

# CONSTRUCTION AND IMPLEMENTATION PATH OF THE HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM FOR THE SENIORS UNIVERSITY OF CHINA IN THE NEW ERA

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**Abstract:** In the context of the new era, the high-quality development of universities for the elderly has become a key pathway to achieving the goal of "active aging." This study adopts a mixed-method approach that combines case studies with questionnaire surveys, taking Jiangsu Yuehua Health and Elderly Care Group and its partner universities for the elderly as research subjects. Based on relevant theoretical frameworks from domestic and international studies on elderly education and universities for older adults, this paper systematically reviews the current development status of elderly universities in China. The findings reveal four major challenges facing their development: imperfect resource coordination mechanisms, a relatively homogeneous service supply structure, imbalanced allocation of urban and rural educational resources, and insufficient adaptation of information technology to the needs of older learners. In response, the study proposes a set of systematic pathways for improvement: innovating institutional mechanisms and optimizing resource allocation efficiency; establishing a diversified and hierarchical curriculum supply system; exploring elderly education development models with Chinese characteristics; promoting the deep integration of information technology and elderly education; and building a professional and sustainable teaching workforce.

**Keywords:** Universities for the elderly; High-quality development; Active aging; Social support system; Implementation path

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The world has entered an era of global aging, and education in elderly universities has emerged alongside the rapid progression of population aging in recent years. The high-quality development of universities for the elderly represents the deepening and implementation of the high-quality development concept in the field of elderly education. It transcends traditional models of elderly education, aiming to meet older adults' demand for a high-quality life and the developmental needs of an aging society [1]. As the most important carriers and core platforms of elderly education in China, universities for the elderly are defined as "non-traditional, elderly-oriented lifelong education activities that are purposeful, organized, and systematic, provided for the elderly in accordance with social development and their intrinsic needs". Since the advent of the new era, with the advancement of the "active aging" strategy and the construction of an "elderly-friendly" society, older adults have increasingly relied on universities for the elderly to satisfy diverse learning needs, thereby realizing the goal of "lifelong learning" and further achieving "active contribution."

## 2 THE DEVELOPMENT COURSE OF UNIVERSITIES FOR THE ELDERLY

In the context of an aging society, China has both absorbed the essence of the international concept of lifelong learning and, through policy innovation and practical exploration, gradually developed a system of universities for the elderly with distinctive local characteristics.

### 2.1 The Development Process of Research on Universities for the Elderly

Research on universities for the elderly in China has deepened gradually under the dual impetus of policy guidance and social demand, forming a developmental trajectory that embodies both Chinese characteristics and the features of the times.

#### 2.1.1 Theoretical studies of China geriatric education

Theoretical research on geriatric universities primarily encompasses Social Adaptation Theory and Geriatric Health Promotion Theory. The former posits that geriatric education embodies three social attributes: lifelong development, social welfare, and superstructure. The latter emphasizes the need to address both the physical health and spiritual well-being of older adults, advocating for a shift from merely "ensuring basic care" to enabling them to "find joy" and embrace life fully. Drawing on domestic and international scholarship, Li Jie (2020) systematically reviewed fundamental theoretical issues in geriatric education from three dimensions: learning subjects, learning motivation, and learning content. She highlighted the necessity for researchers to further explore these core themes and expand research paradigms to guide geriatric education practices effectively[2]. On the whole, geriatric education in China exhibits

interdisciplinary characteristics and has not yet formed an independent disciplinary system. Instead, it is scattered across different disciplinary fields, such as education, psychology, sociology, and economics.

### **2.1.2 The supply practice of seniors universities in China**

Relying on the practice of elderly education, research on the supply of elderly education in China has gone through three development stages. The first stage focused on "empowerment", laying the policy foundation for elderly education and forming a "Chinese perspective on elderly education" integrated with traditional Chinese culture. Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) put forward the concept of lifelong education in the 1960s, China has actively responded at the policy level. In particular, the formulation and implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly has provided a legal basis for the elderly's right to education. At the same time, the state has also empowered the elderly in terms of institutional arrangements, operation mechanisms, social environment and psychological support, ensuring the realization of the right to elderly education in a systematic manner. In the 1980s, elderly education in China emerged spontaneously with the implementation of the system for retired cadres. The "Shandong Red Cross Seniors University", founded in 1983, was China's first seniors university [3]. Initially, its function was to meet the spiritual and cultural needs of retired veteran cadres. Mainly based on the national goals for elderly work, it provided "welfare-oriented" educational services for retired personnel from state organs, enterprises and public institutions [4].

