

Prospects for the development of China's "silver-haired talents" market in the post demographic dividend period

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Abstract. In order to tap the existing human resources in the post demographic dividend period and support the sustained economic growth, China should pay attention to the development of senior talents. This paper firstly emphasizes the necessity of developing elderly talents by analyzing the current situation of China's labor market under the background of population aging, and affirms the feasibility of developing elderly human resources by analyzing the characteristics of elderly human resources and the employment market. Then by exploring the experiences of South Korea, Japan and the United States in developing the human resources of the elderly, this paper draws on the advanced points, and puts forward suggestions for the development of human resources for the elderly in China. Finally, based on the existing practical experience in China, this paper proposes countermeasures from the perspectives of concept, policies and organization for the possible problems in the development of "silver-haired talents", hoping to help China's practical development in this field.

Keywords: post demographic dividend period; population aging; China's human resources; "silver-haired talent"; labor market; active aging theory.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, population aging has become a worldwide problem. According to data from China's seventh national census, by the end of 2020, China's population of 65-year-olds was 190.64 million, accounting for 13.5% of the total population, which has reached a relatively high level of aging.

With the deepening of the aging of China's social population, the proportion of the working-age labor force is correspondingly reduced, and China's post-demographic dividend era is also coming. Cai (2009) believes that the demographic dividend refers to a favorable productive population structure with an increasing proportion of the working population, which means that the society can ensure sufficient labor supply and savings rate, and provide continuous impetus for economic growth [1]. Bloom and Williamson (1998) took the demographic dividend as the reason for the rapid economic development in their study on the East Asian Miracle created by Japan and the Four Asian Tigers in the 1960s [2]. In a study on the impact of the demographic dividend on the Chinese economy, Cai (2009) pointed out that between 1982 and 2000, the contribution of demographic dividend to per capita GDP growth rate reached 26.8%. However, around 2013, with the change of China's population structure and the deepening of the aging degree, the change trend of China's population dependency ratio changed from decreasing to increasing, the demographic dividend in the traditional sense tended to disappear, and China entered the post demographic dividend period [3].

In the post demographic dividend period, in order to further seek the driving force of economic growth and cope with the aging, China has made adjustments to its economic development strategy. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that China's economy should turn high-quality growth [4]. This transformation from the pursuit of "quantity" to the pursuit of "quality" provides a solution for China to continue to create demographic dividend advantages under the constraints of human resources. In order to achieve this goal, on the one hand, China vigorously cultivates innovative talents, attaches great importance to the cultivation of labor's knowledge, skills and productivity. On the other hand, China continues to tap the existing human resources, strengthen their vocational education and training, strongly support the aging market and deeply mine the resources of "silver-haired talents" [5].

This paper focuses on the situation and development prospects of China's exploration and use of "silver-haired talents" in the post demographic dividend period. It will analyze the necessity and feasibility of developing elderly talents in China, and then use the existing literature and data to summarize the experience of foreign elderly human resources development. Finally, based on these revelations and China's practice in the field of talent development for the elderly, this paper tends to put forward possible problems and countermeasures in the development of related work in this field.

2. The necessity and feasibility of the development of "silver-haired talent" in China

2.1 Necessity

Liu (2021) pointed out in her research that aging will be the trend of the world for a long time in the future. Comparing the degree of aging in China and the world, it can be found that although China's aging starts relatively late compared to developed countries and its relative level of aging is relatively light, the pace of aging in China is significantly faster. The phenomenon of rapid aging in China has created a large-scale dilemma like "getting old before getting rich" and "no country for old men", as China's old-age dependency ratio has already exceeded the world's average level. The study predicts that by 2050, China's aging degree may be comparable to that of developed countries in Europe and the United States, and the old-age dependency ratio may even surpass them [6].

