

# ***A Discussion on the Role of Government in Building an Age-friendly Society***

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**Abstract:** China is in a phase of rapid ageing, which is an important trend in social development and an important reflection of the progress of human civilization. Based on this social situation, the National Committee on Ageing has carried out pilot work on age-friendly cities across the country, promoting the development of cities into age-friendly ones. Whether the demands of the elderly are met is an issue that the whole society needs to face. How to build and construct an age-friendly society has become a new focus of the government's work. This paper analyses the current situation and problems of an age-friendly society in China, proposes ways to solve the problems and provides references and suggestions for the government to promote the building of an age-friendly society. The government's macro-governance ability is an important factor affecting the country's governance ability, and the government has played an important role and assumed an important responsibility in the historical changes. In the face of the basic national condition of ageing, government departments should promote the building of an age-friendly society, play the function of a service-oriented government, accelerate the transformation of the social environment into an age-friendly society, and explore a path of an age-friendly society with Chinese characteristics, which will help to improve the sense of access and happiness of the elderly and cope with the new social form.

**Keywords:** age-friendly, aging population, government support

## **1. Introduction**

Implementing the national strategy of actively coping with population ageing, developing the elderly care business and industry, optimizing services for widows and orphans, and promoting the realization of basic elderly care services for all elderly people were among the recommendations made in the 20th Party Congress report [1]. Nowadays, countries all over the world attach great importance to the problem of ageing and how to build an age-friendly society, and China has now become one of the countries with more serious ageing problems in the world.

### **1.1. Background of the Study on Age-friendly Society Construction**

According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on January 17, 2022, there were 267.36 million people in China who were 60 or older, making up 18.9% of the total population. There were also more than 200 million people who were 65 or older, making up 14.2% of the total

population. The problem of ageing has become a difficult issue in the process of China's economic development, and the problem of "getting old before getting rich" deserves the attention of society as a whole, as a social problem, not a personal one. The elderly population will gradually change from a marginalized group to a major participant in society, with increasingly strong demands for social security, social services, equal participation and spiritual culture, which will have a profound impact on the changing pattern of interests and demands in society as a whole [2]. In the *Opinions of the State Council of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Strengthening Ageing Work in a New Era*, the importance and necessity of "making efforts to build an age-friendly society" was clearly pointed out [3]. Since then, the construction of an age-friendly society will become an important indicator in the government's work assessment.

## **1.2. Significance of the Study on Building an Age-friendly Society**

Humans have always aspired to a social ideal of achieving social harmony and creating a better society, and a social ideal that Marxist parties, including the Communist Party of China, have been relentlessly pursuing [4]. Since the 20th Party Congress, the people's government is rooted in the people, in promoting the building of a harmonious society, the government plays an important role, and the general policies of the government play a decisive role, and the building of an age-friendly society is closely related to the interests of the people, so it is necessary for the government to bear in mind its own mission in the process of building an age-friendly society, to meet people's needs, therefore, it is necessary for the government to bear in mind its mission in building an age-friendly society, to meet the needs of the people, to safeguard the public interest and to promote social development. Nowadays, Chinese cities are full of "symptoms of old age" [5]. The ageing population has become a pressing social issue, which has given rise to a new social form and a new trend in social development. The existence of a suitable environment for the elderly is a key factor in judging whether the elderly are happy in their lives. A good age-friendly environment helps older people gain mental and physical comfort, and allowing them to enjoy social resources on an equal footing with other groups is a key step in building an age-friendly society.

## **2. Analysis of the Current Situation and Problems in Building an Age-friendly Society**

The concept of a liveable environment for the elderly originated from domestic and international discussions on liveable cities and habitats, especially the active promotion of age-friendly cities in the international community. The concept of a liveable environment for the elderly is aimed at removing barriers to the integration and participation of older people in society, creating a number of distinctive age-friendly cities and age-friendly communities, and promoting healthy and active ageing [6]. The main problems in the construction of a livable environment for the elderly From proposing the concept, conducting pilot projects to formally entering the law, in just four years, the construction of a livable environment for the elderly in China has made a major breakthrough at the legislative level. However, the construction of a livable environment for the elderly in China is still at an early stage, and there are still some problems and shortcomings in the policy system, regional development, market projects, public environment, community livability level, standards and norms [7].

### **2.1. Few and Insufficient Relevant Studies**

Although at this stage, the concept of an age-friendly society has penetrated into all levels of society and has received the attention of relevant scholars and experts, the system is not complete, the system is not comprehensive enough, and there is still a lot of room for research and development for all-round, multi-level research. In-depth discussions and research on the construction of an age-friendly environment in China are rare, and are basically ideas put forward by scholars in forums and academic

conferences. The construction of an age-friendly environment in China is still at a preliminary stage, and there is a lack of theoretical and empirical research in the academic community [8]. The relevant research has started late compared to that of other countries.

