Research on the Current Characteristics and Countermeasures of Population Aging—A Case Study of Linyi City

FU Jun
Linyi Statistical Investigation Center, Linyi, China

The seventh national census data in 2020 showed that China's population aged 60 and above reached 264 million. It is projected that this number will exceed 300 million during the 14th Five-Year Plan period, which indicates that China will enter the stage of moderate aging from mild aging. As population aging will be the basic national context in China for a long time, coping with population aging has been elevated to a national strategy. With the deepening of population aging in China, how the elderly share the fruits of reform and development, enjoy their twilight years, and how to ensure the seniors’ access to elderly care, medical services, productive aging, education, and elderly happiness is a realistic issue of common concern to the society. Linyi City is a typical case, as it is the most populous city in Shandong Province and one of the prefecture-level cities with the largest number of elderly people in the country. This paper analyzes the general pattern and current characteristics of population aging in Linyi based on the data of the seventh national census of the city. Besides, it explores the impact of population aging on economic and social development. In doing so, the paper will provide effective references and constructive recommendations to deal with a series of problems that arise along with population aging, and promote the sustainable development of the city’s population, economy, resources, and environment.

Keywords: countermeasures and suggestions, impact of population aging

Population aging is an important trend in social development. Literally, it is the inevitable result of declining birth rates and increasing average life expectancy under modern fertility patterns. The seventh national census data in 2020 showed that China’s population aged 60 and above reached 264 million. It is projected that this number will exceed 300 million during the 14th Five-Year Plan period, which indicates that China will enter the stage of moderate aging from mild aging. The Report on the Work of the Government in 2022 proposes that “We will proactively respond to population aging, improve elderly care in urban and rural areas, and promote high-quality development of both elderly care programs and the elderly care sector”. As population aging will be the basic national context in China for a long time, coping with population aging has been elevated to a national strategy. With the deepening of population aging in China, how the elderly share the fruits of reform and development, enjoy their twilight years, and how to ensure the seniors’ access to elderly care, medical services, productive aging, education, and elderly happiness is a realistic issue of common concern to the society. Linyi City is a typical case, as it is the most populous city in Shandong Province and one
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Definition and Classification of Population Aging

Population aging is a dynamic in which the number of young people in the total population decreases and
the number of elderly people increases, resulting in a corresponding increase in the proportion of the senior,
due to the decrease in fertility and the increase in life expectancy of the population.

According to internationally accepted standards, a country or region is in an aging society when 10% of
the total population is over 60 years old or 7% of the total population is over 65 years old.

General Pattern and Current Characteristics of Population Aging in Linyi

The seventh national census in 2020 revealed that the resident population of Linyi City was 11,108,365.
Compared with the figure of 10,039,440 in the sixth national census in 2010, there was an increase of 978,925
people in 10 years, an increase of 9.75% and an average annual growth rate of 0.93%.

Among the resident population of the city, the population aged 0-14 was 2,584,573, accounting for
23.46%; the population aged 15-59 was 6,270,377, accounting for 56.91%; the population aged 60 and above
was 2,163,415, accounting for 19.63%, of which 1,555,377, or 14.12%, were aged 65 and above. Compared
with 2010, the proportion of the population aged 0-14 increased by 5.33 percentage points, the proportion of
the population aged 15-59 decreased by 10.61 percentage points, the proportion of the population aged 60 and
above increased by 5.28 percentage points, and the proportion of the population aged 65 and above increased
by 4.26 percentage points. According to the internationally accepted criteria for the classification of the aging
population, Linyi City has entered a moderately aging society with seven main characteristics.

A Large Elderly Population

Census data show that Linyi has a population of 2.163 million people aged 60 and above, including 1.555
million people aged 65 and above, accounting for 10.2% and 10.1% of the population aged 60 and above, and
aged 65 and above in Shandong Province, respectively. Both of these two figures are in the leading position
among the 16 prefectures and cities in the province. It is estimated that in the next decade or so, the aging of
Linyi will develop rapidly and will enter a hyper-aged society around 2035.

A Significantly Accelerated Aging Process

According to the census data, from 2010 to 2020, the proportion of people aged 60 and above rose by 5.28
percentage points, and that of people aged 65 and above rose by 4.26 percentage points, 0.93 percentage points
and 0.62 percentage points higher than the national average, respectively.