The second stage centered on "active aging". Driven by strong policy support, China embarked on the Chinese-style practice of elderly education. Entering the new century, China's aging population issue became increasingly prominent, and the Party and the state attached great importance to elderly work while actively promoting the development of elderly education. The National Medium- and Long-Term Plan for Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), released in 2010, explicitly stated that "elderly education should be valued" and proposed an action plan to address population aging [5]; in 2016, the Elderly Education Development Plan (2016-2020) put forward initiatives to "accelerate the development of elderly education, expand the supply of elderly education, and innovate the institutional mechanisms of elderly education", laying out arrangements to enhance the modernization level of elderly education [6]. During this stage, China's elderly education embarked on Chinese-style practice. As an important part of the elderly care service system, the construction of elderly universities across the country showed a vigorous momentum [7]. Relevant studies indicate that the number of elderly universities in China increased at an annual rate of 4.7%, with over 76,000 elderly universities at all levels and types nationwide, and the number of students participating in studies exceeding 20 million [8]. Amid the growing demand for learning among the people and the strong promotion of elderly education by the Party and the state, a large number of veteran Party members, senior teachers, and elderly scientific and technological workers with pioneering and exemplary roles took the lead in actively participating in lifelong learning and engaging in social construction. Scholars also turned their research focus to topics such as the modernization, balanced development, service system, and value research of elderly education.

The third stage centers on the new development of elderly education, propelled by the "New Era" context and the goal of "high-quality development". Guided by the new development philosophy, and based on the new stage of economic and social progress, efforts are dedicated to fostering the transformation of elderly education from "ensuring a fulfilling life for the elderly" to "enabling the elderly to pursue learning" and "empowering the elderly to contribute to society", so as to accelerate the achievement of high-quality development of elderly education in the New Era. Fan Hua argues that the development of elderly education must align with the three epochal characteristics of "openness, inclusiveness, and public welfare", and effectively implement initiatives including "enhancing connotative development, integrating educational resources, and strengthening supporting measures" [9]. With the government taking the lead and multiple social sectors participating, a systematic and holistic institutional framework should be established to safeguard the educational needs of the elderly. Cao Taisheng points out that elderly education is not only a crucial system for protecting the elderly's right to education and providing them with welfare, but also an economic strategy to improve the quality of human resources and address the challenges of population aging. Its essential attribute remains educational in nature, and inclusiveness and diversification serve as the direction and strategy for realizing the high-quality development of elderly education [10]. Chen Youhua holds that elderly education is the core of elderly human resource development, as it is closely related to the employability and social participation of the elderly group [11].

## **2.2 Development of Geriatric Education Research in Other Countries**

Geriatric education research in other countries started relatively early, leading to the development of a series of theories on geriatric education as well as practical experiences with distinct national characteristics.

### **2.2.1 Theoretical studies on geriatric education in other countries**

The theoretical foundations of elderly education in foreign countries are primarily derived from sociological theories, which have evolved into new theoretical perspectives on elderly education. These frameworks are constructed from three dimensions: social structure, individual psychology, and life value, forming a comprehensive theoretical system for understanding elderly education.

From the social interaction perspective, Social Group Theory suggests that education serves as an important vehicle for older adults to build social relationships and strengthen group identity. Social Conflict and Adjustment Theory argues that elderly education can help marginalized groups enhance their awareness of rights, thereby reducing intergenerational conflicts and social exclusion [12]. From the individual psychological dimension, social psychology

focuses on the patterns of psychological adaptation in the aging process. Continuity Theory emphasizes the continuity between lifestyles in middle age and later life, proposing that elderly education should be designed with differentiated curricula that align with individual interests and prior experiences. Activity Theory challenges the pessimistic notion of aging embodied in the Disengagement Theory, contending that continuous participation in educational activities enables older adults to maintain social roles and enhance their sense of self-efficacy. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory reveals that once physiological needs are satisfied, older adults pursue social belonging, respect, and self-actualization—providing a psychological basis for the diversification of elderly education content. From the life value perspective, British scholar Peter Laslett's Third Age Theory defines old age as a "pinnacle stage for realizing one's potential and utilizing accumulated experience," thereby offering a philosophical foundation for the transformation of elderly education from compensatory learning to developmental learning[13].

In summary, sociological theories establish the social necessity of elderly education by highlighting its role in promoting social harmony and sustainable development. Social psychological theories elucidate the individual necessity of elderly learning, guiding educational practice to balance psychological adaptation with self-realization needs. Meanwhile, innovative perspectives such as the Third Age Theory further position elderly education as a core pathway for activating "silver human resources" and advancing the goal of active aging, providing systematic guidance for policy formulation and practical innovation in elderly education[14].