## **2.2. Inefficient Translation of Theory to Field Outcomes**

The relevant research mostly remains at the conceptual stage, which is difficult to implement in practice, and the results of field implementation are less and not comprehensive enough. At present, the construction of an age-friendly environment in China is still in its early stages, and there are still some problems and shortcomings in the policy system, regional development, market projects, public environment, community livability and standards and norms. Empty theories cannot truly contribute to building an age-friendly society in China. If the construction of an age-friendly society only stays at the research stage, then the construction of an age-friendly society in China will be slow and will not be able to solve the problem at its root.

## **2.3. Large Differences Between Regions**

There are disparities and imbalances in construction between regions, with an imbalance in the construction of age-friendly societies in towns and cities, with first- and second-tier cities developing relatively well and small and medium-sized cities, especially in the central and western regions, lagging far behind coastal cities. Within cities, there are similarly large geographical disparities, with elderly living facilities and welfare benefits failing to harmonize with the actual needs of older people. The government's efforts to address the theoretical and practical integration of an age-friendly society through strong instruments and policies as well as to promote the implementation of the results and harmonize regional balance are a major priority for the government at present.

## **2.4. Ignorance of the Needs of Older People**

According to many published studies, urban space and urban services for the needs of older people are clearly inadequate, thus limiting their ability to live independently. Compared to younger age groups, older people have more social experience and social sophistication. When the government focuses on building an age-friendly society, it mostly focuses on external landscape design and tends to overlook the importance of social participation of older people and whether older people can actively integrate into society, which they can do by participating in social activities, promoting physical and mental health and adding momentum to society. Helping older people realize their self-worth is also a core point in building an age-friendly society.

# **3. Suggestions for Countermeasures Against the Building of an Age-friendly Society**

## **3.1. Exploring a China's Way**

Based on the different social and development conditions of different countries, it is good for the government to learn from the existing measures of other countries in promoting the construction of an age-friendly society, but not to copy the construction measures of other countries, but to learn and innovate the effective measures of other countries in a conditional manner. At the level of theoretical research, urban and rural areas should be developed in an integrated manner, and the strategic layout of the construction of a livable environment for the elderly should be researched, and a system of urban and rural elderly service facilities, spatial systems, planning and architectural index systems should be constructed to enrich the theoretical research on the construction of a livable environment for the elderly and effectively guide the implementation of specific projects [9].

### 3.2. Offering National Policy Support

At the national level, "top-level design" is focused on to provide policy support and develop a policy system for building and protecting an age-friendly society. A more scientific and effective institutional arrangement to actively cope with population ageing and a mature and complete institutional arrangement to cope with population ageing that is compatible with a strong socialist modern state are the requirements of the *National Medium and Long Term Plan to Actively Deal with Population Ageing*, so that the construction of an age-friendly society in all regions can be supported by policy pillars and the national level in order to better promote the construction of an age-friendly society.

### 3.3. Comprehensive Consideration of the Needs of Older People

The "Research Report on the Internet Life of the Middle-aged and the Elderly" released in 2018 mentioned that by December 2017, the number of Chinese Internet users reached 772 million, and the Internet penetration rate reached 55.8%. However, in the overall age structure of Internet users, only 5.2% of Internet users are aged 60 or above. The problem of older people "not knowing", "not daring", "not wanting" and "not being able to use" the Internet is prominent [10]. Therefore, government agencies should not only solicit opinions from older people about building an age-friendly society through the Internet, but should also visit them in the field, taking into account the needs of older people who do not use it or do not know how to use it, and can also strengthen the digital penetration rate of the Internet through training and other means, so that more older people can participate in the discussion of building an age-friendly society through the Internet in real time and on the ground. When survival needs are met, government departments should consider the higher-level needs of older people in greater depth. As shown in Figure 1, the American psychologist Maslow proposed a hierarchy of needs from the perspective of human motivation. Human needs are divided into physiological needs, security needs, love and belonging, respect and self-actualization. With the development and progress of society, the needs of the elderly for food and clothing and security have been met, and they have higher-level spiritual needs.

