

THE BOOK WAS BASED ON
THE RESEARCH RESULTS OF
MY DISSERTATION

LÜ WENJUAN
AUTHOR

SUCCESSFUL AGING *OF*

**CHINESE
OLDER ADULT
LEARNERS**

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I'll close by saying that life is good, and it's getting better each day!

Lü Wenjuan

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Preface

With the worldwide aging tendency, how to age successfully has gained increasing attention. Learning participation was proved to be a great contributing factor. While the concept of successful aging was located in a given cultural context, the previous norms and predictors might be partly plausible in Asian context.

The book aimed to investigate successful aging from the perspectives of Chinese older adults who participated in lifelong learning programs. How did Chinese older adult learners perceive the concept of successful aging? What were their opinions on its relationship with learning participation? And what were their learning needs to achieve successful aging? Questionnaire survey was adopted as the main research method to collect data. Shanghai, a Chinese city, was selected as the sampling area.

The research results showed both consistency and inconsistency with previous studies. Among the various perceptions of successful aging, family interaction was labeled as the most significant. Due to the influence of Confucianism, until now many Chinese viewed the multi-generational extended families as ideals. As for learning's influence, the most outstanding outcome was that the participants fostered new interests and acquired updated knowledge. Finally, as for their learning needs, participants showed keen interest in how to live a healthy life, such as care, nutrition, and chronic disease prevention. In comparison, they showed less interest in financial management.

The book hoped to provide some implications and suggestions for the future study. First of all, given that only a limited number of English

articles could be found , which studied successful aging from Asian older adults' perspectives , the current study was intended to help the researchers who were interested in Asian culture and eager to get informed , by developing a more comprehensive and culture-specific definition of successful aging based on the understanding of Chinese older adults' situation . Secondly , at present older adult education was still in an inferior position compared to other fields of education in China , as the learning necessity and ability of senior people were doubted by a majority of people , and the great significance of learning in one's later life failed to be recognized . Therefore , the current study hoped to arouse the consciousness that learning could lead to development in older adulthood and help achieve physical , psychological and social well-being in one's later life by introducing some Chinese older adult learners' real experiences .

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The 21st century, when the population aging has become a global trend, is an era of longevity. The World Health Organization (2007) estimated that there were 600 million people aged 60 and older in 2000 and that this would increase up to 1.2 billion by 2025 and 2 billion by 2050. Similarly, the United States Census Bureau (2016) issued a report named *An Aging World: 2015*, which investigated 141 countries in the world. According to the report, in 2015 the number of population aged 65 years and over was 0.62 billion, which accounted for 8.5% of the total population (7.3 billion) in the world. Up to 2050, this number will rise sharply to 1.56 billion, accounting for 16.6% of the world population (9.4 billion).

The growing number of older citizens in contemporary societies brought about challenges to researchers, policy makers, and societies in general (Sener et al., 2008). Despite the negative perceptions of aging, Kart and Kinney (2000) pointed out that “If handled well, aging and productivity will not be contradictory terms” (p.172). How to facilitate seniors to live a meaningful and abundant life has become a hot research topic that deserves to be further investigated.

This chapter developed by giving successively research background, statement of the problem, research question, definition of terms and limitations.

1.1 Research background

Geographically, China is situated in East Asia and covers an area of 9.6

million square kilometers . The country consists of 23 provinces , 5 autonomous regions , 4 centrally administered municipalities (a municipality has the same political , economic and jurisdictional rights as a province) , and 2 special administrative regions . According to the most recent figures , by the end of 2015 China's population has surpassed 1.36 billion . Based on the previous study , five unique features of aging population in China were summarized as follows :

First of all , huge scale of elderly population . At present , China's population has surpassed 1.36 billion . Up to 2015 , China's population over 60 years was expected to rise to 0.22 billion , which would occupy one fourth of the total population over 60 years in the world . At that time , China would become not only the most populated country but also the country with most aged population in the world .

Secondly , unprecedented aging speed . The proportion of elderly in China is growing much faster than that in many developed countries . In general , most developed countries spent more than 45 years stepping from aging society to aged society , such as France (115 years) , Sweden (85 years) , Australia (73 years) and US (69 years) , but China only spent 34 years , and is among the fastest-aging countries in the world (*An Aging World* ; 2015) .

Thirdly , accelerated aging outpacing modernization . Most developed countries entered aging society after they got rich , however , the situation of China was just the other way around . Given the One Child Policy and rising longevity , China faced a rapidly aging population before it had got rich and before modernization had fully taken place in the country . As a result , due to lack of sufficient time and resources , the Chinese government was confronted with great pressure and challenges to establish an adequate social security and service system for the elderly .

Fourthly , a larger number of elderly residents in rural areas compared to urban areas . In the past imposed by Confucian doctrines , it was children's filial duties , especially sons , to care for their parents when they got old . But in recent decades , along with the fast-paced

industrialization and urbanization , more migrant peasants poured into cities , and left their elderly parents and young children as “left-behind” population in rural areas . As a result , the traditional links between generations were broken , and the pattern to support and care for the elderly changed dramatically .

Fifthly , increasing empty-nest phenomenon . In recent years , the phenomenon of “empty-nest” aged family has become increasingly prominent in both rural and urban areas . Previous investigations found that a majority of the empty-nest elders shared some common features , such as old age , low literacy level , and poor health . Most of them lived an empty and boring life , which led to various psychological problems directly influencing their life qualities . Although their basic living could be guaranteed , they lacked family affection , friendship and access to hobbies . Isolated and marginalized by the society , some even committed suicide to escape emotional frustration . How to solve the problem? Evidence showed that due to the absence of their family , these empty-nest elders relied more on neighbors or community to ask for help . By participating in the various educational programs sponsored by the local community , they learned how to maintain health , made new friends , and developed hobbies , and their later life was not empty but abundant , meaningful and regular .

1.2 Statement of the problem

Older people’s preferences to remain active and independent (Bowling & Dieppe , 2005) , together with increasing emphasis on disability-free and healthy-life expectancy in older age , have heightened interest in the promotion of successful aging (Gingold , 1999 ; Fries , 2002) . Learning and education has been proved to be a great contributor in the process of successful aging . Previous studies provided us with fundamental knowledge , but two research gaps were identified .

The first research gap identified lied in that among the abundant