### **2.2.2 The supply practices of elderly universities in other countries**

From the perspective of supply models, seniors university education in other countries can be classified according to different investment approaches into three main types: government-funded models, self-governed and self-supported models, and community-based models. From the perspective of supply content, elderly universities abroad offer a wide range of courses, including academic programs such as language, literature, and history to enhance knowledge and cultural literacy, as well as recreational courses such as games and music to enrich leisure life. Teaching quality and curriculum design are often refined through feedback mechanisms and policy adjustments. From the perspective of supply forms, seniors university education overseas is mainly operated by multiple entities, including traditional universities, universities of the third age (UTAs), and community organizations. Each type of institution provides programs with distinct priorities and educational orientations based on its mission, resources, and learner characteristics. Specifically, different countries exhibit diverse types and developmental characteristics of seniors university education systems, as detailed below:

Elderly education also presents distinct types across different countries. The first type is the self-directed education model represented by the United Kingdom and Australia. Originating from the Development Committee of the University of the Third Age (U3A) Cambridge in 1981, this model relies on study groups where both teachers and students hold dual roles to share knowledge independently. After 2000, it expanded into distance education formats such as "virtual Universities of the Third Age". The second type is the community-based education model represented by the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. This model leverages community colleges to provide diverse courses. For instance, the United States promotes the SeniorNet program to help the elderly master information technology, with a focus on the development of information technology and resource platforms, and emphasizes the standardization of basic platforms and innovation in practical projects[15]. The third type is the wellness-oriented education model represented by Japan, which aims to enhance the physical and mental health of the elderly and promote their social well-being. This model builds a nationwide integrated online-offline distance education system, providing both "one-to-many" and "one-to-one" learning support services to improve effectiveness. Its characteristics include openness in educational models, resource development, and dissemination channels, as well as timeliness in learning support services[16].

## **3 CHARACTERISTICS AND CURRENT STATUS OF SENIORS UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN THE NEW ERA**

Against the backdrop of the New Era, China's aging process has accelerated, with the proportion of the elderly population continuing to rise. Alongside improvements in economic development, increases in life expectancy, and the growing spiritual and cultural needs of the elderly group, the connotation of elderly education has also undergone constant transformation. Elderly education in different historical stages presents distinct development characteristics and epochal implications.

### **3.1 Characteristics of Seniors Education in the New Era**

#### **3.1.1 The connotation of seniors education in the new era**

As early as the initial stage of elderly education in China, scholars began to discuss the connotation, functions, and roles of elderly education[17]. They made preliminary judgments on the content, forms, and development trends of elderly education[18]. Ye Naizi (1988) argued that elderly education is a form of education targeted at the elderly[19]. The New Dictionary of Gerontology defines elderly education as "an activity in which educators exert purposeful, planned, and organized influences on the elderly in accordance with certain social requirements, so as to bring about expected changes in their physical and mental states"[20]. Zhang Chunyuan (1989) regarded elderly education as a crucial educational link for smoothly realizing major life transitions, prolonging life, and enriching the spiritual life of the

elderly [21]. It is rooted in the special needs of the elderly stage and the inherent connection between this stage and social-economic development[22].

In the context of the national strategy of actively addressing population aging, elderly education in the New Era is a form of lifelong education carried out to meet the diverse development needs of the elderly and promote social harmony and sustainable development. Its connotation has shifted from the early "leisure and entertainment-oriented" model to "potential development-oriented", "participation and adaptation-oriented", and "social integration-oriented" models, with a focus on core goals such as the elderly's independent development, social participation, technological adaptation, and physical and mental health. Elderly education in the New Era not only focuses on the elderly's acquisition of knowledge and enrichment of spiritual life, but also emphasizes the realization of its functions in multiple dimensions including cultural inheritance, community governance, and industrial development, demonstrating a value orientation that prioritizes both the "educational function" and the "social service function". In essence, it is a type of lifelong education with elderly-specific characteristics, non-traditional attributes, and interdisciplinary features, gradually evolving from a marginalized social welfare activity into a core component of the national governance system and the lifelong learning system. The high-quality development of elderly education has become a key means to address the challenges of population aging, as well as an inevitable requirement for improving the quality of life of the elderly, realizing lifelong education, and building a healthy aging society.

### **3.1.2 Characteristics of seniors education in the new era**

First, elderly education in the new era has undergone multiple transformations. (1) It has shifted from being a retirement welfare service limited to certain groups to a foundational project within the aging policy system and an essential pillar of the active aging strategy. (2) It has moved from a leisure-oriented model centered on cultural and recreational activities to a key component of the lifelong education system and an institutional guarantee for promoting social participation. (3) It has been elevated from a marginalized social welfare undertaking to an important channel for utilizing and developing elderly human resources.

Second, its functions have been continuously expanded. With the development of the new era, elderly education has gradually transcended the previous limitation of merely satisfying retirees' cultural and recreational needs, evolving into a multifaceted system. At the individual level, it primarily serves the functions of knowledge dissemination and adaptive capacity building. At the societal level, it plays an economic role in promoting elderly human resource development and related industries, a political role in mobilizing and guiding older groups, and a social role in fostering participation and grassroots governance. At the cultural level, it contributes to the inheritance of traditional culture, the creation of a social atmosphere of filial piety and respect for the elderly, and the promotion of cross-cultural exchange.

Third, it has developed along diverse dimensions. In terms of providers, apart from government-sponsored universities and schools for the elderly, community education centers, open universities, higher education institutions, enterprises, and other social organizations are also actively involved, forming a multi-actor participation pattern. In terms of curriculum content, elderly education has expanded from initial focuses on leisure activities and health knowledge to include life skills, psychological adjustment, social services, life education, and vocational training. In terms of teaching forms, classroom instruction remains dominant, but new approaches such as online courses, study tours, volunteer service, and social practice have become increasingly prevalent.

