

Exploring the Localization Path of Japanese Elderly and Children Co-Care Model in China: A Case Study of Meizhou City

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Abstract: Under the dual challenges of population aging and declining birthrate in China, the co-care of the elderly and children has become an innovative path to address the issues of elderly care and childcare. Japan, as a forerunner in population aging, has developed a mature co-care model rooted in the "family culture" and "symbiosis" concepts, forming a complete system characterized by "policy guidance-facility integration-community support". This paper analyzes the operational mechanisms and cultural connotations of the Japanese model through literature review and case comparison, and explores the localization path in China by examining local practices in Meizhou City. The study finds that promoting co-care for the elderly and children in China requires systematic innovations in policy coordination, cultivation of dual-qualified professionals, and digital platform construction. Accordingly, it is necessary to improve policies and regulations, strengthen interdisciplinary talent training, promote intelligent transformation, and facilitate the integration of traditional concepts of elderly and child care with modern service systems, thereby providing practical references for building a localized co-care model.

Keywords: Elderly and Children Co-Care Model; Inter-Generational Integration; Localization Path; Japanese Experience; Meizhou City

1. Introduction

In an era marked by simultaneous global population aging and declining birth rates, the creation of a social security system that meets the evolving demands of society has become a pressing collective challenge for numerous countries. By 2024, Japan's population is projected to reach 123.8 million, with individuals aged 65 and older numbering 36.24

million, accounting for 29.3% of the total population. As one of the countries with the most pronounced aging demographics, Japan has systematically devised strategies to address these challenges since the 1970s, gradually establishing a community-based service model that integrates care resources for both the elderly and children. This innovative approach not only alleviates the burden of caregiving by fostering interactions between the elderly and the young but also reconstructs intergenerational support networks. It embodies the deep-seated cultural values of family and community that are hallmarks of Eastern traditions.

Similarly, China faces the dual challenges of rapid aging and a burgeoning demand for infant and child care, making the "elderly and child" dilemma increasingly prominent. Projections indicate that by 2050, China's elderly population will surpass 400 million, representing approximately 35% of the total population. This demographic shift not only alters the current social structure but also poses significant challenges to economic development, the social security system, the labor market, and public services [1]. While the cultural ethos of "respecting the elderly and cherishing the young" prevails, the modernization process has weakened family structures' capability to provide elder care, and the existing social service system remains inadequate. In light of these issues, it is crucial to explore inclusive models that integrate elder care and childcare, tailored to fit the specific cultural and social context of China.

Therefore, this paper analyzes the cultural foundations and practical mechanisms of Japan's intergenerational care model. By examining local practices in Meizhou City, it seeks to identify viable pathways for adopting and developing this model in China. The goal is to provide valuable insights for constructing an intergenerational care system that is distinctly Chinese, harmonizing traditional values with

contemporary needs.

2. Practical Experience and Cultural Foundations of Japan's Intergenerational Care Model

2.1 Development Status and Service Modalities of Japan's Intergenerational Care Model

Japan's intergenerational care model has evolved through a well-structured combination of policy initiatives and legal frameworks. Since the 1990s, landmark legislation such as the *Elderly Welfare Act* and the *Child Welfare Act* has not only clarified the rights and status of the elderly but also established a supportive social framework encouraging interactions between elderly citizens and children. Rather than creating entirely new institutions labeled as "intergenerational care", the government has emphasized integrating and coordinating the functions and resources of existing eldercare and childcare facilities. This approach fosters synergy between services without duplicating infrastructure. The government supports this model through financial subsidies, tax incentives, and policy guidance that encourage diverse stakeholders' participation and create a sustainable funding environment. Consequently, several distinct service modalities have emerged, forming a comprehensive system that links policy, facility integration, and community involvement [2].

Japan's intergenerational care manifests primarily in three representative models: first, the facility integration model, exemplified by Tokyo's Kotoen, where a special nursing home and a nursery are co-located within the same building, promoting everyday intergenerational exchanges through shared activity spaces [3]; second, the community comprehensive model, typified by Toyama Prefecture's "Village of Hope", which utilizes small-scale multifunctional hubs to provide joint care for the elderly, children, and persons with disabilities [4]; and third, the home-support model, which combines home visits with domiciliary care services to facilitate seamless intergenerational coexistence within familiar family environments. Together, these models form a coherent system characterized by the interplay of policy guidance, facility integration, and community support.

2.2 Cultural Foundations and Core Values of Japan's Intergenerational Care Model

At the heart of Japan's intergenerational care model lies its distinctive cultural heritage. The traditional familial ethos rooted in the principle of "intergenerational mutual aid" furnishes an ethical cornerstone. Amidst the forces of industrialization and the rise of nuclear families, Japanese society has adeptly transposed familial virtues of filial piety and compassion into societal paradigms of mutual support and coexistence. As Atsuko Kusano argues, intergenerational exchange must rest upon the concept of "symbiosis", which underscores the mutual dependence and shared development among diverse age groups [5].