An Obvious Difference in Urban and Rural Aging

According to the census data, the proportions of elderly people aged 60 and above and 65 and above in
Linyi City were 25.48% and 18.61% respectively. The proportions of urban elderly aged 60 and above, and 65
and above were 14.21% and 10.45%, respectively. The figures in rural areas were 11.27 and 8.16 percentage
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points higher than those for urban areas, and were 3.28 and 1.55 percentage points higher than the national average, respectively.

A Great Rise in Elderly Dependency Ratio

Census data showed that in 2000, the total dependency ratio was about 46.2%, of which the elderly dependency ratio was about 11.42% and the juvenile dependency ratio was about 34.78%; the total dependency ratio was about 38.87% in 2010, of which the elderly dependency ratio was about 13.69% and the juvenile dependency ratio was about 25.18%. Two years ago, the total dependency ratio reached 60.19%, of which the elderly dependency ratio was about 22.61% and the juvenile dependency ratio was about 37.58%. A total of nine counties in the city had an elderly dependency ratio exceeding the national and provincial averages.

An Increased Number of Elderly in Need

As far as health status is concerned, 54.27% of Linyi’s elderly people over 60 years old were healthy, 29.57% were basically healthy, 13.34% were unhealthy but capable of taking care of themselves, and 2.82% were unhealthy and incapable of taking care of themselves. Nearly 20% of the senior citizens were in poor health. From the perspective of living conditions, the elderly living alone accounted for 18.51% of the total number of elderly, the elderly living with their spouses, 65.22%, and the empty nesters, more than 80%. In terms of the elderly sources of living, 12.22% came from pensions and retirement benefits, 38.21% from labor income, 6.96% from minimum subsistence benefits, 32.62% from support from other family members, and 8.45% from property income. Just over 10% of seniors relied on pensions and retirement benefits to support their lives. The elderly with disabilities, the empty nester, and the elderly living alone all need special care to varying degrees.

A Declining Share of Working-Age Population

The census data showed that the proportion of the working-age population aged 15-59 in the total population of Linyi decreased from 67.52% in 2010 to 56.91% in 2020. Over the 10-year period 2010-2020, the share of the young working population aged 15-24 in the total population decreased by 7.05%; the share of the middle-aged working population aged 25-44 decreased by 5.17%. On the contrary, the share of the elderly working population aged 45-59 increased by 1.61%. In summary, Linyi’s labor force has shrunk significantly with an aging workforce structure.

A Distinctive Feature of “Getting Old Before Getting Rich”

Linyi’s total GDP registered 480.53 billion yuan in 2020. However, due to the large population base, the GDP per capita was only 45,047 yuan (less than 6,500 USD), which was only about 60% of the national and provincial average. Linyi, as an economically underdeveloped city with a large population, was particularly characterized by “getting old before getting rich”.

The Impact of Population Aging on Economic and Social Development and Family Structure

An Aging Population Can Have a Significant Impact on the Labor Market

Internationally, “working-age population” is usually used to represent the labor resources of a country or a region. Along with the process of population aging, the decline of the proportion of working-age population
becomes inevitable, which will affect the effective labor supply. Although the country is still at its most productive period in terms of working-age population, it is expected to have a decline in the future with the slowdown of the growth rate of the working age population.

**The Aging of the Population Will Lead to an Increased Social Burden and Put Enormous Pressure on the Pension and Social Health Insurance Systems**

On the one hand, with the rapid growth of the elderly population, the pension insurance system will become the largest expenditure in the entire social security system. The extension of life expectancy means that the period for the elderly to receive pensions will be extended. In other words, the pressure on the state to pay pensions will also be greater. On the other hand, access to health care for the elderly is a vital part of social security, who is, after all, an important consumer of health care resources. The Ministry of Health has calculated that the prevalence of chronic diseases among people over 60 years of age is 3.2 times higher than the prevalence of the entire population, the disability rate is 3.6 times higher than the disability rate of the entire population, and the health resources consumed by the elderly are 1.9 times higher than the average health resources consumed by the entire population. Aging has resulted in a surge in the total cost of health care covered by social security, putting the overall planning of medical insurance under tremendous pressure.