Fourth, the application of information technology has been strengthened. The Development Plan for Elderly Education (2016 – 2020) issued by the General Office of the State Council emphasized "using information technology to support elderly education, developing digital resources suitable for distance learning for the elderly, and providing learning guidance, personalized recommendations, and other learning support through information-based means." In the context of the new era, a key direction of elderly education development is to build an integrated online and offline distance education system. By leveraging modern information technologies-including cloud platforms, mobile applications, live-streaming, and intelligent recommendation systems-an "elderly-friendly" online learning platform and "air classroom" model can be established. This enables the coordination of online and offline resources, personalization of learning pathways, and intelligent teaching support, thereby effectively enhancing the coverage, accessibility, and interactivity of elderly education.

## **3.2 Current Situation of Seniors Education in the New Era**

Against the backdrop of the new era, the strategic position of elderly education in China has been continuously elevated. However, despite rapid progress, a number of practical challenges remain, which constrain its high-quality development. These challenges are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

### **3.2.1 An immature resource coordination mechanism**

As geriatric university education has been elevated to "a key means for implementing the national strategy of active aging" and "a foundational project for elderly-related work", the supporting resources and systems required are also in urgent need of "upgrading and enhancement".

First, there is a phenomenon of "multiple departments managing the same affair" in current geriatric university education. Although various competent authorities have their respective responsibilities, it is difficult to form a synergistic force in practical promotion. Despite the fact that many provinces and cities have explicitly proposed the need to strengthen "inter-departmental collaboration under the overall planning of the Party committees", practical implementation still faces difficulties in resource integration. The lack of a unified overall planning mechanism and

insufficient inter-departmental coordination have led to prominent problems such as scattered educational resources and fragmented management, which affect the development efficiency of geriatric university education.

Second, insufficient funding input is a core bottleneck restricting the development of grass-roots geriatric university education. Although documents such as the National Medium- and Long-Term Plan for Actively Responding to Population Aging and the Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Strengthening the Work of Geriatric University Education propose to incorporate geriatric university education into the fiscal budget, there are significant differences in the actual implementation by local governments. In some regions, especially at the county level, fiscal expenditure is limited, and the funding for geriatric university education often remains in a "marginalized position".

Finally, the contradiction between supply and demand in geriatric universities—where "it is hard to secure a enrollment spot" — is particularly prominent. A report by Xinhuanet points out that the phenomenon of "wanting to study but failing to sign up" is extremely common in urban geriatric universities. The shortage of teachers for popular courses such as music and health-related courses is as high as 40%. Moreover, "99% of the teachers in geriatric universities across the country are part-time, and many courses cannot be offered due to the lack of suitable teachers" [23], which reflects structural bottlenecks in the development of geriatric university education, such as insufficient venues, tight teacher resources, and inadequate supply.

### **3.2.2 Singularity of service supply content**

In the new era, the functions of geriatric university education have transcended the single function of "leisure and entertainment". The 2022 Research Report on the Re-employment of the Elderly Group shows that 68% of the elderly group have a strong willingness to work after retirement, among which 46.7% of the elderly take "realizing personal value" and "participating in social development" as their core demands for re-entering the workplace. This highlights the functional gap of geriatric university education in promoting the re-employment of the elderly. Specifically, the problems are concentrated in two aspects.

On the one hand, the curriculum structure tends to focus on cultural and recreational content, with insufficient skill-oriented courses. Currently, the courses offered by geriatric universities (schools) are still dominated by dance, calligraphy, and vocal music. According to a survey by Jiangsu Workers' Daily, among about 76,000 geriatric universities across the country, more than 80% of the courses focus on traditional cultural and recreational activities (dance, calligraphy, vocal music), while practical courses such as information technology and re-employment account for less than 50% [24]. Although some emerging courses like information technology, short videos, and fitness have been gradually added, they still fail to meet the elderly's core needs such as "self-actualization" and "social participation". Due to insufficient practicality and career orientation, these courses can hardly support the elderly's willingness to re-enter the workplace.

On the other hand, there is a lack of systematic training paths and a clear mechanism for transforming educational achievements into practical outcomes. Most institutions still carry out teaching in the form of interest-based "single-course classes". The courses are fragmented, lacking a sustainable "course cluster" system and a progressive vocational skill path, making it difficult to form verifiable achievements. Although the state encourages the elderly to "contribute their abilities" and supports flexible employment, the courses often lack certification and connection channels, failing to provide vocational skill certificates. There is no official job transfer or recommendation mechanism between schools and employers, resulting in educational achievements remaining in the classroom and failing to be applied in practice.