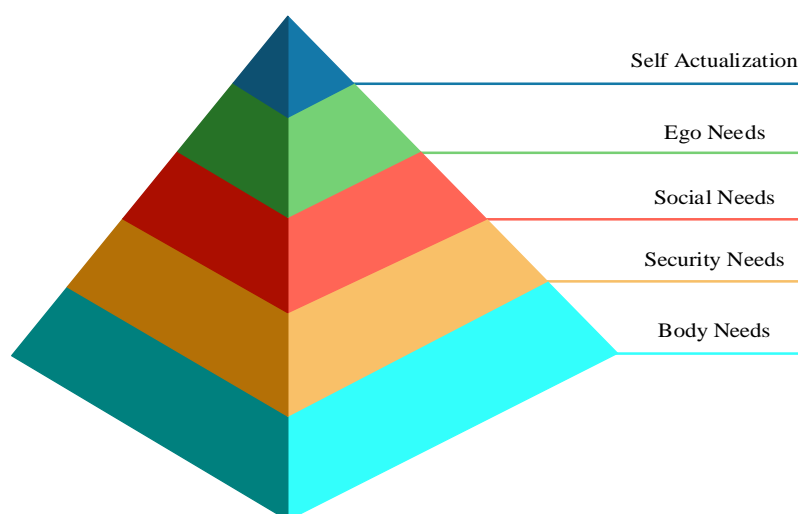


Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

### 3.4. Focus on Community Landscape Design

Actively integrate with community landscape construction work to promote the building of a livable environment. It is proposed to build a home based, community based and institutional supported

social care service system for the elderly. The aim of building age-friendly communities is to create an environment conducive to the residential life of older people and to maximize their ability to live independently, which is an important step to alleviate the pressure on the elderly and meet the challenges of an ageing population [11]. The importance of community venues as a place for older people to live and move around on a daily basis is increasingly being recognized as important for their physical and mental health and quality of life. Promoting the construction of special rest areas for older people, setting up suggested relaxed entrances and exits, adopting safe recreational facilities, meeting the simultaneous needs of older people for their own recreation and the care of young children, bringing the two recreational areas closer together, and setting up first aid stations distributed according to the community to ensure the safety, convenience and comfort of the recreational environment for older groups.

### **3.5. Focus on the Social Value of Older People**

Being "age-friendly" means, first of all, a change in traditional perceptions and stereotypes about older people. In fact, the elderly population itself is rich in human resources and social capital [12]. According to the "2022 Research Report on Retirement and Re-employment of the Elderly" released in October 2020, 68% of the elderly in China have the intention to retire and re-employ, and 46.7% of them return to the job market in search of personal and social value and social value [13]. In view of the current national situation, with the deepening of population ageing and the growing number of elderly groups, the development of society needs the participation of elderly groups, who can not only realize the value of life through retirement, but also enrich their retirement life and continue to contribute to the construction of society, in line with the development trend of population ageing and promote the "silver hair economy" This is in line with the trend of population ageing and promotes the development of the "silver-haired economy" [14]. This will further reduce and alleviate the occurrence of psychological problems in old age, which is also an attitude of positive ageing.

### **3.6. Nurturing Talent in Relevant Fields**

Talent is an important indicator of the competition for the comprehensive national power of a country. Talent is the first resource, and in the context of the new era, it is particularly important to gather talents from all over the world and do a good job with them. We are at a historical period when we are approaching our great goal, and a large number of talents are needed in all fields of economic and social development. Only by making good use of live talents can we add to the great cause and unite our strengths. Accelerating the construction of an age-friendly city talent pool is vital to building an age-friendly society, and the addition of talent is a boost to advancing the construction work. Government departments should introduce outstanding talents through policy introduction, economic attraction and welfare protection, etc. In order to improve the income of elderly and wellness practitioners, continuously raise the bar for senior services, and strengthen the soft power of the elderly and wellness industry development, practitioners of health and wellness, elderly service institutions, and home-based elderly and wellness service organizations should rely on pertinent universities and vocational education centers [15].

## **4. Conclusion**

The people's government is rooted in the people, and the word "people" is more important than the word "mountain". Building an age-friendly society is a systematic project and an important task in the implementation of the national strategy to actively cope with population ageing [16]. The modernization of China is also the modernization of a super large elderly population, and the symbiosis and co-integration of the elderly population and the ageing society, and the sharing of the



same is the title of Chinese modernization. It is the government's responsibility and obligation to actively respond to and solve new social problems. Building an age-friendly society is a matter of increasing the satisfaction and happiness of the public, building the image and credibility of the government, and is an important indicator to test the work of the government. The government should face up to the shortcomings in building an age-friendly society and take up the important role of building an age-friendly society through economic, administrative and legal means. The building of an age-friendly society is to develop a new social form suitable for the survival and development of the elderly, to adapt to the demands of healthy ageing, active ageing and harmonious ageing, so that the elderly can have the same opportunities as other members of society to participate in social life and share the fruits of development. The essence is to create an inclusive, co-constructed and shared society without discrimination but with dignity. We believe that under the strong guidance of government departments, the construction of an age-friendly society in China will usher in a brand new situation.

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