The unavoidable aging of the social population means that the impact of aging on the economy is also unavoidable. With regard to the labor market, which is the focus of this paper, population aging increases the mismatch between labor supply and demand. On the supply side of the labor force, population aging reduces the supply population of the right-age labor force in quantity, and increases the average age of the labor force in structure. Due to the relatively low labor efficiency and technical content of the elderly, the aging of the population also reduces the efficiency and technical content of the overall labor supply. On the demand side, data from the China Employment Training Technical Guidance Center shows that labor demand has always exceeded labor supply in recent years. Since the fourth quarter of 2017, the job-seeking ratio in the public employment service agency market in 80 cities in China has maintained a high level of over 1.2, and has shown a continuous upward trend, reaching 1.53 in the third quarter of 2021. In addition, as China's industrial restructuring has been transformed and upgraded to a stage of high-quality development, the demand for high-efficiency and high-skilled labor has increased. The job-seeking ratio of each technical grade is greater than 1, and that of senior technicians has reached 3.05, which shows a serious shortage of technical labors [7]. In addition to expanding the unmet needs in the labor market, aging also affects the long-term development of the national economy and social and economic welfare by affecting the national security system, social consumption, and international industrial competitiveness [8].

In order to cope with the impact of population aging on the country and the social economy, rationally developing the human resources of the elderly and creating new sources of labor supply can contribute to alleviating the supply and demand asymmetry in China's labor market and creating new impetus for economic growth.

2.2 Feasibility

First of all, with the progress of modern medicine, the average life expectancy has been greatly improved, and it is possible for the elderly to further extend the time to participate in social production activities and economic activities. According to the National Health Commission, China's average life expectancy rose steadily from 76.3 years to 77.3 years in 2015-2019, and it is still showing an upward trend. This shows that for the elderly population of the same absolute age, their physical fitness and labor potential are improving, which provides a basic guarantee for expanding the use of human capital for the elderly.

Secondly, the main social labor mode changes from manual labor to intellectual labor, which has relaxed the constraints of physical insufficiency of the elderly, and gave full play to their advantages in experience and professional ability (Sun, 2017) [9]. Liu (2020) believes that the elderly have rich work experience, and this experience accumulation is very valuable for the labor market. Their knowledge, skills and experience acquired by the elderly will not disappear with age, and the interpersonal network they have can also facilitate the improvement of the efficiency of information exchange at work. Compared with spending several years or even ten years to cultivate new talents, it usually costs less to tap the talent resources of the elderly. They only need short term of re-education and re-training to be transformed into efficient human capital [10].

In the current society, it is entirely possible for the elderly to play an important role in production by virtue of their good physical fitness, excellent professional skills, and rich work experience.

3. The experience and enlightenment of foreign senior human resources development

Foreign countries, especially developed countries with a serious aging degree, have produced earlier theoretical research and practice in developing the human resources of the elderly. In this field, foreign academic circles have formed a theory of active aging. This theory believes that people should still be able to recognize their abilities and potentials when they are old and should be allowed to participate in society according to their abilities and wishes with the approach to receive adequate financial and health security provided by the government and society when they need. According to this theory, foreign countries have carried out a lot of work to encourage and support the re-employment of the elderly. Studying the existing experience of these countries can provide a good reference for the practical and theoretical development of human resources use for the elderly in China. In this article, we mainly focus on three countries: South Korea, Japan, and the United States.

3.1 South Korea

Shen (2020) believes that South Korea is facing the problems of high-speed aging, low birth rate and low population growth rate, which makes South Korea's labor supply capacity and social consumption demand significantly reduced, and increases the financial burden of the Korean government [11]. In addition, the average retirement age of Korean nationals is early at about 53-55 years old, and the retirement security is relatively poor. Many people who have reached the retirement age do not have sufficient funds for retirement, so the elderly poverty problem is severe. In order to deal with these problems, Korean government tried to encourage the employment of the elderly and to protect the employment rights of the elderly. In 1991, the government promulgated a bill stipulates that companies are obliged to hire employees until the age of 60 and requires local governments and state-owned enterprises to increase the employment ratio of elderly people. In 2013, the Korean National Assembly passed a bill to severely punish companies that forced employees to retire early and enforce retiring after the age of 60 for companies with 300 or more employees. This series of policies extended the employment time of the elderly and safeguarded their employment rights, which not only ensures the source of income of the elderly but also eases the pressure of labor market shortages. According to OECD, the employment rate of Korean aged 55-64 rose steadily from 57.84% to 66.57% in 2000-2020, which shows that South Korea's efforts to promote employment of the elderly are paying off [12]. However, due to the constraints of the "wage peak" mechanism, the elderly in South Korea are often paid far less than the rest of the labor force, and they often only get mobile jobs rather than long-term employment, which shows that the elderly are still discriminated against in the labor market. In the process of promoting the reemployment of the elderly in China, we should pay attention to similar issues and provide a better employment environment for the elderly.