### **3.2.3 Unbalanced urban-rural development**

There is a significant gap in the development level of geriatric university education between urban and rural areas in China, with a prominent urban-rural dual structure. Although the state has proposed "coordinated urban-rural development of geriatric university education", some local policies tend to favor cities in terms of fund allocation and project arrangement. The operating funds of geriatric universities exhibit the characteristics of "more in three aspects and less in three others": relatively more investment in economically developed regions than in underdeveloped ones; relatively more investment in central cities than in remote areas; and relatively more investment in geriatric education institutions at or above the county level than in grassroots geriatric education institutions below the county level [25].

According to statistics from the China Association of Geriatric Universities, among geriatric universities at or above the county level in China, government-run institutions account for 85.36%. Geriatric university education still focuses on public welfare with low tuition fees, while private and social forces in running schools lag behind. The per-student funding in rural areas is only 1/3 of that in urban areas.

Financial constraints have weakened the promotion of geriatric university education to towns and townships below the county level, leading to uneven layout of infrastructure between urban and rural areas. In cities, the construction of geriatric universities and community-based elderly learning centers has reached a certain scale, while in rural areas, hardware facilities and digitalization levels are relatively backward. This is reflected in limited venues for geriatric university education, outdated teaching equipment, and insufficient curriculum resources. Relevant data shows that the per-student teaching area in urban geriatric universities reaches 8 square meters, while that in rural areas is only 1.2 square meters. The coverage rate of geriatric university education in rural areas of central and western China is less than 40% [26], with severe shortages of school buildings and teaching staff.

### **3.2.4 Insufficient application of information technology**

Against the backdrop of the accelerated popularization of information technology, the technical barriers faced by the elderly as a "digitally disadvantaged group" and the insufficient age-appropriate design have become major obstacles restricting their in-depth participation.

On one hand, the digital divide among the elderly is prominent. According to the Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, as of December 2023, the proportion of internet users aged 60 and above in China accounted for only 23.0% of the total number of internet users in the country, reflecting that the overall "internet access rate" of the elderly group remains at a low level. In addition to their weak basic application skills, some elderly people also encounter obstacles in operating smart devices. When faced with complex operational processes such as course registration, APP login, and switching between multiple terminals, they tend to feel frustrated and thus give up online learning.

On the other hand, age-appropriate design is insufficient. Although some online geriatric university education platforms have carried out age-appropriate transformations in terms of font enlargement, speech speed adjustment, and operation simplification, a considerable proportion of APPs or webpages still fail to fully reflect the cognitive and sensory characteristics of the elderly[27]. Despite the fact that some geriatric university education resource platforms have a font enlargement function on their pages, the interaction logic still leans towards the usage habits of young users, with excessive function entrances, complicated operations, and difficulty in getting started. They lack auxiliary functions such as "one-click access", "voice navigation", and "visual tutorials". The age-appropriate design remains superficial and fails to effectively improve the user experience, which limits the enthusiasm of the elderly group for participating in online education.

Furthermore, online geriatric education has not yet been carried out on a regular basis. Problems such as delayed updates, poor interactivity, and insufficient relevance have also affected its attractiveness and practicality, making it unable to effectively support the elderly in continuous learning and skill improvement.

#### 4 PATHS TO REALIZE HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF SENIORS UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN THE NEW ERA

To construct paths for the high-quality development of senior education in the new era, it is urgent to make coordinated efforts from multiple dimensions, solve the current development bottlenecks with systematic thinking, and promote the paradigm shift of senior education from "welfare supply" to "right guarantee" and from "cultural entertainment" to "all-round development".

##### 4.1 Improving the Seniors University Education Service System through Institutional Innovation and Resource Optimization

Clarify the main responsibility subjects and form a joint force for co-governance. Business management departments need to proactively change their work mindset: shift from the traditional "management" model of academic education to a "service" model for geriatric university education, and transform from "directly participating in operations" to "building platforms". At the same time, it is necessary to define the responsibility boundaries of multiple departments including civil affairs, health, finance, and culture. Table 1 classifies the positioning, responsibility scope and objectives of the competent departments:

**Table 1** Scope of Responsibilities and Objectives of Various Business Departments in Senior Education

| Business Departments                                                                                                  | Scope of Responsibilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Responsibility Objectives                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Education Department:</b><br>Business supervisor,<br>Coordinate the<br>construction of the<br>teaching system      | 1. Formulation of policies, development of plans, and establishment of standards.<br>2. Promotion of standardized management for senior universities, community senior schools, and other related institutions.<br>3. Curriculum development, teacher training, and ensuring the quality of teaching. | 1. Build an urban-rural senior education network to ensure the standardized and systematic development of senior education.<br>2. Promote senior education to become an important part of the national education system.<br>3. Facilitate the sharing of senior education resources.                                                                        |
| <b>Civil Affairs Department:</b> Relying on communities: Promote the popularization of grassroots senior education    | 1. Opening up elderly care service facilities and organizing senior education activities.<br>2. Promoting the integration of senior education and elderly care services.<br>3. Mobilizing social organizations and volunteers to participate in senior education services.                            | 1. Advance the integrated development of senior education with community governance and elderly care services.<br>2. Pay attention to rural and low-income elderly groups, and narrow the gap in educational resources between urban and rural areas.<br>3. Encourage the participation of social forces, with government guidance and social coordination. |
| <b>Health Department:</b><br>Health promotion:<br>Advance the integration of medical care, elderly care and education | 1. Conducting scientific and professional health education for the elderly and popularizing relevant knowledge.<br>2. Encouraging medical institutions and primary-level health service centers to carry out health lectures, health preservation courses, and other related activities.              | 1. Improve the health literacy of the elderly and promote healthy aging.<br>2. Promote the "integration of medical care, elderly care and education" model, making senior education an important approach to health management.                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Culture Department:</b>                                                                                            | 1. Carrying out senior education activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1. Enrich the content of senior education to meet                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