**The Influence of Population Aging on Family Structure**

The family structure has changed significantly because of the aging population. The “4-2-1” demographic structure (a couple supporting four elderly people and one child) has brought about a change in the traditional family structure. The number of large families with many children and traditional families with three generations living together is decreasing, while the number of the empty nesters is rapidly increasing.

**Countermeasures and Suggestions for Coping With Population Aging**

With the economic boom, population aging is both an objective trend of social development and a reflection of the progress of human civilization. Population aging will also be a key basic national context of China for a long period of time in the future. Inevitably, population aging will bring challenges such as pressure on labor supply, increased burden on social security system, and family retirement, but risks and opportunities coexist. With the right response, we can turn the tide and hedge against the adverse effects of population aging.

**Establishing a Positive View of Aging and a Correct Understanding of Population Aging**

As an inevitable product of modern economic and social development to a certain stage, population aging is a common issue faced by human beings. Effective response to aging is a matter of people’s well-being. Linyi City has entered, and will remain in, an aging society for a long time, so it is essential to fully understand the severity of the challenges of population aging. It is also necessary to enhance our sense of urgency and consciousness to cope with an aging population and an aging society. In a word, we need to treat the elderly positively, seriously, and carefully. When formulating economic and social development plans, party committees and governments at all levels should start from the basic situation of an aging population and include the challenges of population aging in their future development strategies.

**Promoting the Traditional Chinese Virtues of Respecting and Loving the Elderly, and Creating an Age-Friendly Social Environment**

Family respect for the elderly and filial piety has a long history in China, which is a traditional virtue of
the Chinese nation. We should vigorously carry forward the traditional virtue of “Filial piety is one of the virtues to be held above all else”, and strengthen education on social and ethical morals. We should care for, pay attention to and support the development of the cause of the elderly, and promote intergenerational understanding and harmonious relations. In this way, we will create a social atmosphere that is compatible with the aging society and intergenerational integration, so as to truly ensure the seniors’ access to elderly care, medical services, productive aging, education, and elderly happiness.

**Focusing on the Consumer Demand of the Elderly and Cultivating the Silver Economy**

As a result of social and economic development and improved social security system, the consumption structure and mode of China’s elderly population is becoming increasingly diversified. They are expanding from the traditional consumption of “clothing, food, housing and transportation” to service consumption, such as health care, rehabilitation, tourism, and leisure. It is important for us to fully consider the new needs and challenges brought by the aging population and cultivate the silver economy. We need to enrich the supply of elderly-oriented products and services to meet the demand for a wide range of elderly services. Last but not the least, it is essential for us to strengthen the planning of elderly-oriented industries and work to enhance the sense of gain, happiness, and security of the old.

**Establishing a Sound Multi-pillar and Sustainable Security System for the Elderly**

We need to develop the cause of the elderly and consolidate the security of the supply of elderly services. We should make full use of the market mechanism to attract social capital to participate in investing in the elderly business and increase the source of supply of elderly services; we also need to increase the supply of human resources in industries related to the elderly, and increase the training of talents in the elderly care, medical and rehabilitation industries. Moreover, we need to increase innovative ways to provide elderly services, and encourage the development of intelligent elderly products, elderly games, and elderly mental health services. We should further explore the establishment of a long-term care insurance system to meet the long-term care needs of special elderly groups such as the disabled and the mentally handicapped. In addition, we need to improve the multi-level pension system and strengthen the financial protection of social pensions. We must implement the policy of full coverage, basic protection, multi-level and sustainable development in an effort to improve the social security system. Finally, we should introduce medium-and-long-term planning for pension funds, promote the reform of the individual account system for pensions, and boost the coordinated development of the three pillars of pensions to further consolidate the wealth foundation in response to aging population.

**Strengthening the Legal System to Protect the Legitimate Rights and Interests of the Elderly**

It is necessary for us to promote the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly and raise the legal awareness of the legitimate rights and interests of the elderly in social security. We need to lower the threshold of “legal aid”, and provide the elderly with a “green channel” for dispute resolution and legal aid. Priority should be given to the filing, trial, and execution of all kinds of cases that infringe on the legitimate rights and interests of the old. We have to prevent all kinds of infringement risks and crack down on infringements against the elderly, especially various illegal acts of fraudulent sales of various health care products and services. Last but not least, we need to carry out fraud prevention education for the elderly to enhance their awareness and ability to defend against frauds.
References