3.2 Japan

Japan is the most aging country in the world today. According to statistics from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan, as of October 1, 2021, the proportion of Japanese people over the age of 65 accounted for 28.6% of the total population, far exceeding the standard of a super-aging society of 20%. Japan's fertility rate is low, and the total population has experienced negative growth in recent years. In order to ensure the supply of labor and maintain the normal operation of the Japanese economy, the Japanese government has adopted measures such as extending the retirement age, adopting work probation periods and encouraging the elderly to start businesses. Between 2000 and 2020, these methods have increased the employment rate of people aged 55-64 in Japan from 62.82% to 77%. Among these measures, the "Silver-haired Talent Center" program is the most mature and most representative.

The silver-haired talent center in Japan started out as a regional activity organization with commitment to providing short-term job opportunities for the elderly who are willing to work (Wen, 2020) [13]. It was not until Japan promulgated the "Elderly Employment Stability Law" in 1986 that the Silver-haired Talent Center truly became an organization recognized and protected by Japanese law. The functions of the silver-haired talent center include but are not limited to: providing vocational training; introducing suitable jobs; allowing the elderly to volunteer for government-organized activities; helping the elderly to sell agricultural products or handmade products, etc. Generally speaking, the jobs provided by silver-haired talent centers have low skill requirements, and most of the work locations are local. However, because this organizational form respects the working willingness of the elderly, gives full play to the work potential of them and helps the elderly integrate into society life, it is very popular and has made a positive contribution to society. China can learn from the experience of Japan's Silver-Haired Talent Center and effectively solve the problem of human resource development for the elderly through social grass-roots government departments.

3.3 America

As a representative of developed countries, the process of population aging in the United States started earlier and has reached a relatively high level. The increase in pension expenditures and labor costs brought about by the aging have caused a certain impact on the U.S. economy, and the U.S. government is facing a heavy financial burden. However, the rapid increase in the number of elderly employment in the United States these year has alleviated this pressure. Tong (2019) stated that in 2000 only about 400 million elderly people aged 65 and above chose to continue working, and by 2017 the number has reached 9.23 million [14]. The U.S. government and social groups has made many plans and constructions to increase the employment of the elderly population, such as "The BACK TO WORK 50+ Program" and "Woman's Economic Stability Initiative (WESI)" launched by AARP [15]. The BACK TO WORK 50+ Program aims to help job seekers over the age of 50 find jobs that meet their will and ability. The organization helps job seekers filter job listings, train specific skills, and engage with employers to support seniors' reemployment services. WESI is a program that helps unemployed women aged 50-64 gain the confidence, skills and opportunities to work full-time, with the hope of helping these women return to work to avoid poverty in later life and achieve financial security. When developing human resources for the elderly, China should also pay attention to the power of social organizations, and provide living space for non-governmental service organizations to play their role; at the same time, China should also pay attention to the differences in support between different groups, in addition to the additional support for women special assistance for the elderly and the disabled in poverty-stricken areas should also be considered.