|                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Enrich content: Enhance the spiritual and cultural life                            | based on public cultural facilities.2.Organizing cultural activities suitable for the elderly.                                                                              | the diverse spiritual and cultural needs of the elderly.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Finance Department:</b><br>Fund guarantee: Optimize the allocation of resources | 1.Ensuring financial input in senior education.<br>2.Exploring diversified investment mechanisms such as government procurement of services and social capital cooperation. | 2.Utilize cultural resources to expand the forms of senior education and enhance its attractiveness and participation rate.<br>1.Establish a sustainable funding guarantee mechanism for senior education.<br>2.Encourage the participation of social capital and form an investment model led by the government and supplemented by the market. |

In terms of resource allocation, a diversified investment mechanism should be established. Financial investment should demonstrate precision, balance, and exemplary effects, while taking into account the construction of both rural areas and urban demonstration and guidance regions. More importantly, it is necessary to explore market opportunities in geriatric university education, encourage the participation of social forces, and guide enterprises and social organizations to engage in geriatric university education through policies such as tax and fee preferences. For instance, Jiangsu Yuehua Health and Elderly Care Group has launched the "Dining Table to Desk" activity based on community service stations. It utilizes the free time of community meal-assistance stations in the afternoon to offer 15-minute "geriatric university education micro-courses" covering five major fields: culture and art, health preservation, technology application, language and culture, and practical skills.

Support institutions such as vocational colleges and general universities to open up and share educational resources. Innovate ways of resource integration: in cities, promote the co-construction and sharing of geriatric universities with colleges and universities, communities, and cultural venues. The Department of Education of Jiangsu Province launched the "Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions' Action Plan for Doubling Services in Geriatric University Education" and carried out the pilot construction of "Jiangsu Higher Education Silver Age Learning Centers". The Silver Age Learning Center of Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine emerged as a result. Giving full play to the university's characteristics in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) culture and advantages in professional teaching staff, and closely aligning with the actual needs and learning characteristics of the elderly group, it has developed a diversified curriculum system including TCM health care, traditional TCM exercises, emergency rescue for the elderly, elderly health management, and appreciation of classic TCM cultural works. Through a three-dimensional learning model that integrates online and offline teaching as well as theory and practice, it enhances the awareness of healthy living among the "silver age" group, stimulates their enterprising spirit of staying vital in old age, leverages the strength of the elderly, realizes healthy elderly care, and contributes to the construction of a Healthy China.

In rural areas, carry out geriatric university education activities based on existing facilities such as party-mass service centers and elderly care institutions. At the same time, strengthen digital construction, develop age-appropriate online courses, and expand the coverage of high-quality educational resources through the "online + offline" model. Jiangsu Open University, with platforms such as "Jiangsu Geriatric University Education Network" and "Jiangsu Learning Online" as carriers, has vigorously promoted the construction of a geriatric university education resource database to enrich digital online learning resources. The Jiangsu Geriatric University Education Network hosts 2,955 geriatric university education courses, including 153 recognized projects of the provincial-level geriatric university education resource database sub-library, with over 510,000 registered users. A unified provincial-level geriatric university education teaching staff database should be established gradually, and the volunteer service mechanism should be improved to alleviate the imbalance in the teaching staff resources for geriatric university education.

#### 4.2 Improve and Enrich the Content of Seniors University Education Service Supply

With the intensification of population aging and changes in the labor structure, geriatric university education urgently needs to go beyond its traditional single functional orientation of "providing joy through learning" and "enabling lifelong learning" for the elderly, and expand toward "facilitating the elderly to contribute" by promoting their social participation and re-employment.

Both the Jiangsu Province Employment Promotion Regulations and the Revised Jiangsu Province Elderly Care Service Regulations clearly state that "local people's governments at or above the county level shall strengthen the development and utilization of elderly human resources, formulate policies and measures to encourage the elderly to re-enter the workforce, provide support such as employment services and vocational training, and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of the elderly in re-employment". The General Office of the Jiangsu Provincial People's Government issued the Notice on Optimizing and Adjusting Policies for Stabilizing Employment to Strive for Development and Benefit the People's Livelihood, encouraging all localities to provide "elderly-friendly" employment services. It integrates multiple means such as vocational guidance, vocational training, and placement in public welfare positions to achieve targeted support for elderly people with employment difficulties, and extends employment policies to elderly individuals who have exceeded the statutory retirement age but have not received basic old-age insurance benefits. In 2023, there were 125,000 workers aged 60 and above in the province who participated in social insurance in the form of flexible employment, among whom 3,792 received social insurance subsidy policies[27].

Promoting the orderly construction of a geriatric university education service system is an effective way to meet the elderly's learning needs, improve their educational satisfaction, and make practical use of learning outcomes. The clear classification of geriatric university education courses will help give play to the diverse functions of geriatric university education, meet the elderly's diversified learning needs, and enhance their sense of gain. A comprehensive and systematic geriatric university education curriculum system should meet the elderly's needs in various aspects such as daily life, entertainment, and self-development. Referring to the curriculum settings of geriatric universities in countries like the UK and France, which integrate cultural and sports programs with diverse disciplines, China's geriatric university education curriculum system can be clearly divided into four basic types:

**Elderly Literacy Education Courses:** These cover basic knowledge related to aging, including the physiological mechanisms of aging, retirement preparation, death education, national and local elderly policies, legal rights protection, financial planning in old age, and knowledge about fraud prevention. They help learners correctly understand the aging process and establish a positive outlook on aging. These are courses that every elderly person should take and benefit from.

**Leisure and Entertainment Courses:** These include activities such as playing musical instruments, chess, calligraphy, painting, dancing, photography, and tai chi. They meet the elderly's needs for hobbies, while promoting their social participation and physical and mental health development. As the main component of current geriatric university education in China, these courses should continue to be further developed.

**Academic Knowledge Courses:** These courses are highly professional, cover a wide range of fields, have high requirements for teaching staff, and face relatively low demand and great difficulties in implementation. However, geriatric university education is part of adult education and an important component of lifelong education. The state should also guarantee the elderly's pursuit of professional knowledge.

**Practical Skills Courses:** The content of these courses includes online shopping, knowledge about raising grandchildren, and the use of smartphones. At the same time, re-employment skills training should be appropriately incorporated. The elderly's mastery of practical skills can help them live more independently, contribute to society through re-employment, and integrate into society better.

In the design of training content for geriatric university education, close alignment with the employment needs and competency characteristics of the elderly group should be ensured.

The re-employment of the urban elderly group with high pensions mainly focuses on knowledge-based and service-oriented positions, such as educational consulting, community management, and technical guidance. This group generally has relatively high educational levels and professional skills, and their motivation for re-employment is more driven by social participation and self-actualization.

In contrast, the rural elderly group and the elderly group with low pensions tend to engage in physical and experience-based work, such as agricultural technical guidance, traditional handicrafts, and rural domestic services. Their employment scope is more closely related to practical livelihoods, and due to limitations in educational attainment and skill levels, they rely more on training provided by geriatric university education.

These two groups exhibit significant differences in terms of employability, career expectations, and social support. Therefore, it is necessary to design targeted training content and employment support policies. For example, in August 2024, Taicang City launched the first elderly human resource center in Jiangsu Province—the "Silver Hair Odd-Job Post Station", which established a development mechanism of "potential development – capacity empowerment – social service" [28]. Jiangsu Yuehua Health and Elderly Care Group, based on its own demand for building a team of caregivers, carried out elderly care training for retirees aged over 50. Those who obtained qualification certificates were directly recruited as corporate caregivers. Guiding enterprises that can absorb retirees for employment to link training with employment can well achieve a seamless connection between geriatric university education and the re-employment of the elderly group.

#### **4.3 Constructing and Improving a New Model of Chinese-Style Seniors University Education**

The current gap in the development of geriatric university education between urban and rural areas is reflected not only in hardware facilities, but also in content-related aspects such as service systems, resource allocation, teaching staff, and curriculum quality. It is essential to bridge this gap through institutional innovation and targeted policies.

The development of geriatric university education in China has benefited from the strong top-down promotion by the government. However, as the elderly groups with diverse needs have increasingly diversified demands for geriatric university education, complete reliance on the government's administrative power will limit the further development of geriatric university education. The prominent issues include the "difficulty in securing a spot" in urban geriatric universities and the oversimplification of geriatric university education in rural areas.

Therefore, it has become inevitable to construct a geriatric university education model suitable for China's national conditions—a multi-level, multi-structural, and diversified model with the full participation of the government, society, market, and individuals. Specifically, this model should include:

**Firstly, Welfare-Oriented Geriatric University Education:** It refers to a geriatric university education model invested in, organized, and operated by the government. Its positioning is to realize the balanced development of geriatric university education and safeguard every elderly person's right to education, and this model is mainly adopted in rural areas and for disadvantaged elderly groups.