4. Possible problems and countermeasures in the development of China's aging talents

4.1 Innovate the concept to justify the employment of the elderly

To change the status quo of the difficulty in finding employment for the elderly, we must start by solving people's misunderstandings. The most common misunderstanding is that the elderly are too old to create value while in fact, the elderly are undervalued human resource mines. According to the data of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the average age of the winners of China's highest science and technology award from 2000 to 2020 was 84.5 years old with the eldest of 95 years old and the youngest of 64 [16]. As the living standards and medical technology improved, many elderly people in their 60s and 70s are in good health and have the ability and willingness to continue to create value. In addition, "providing jobs to the elderly will crowd out the job opportunities of young people" is also a common social misunderstanding. In fact, the employment of the elderly will create more jobs and inject new vitality into the economic market. If university professors retire and start companies, they can provide jobs to more young people. Moreover, generally the elderly are more willing to get involved in agriculture, service industry and other auxiliary industries than young people. Therefore, the employment of the elderly can also supplement the occupational gaps in the employment, balancing the economic structure, and enabling the sustainable development of the national economy [17].

Changing people's concept of employment for the elderly is an important step to provide a healthy and favorable environment for the development of "silver-haired talent" resources in China. In order to achieve this goal, we should increase publicity, change the backward concept of pension, actively convey the advantages of the elderly to make the society realize the value of the elderly group as human resources. At the same time, we should help the elderly to establish a healthy view of reemployment so that they can face challenges with a positive attitude.

4.2 Formulate policies to provide guarantee for the development of aging human resources

The guarantee of the system is the bottom building of the development of human resources for the elderly. Compared with developed countries, China's existing policies and systems for the elderly human resources development is still unclear. However, China has not stopped moving forward. In 2022, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China issued the "14th Five-Year Plan for National Aging Development and Elderly Care Service System", which clearly pointed out in the eighth part of the document that it is necessary to strengthen employment services for the elderly and promote their social participation [18]. This is a big step forward in improving the development system for the elderly talents. In the future, China's policy planning for the elderly should break through the restrictions on the area of elderly care and the elderly industry, and build a more complete system for the development of elderly talents.

In China's existing practice, cases like the Ministry of Education organized retired teachers from colleges to support the education cause in the west, Henan tapped "silver-haired talents" to alleviate the shortage of scientific and technological talents, and Yibin organized retired cadres to join the fight against poverty have strong reference value [19-21]. In the future, local governments in China should also follow the advanced cases, give full play to the advantages of each region, and provide support for the development of aging talents.

4.3 Improve the organization and clear obstacles for the employment of the elderly

The lack of employment service organizations for the elderly is an important reason for the lack of smooth employment channels for the elderly. At present, there is a lack of employment information and communication platforms for the elderly in Chinese society. If domestic retirees want to re-employ, they generally need to learn about employment information through the introduction of friends and family members. From the practice of Japan's "Silver Talent Center" and America's AARP, we can find that a good organizational form can bring the employment information the elderly

need and allow the elderly to continue to develop their talents. Social organizations should also play a role as a bridge in China, so that they can effectively provide diversified employment services for the elderly according to their employment needs.

5. Conclusion

The importance of the development of "silver-haired talents" is determined by the characteristics of the times when Chinese society has entered an aging and post demographic dividend period. At present, the development of human resources for the elderly in China is still relatively low, the employment channels for the elderly are not smooth, the employment system is not perfect, and the policies and regulations to encourage employment of the elderly are not comprehensive. The neglect and waste of elderly talents are still very serious. Starting from the actual situation of China's labor market and employment market, this paper first analyzes the necessity and feasibility of China's elderly human resources development. Combined with the practical experience of the re-employment of the elderly in developed countries, such as South Korea's legislation to protect the employment rights of the elderly, the Japanese silver-haired talent center to help the elderly to find employment, and the American social organization AARP to help the elderly to achieve economic security, this paper summarizes the experience and puts forward some suggestions for the development of human resources for the elderly in China. Finally, in order to strengthen the society's attention to the value of the human resources of the elderly and to guide the development of the elderly talents, this paper puts forward the possible problems and countermeasures in the development of "silver-haired talents" in China.

This study focuses on theoretical discussions, and lacks empirical evidence on the economic impact of elderly human resource development. Future researchers should conduct empirical analysis based on theoretical assumptions and use actual data of China's "silver-haired talents" development to provide reference for research in related fields.

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