Secondly, Public Welfare-Oriented Geriatric University Education: It is a non-profit geriatric university education model sponsored or directly managed by social institutions and individuals such as non-governmental organizations, volunteer groups, public service units, and commercial organizations. Its development positioning should focus on giving full play to the guiding and exemplary role, promoting the professional development of geriatric university education, supporting disadvantaged elderly people, advocating academic institutions and professional associations to conduct research on or professionally engage in geriatric university education, and encouraging public welfare organizations or institutions like foundations, charitable organizations, volunteer groups, museums, and libraries to launch various geriatric university education projects or programs.

Thirdly, Market-Oriented Geriatric University Education: It is a consumer-oriented geriatric university education model where the elderly need to pay a certain amount of educational fees to enjoy educational products. Its development positioning lies in promoting the diversified development of geriatric university education, meeting the diverse needs of the elderly, increasing the supply of educational resources, and optimizing their living and development environment. It is necessary to strengthen legal supervision to promote the orderly and standardized development of commercial organizations' involvement in the process of geriatric university education.

Fourthly, Self-Governed Geriatric University Education: It is a geriatric university education model where the elderly, based on their own hobbies, interests, or strengths, integrate internal and external human and material resources to guide, attract, and gather elderly people to participate in self-organization, self-management, self-service, and self-education. Self-governed geriatric university education is not only of great significance for safeguarding the right to education of the elderly in underdeveloped areas but also an important part of China's community construction.

#### 4.4 Implement the "Internet + Seniors University Education" Action Plan

Build a national geriatric university education resource sharing platform, develop age-appropriate online courses, and promote the radiating of high-quality urban educational resources to rural areas. Equip rural elderly education centers with necessary digital equipment, and carry out "smart assistance for the elderly" training to help the elderly master basic digital skills.

Since the 1990s, Jiangsu Open University has established the Jiangsu Air Geriatric University and begun to explore distinctive practices in elderly online education. Entering the new era, Jiangsu Open University has enabled millions of elderly people in Jiangsu to access education, enjoy themselves, and contribute their abilities, actively exploring and practicing to create a "Jiangsu Model" for geriatric university education.

Promote the planning, design, and development of geriatric university education curriculum resources, the training of the "Elderly Civilization Education Volunteer" team, and the design of relevant systems such as elderly learning registration and learning achievement storage, while continuously deepening the reform and practice of the credit bank. Construct multiple informatization platforms for geriatric university education, including "Learning Centers", "Study Tours Bases", "Learning Experience Bases", and "Elderly Care-Education Integration Bases".

At the same time, with platforms such as "Jiangsu Geriatric University Education Network" and "Jiangsu Learning Online" as carriers, vigorously promote the construction of geriatric university education learning resource databases to enrich digital online learning resources. The Jiangsu Geriatric University Education Network hosts 2,955 geriatric university education courses, including 153 recognized projects of the provincial-level geriatric university education learning resource database sub-library, with more than 510,000 registered users.

#### 4.5 Cultivate a Professional Talent Team for Seniors University Education

Geriatric university education has certain uniqueness: teachers not only need to possess professional knowledge, but also must understand the learning needs, physical and psychological conditions of the elderly, so as to design adaptive learning courses and carry out high-quality teaching activities. Therefore, in the process of developing geriatric university education, it is essential to build a high-quality and professional talent team for geriatric university education. First, establish a full-time teacher system for geriatric university education with a multi-level and multi-structural teaching staff that combines full-time teachers, part-time teachers and volunteers. Allocate special staffing quotas, recruit from the society, and train the recruits to become full-time geriatric university education teachers or administrators. At the same time, select personnel from education, literature and art, medical and other systems to take turns engaging in geriatric university education work, and appoint them as full-time teachers after training. In addition, part-time community geriatric university education staff and volunteers can be hired from relevant units and social organizations.

Second, research and develop a series of teaching materials for geriatric university education, encourage academic institutions and higher education institutions to develop various types of community geriatric university education programs, and develop innovative and diversified teaching materials based on these programs to facilitate the elderly's learning.

Third, establish a talent resource database for geriatric university education. Integrate and build a professional teaching staff platform for geriatric university education to provide references for community education institutions when recruiting teachers.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The high-quality development of geriatric university education in the new era is a key means to implement the national strategy of actively responding to population aging, and also a crucial link in building an elderly-friendly society. However, geriatric university education in China still has shortcomings in resource coordination, service supply, urban-rural balance, and digital application.

Based on this, this paper proposes an implementation path for constructing a multi-level social support system, including optimizing institutional mechanisms, enriching educational content, innovating service models, advancing intelligent transformation, and strengthening talent team building. These measures not only help meet the diversified learning needs of the elderly, but also promote their social participation and value realization, and drive the coordinated development of the "silver economy" and the aging society.

In the future, it is necessary to further strengthen the leading role of the government, stimulate the vitality of social forces' participation, and form a new pattern of multi-stakeholder collaborative development of geriatric university education. Ultimately, this will help achieve the strategic goal of "enabling the elderly to learn, enjoy life, and contribute to society", and contribute Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions to global aging governance.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

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