Within traditional family structures, the elderly's involvement in children's education and daily care, coupled with the younger generation's responsibility for eldercare, establishes a practical foundation for intergenerational cooperation. Research by Yukka Kanamori reveals that such interactions not only enrich emotional bonds but also facilitate the transmission of cultural capital across generations [6]. Japanese families emphasize creating environments tailored to both the elderly and young—featuring barrier-free designs and child-friendly spaces—and foster intergenerational communication through shared activities such as cooking and outdoor recreation. These familial cultural traditions seamlessly permeate institutional care, endowing it with a homely atmosphere.

However, the challenges posed by a super-aged society have surpassed the capacity of traditional family functions to shoulder caregiving alone. Japanese society has thus successfully extended the traditional notions of filial piety and compassion into broader societal values of mutual support and coexistence, which constitute the model's core value system. Moreover, the cultural ideal of "harmony"—which emphasizes balance and cooperation—is vividly embodied in intergenerational care [7], where harmonious coexistence is fostered through sustained generational interaction. The symbiosis ethos further reinforces the model: the elderly impart wisdom and experience to children, who in turn rejuvenate the elderly with their vitality, engendering reciprocal nourishment and collective growth.

Essentially, the intergenerational care model

transposes familial ethics into communal and institutional contexts. For example, the activity of elderly individuals teaching children traditional crafts carries profound symbolism as a cultural transmission from “grandparents” to “grandchildren”, while the children’s liveliness is perceived as a source of life’s enrichment for the elderly. This cultural narrative imbues the model with deep emotional resonance, elevating it beyond mere commercial or public service functions to a socially embraced institution.

Additionally, Japan integrates traditional cultural experiences such as tea ceremony, flower arranging (ikebana), and artisanal crafts into intergenerational care settings [7]. These cultural activities enrich the spiritual and cultural lives of both elders and children, while fostering the perpetuation of traditional heritage. Regularly organized tea ceremonies, for instance, offer occasions where the elderly impart etiquette and cultural profundity to children, who, through participation, come to appreciate the allure of their cultural inheritance, thereby deepening intergenerational bonds and cultural identification.

3. The Current Development and Localization Practices of Intergenerational Care in China: A Case Study of Meizhou City

3.1 Examination of the Challenges and Issues in the Development of Intergenerational Care in China

3.1.1 Policy evolution and local exploration

In recent years, China has focused on enhancing its population service system with an emphasis on the dynamics of the elderly and children. The policy framework has been continuously refined. Starting with the publication of the 2020 *Opinions on Promoting the Healthy Development of Elderly and Child Care Services* by the Government of China, which advocated for an integrated approach to care services, to the 2024 *Policy on High-Quality Development of Elderly and Child Care*, which aim to promote service upgrades, and extending into the 2025 government work report that specifically calls for an expanded and diverse supply of elderly and childcare services [8], a progressive policy support system has emerged. Various regions have engaged in proactive exploration, such as the initiation of the “Elderly and Child Care Pilot Project” in Beijing’s Yuhaiyuan, the introduction of the “Elderly Care +

Kindergarten” intergenerational care model in Fangshan District, the implementation of “Dual-Age Care” services in Hangzhou’s Gongchenqiao Street, and the accelerated development of intergenerational communities in Chengdu. These initiatives have gradually intensified attention to addressing the challenges of elderly and child care integration [7].

3.1.2 Multiple challenges: institutional constraints, talent shortages, funding issues, and social perception

Despite the introduction of various encouraging policies at the national level, the intergenerational care model, as an emerging cross-sectional service type, has yet to establish a systematic legal and regulatory framework. Some scholars point out that the collaborative development of the “Elderly and Child Care” service system must overcome governance challenges such as departmental fragmentation and policy disunity [9]. In terms of service standards, there is a lack of unified facility construction norms, service processes, and quality evaluation systems, leading to inconsistencies in institutional capabilities. On the regulatory front, overlapping responsibilities among departments—including civil affairs, health and education—result in unclear boundaries, leading to a coexistence of “multiple regulatory authorities” and “supervision vacuums”, which hinders the standardization and scale-up of care models.

There is a significant misalignment between talent supply and demand, with a severe shortage of “dual-qualified” professionals. Educational institutions primarily focus on singular directions such as “Elderly Services and Management” or “Preschool Education”, with little intermingling of curricula. Additionally, continuing education programs often lack practical training in intergenerational communication and activity design, limiting practitioners’ competence in providing cross-generational care, where services are predominantly confined to “spatial coexistence” rather than achieving “emotional integration” and “value exchange”.

Funding sources are predominantly limited, creating an overreliance on government subsidies. Given the substantial investments necessary for construction and operation, relying solely on subsidies is unsustainable, and the willingness of social capital to participate remains low. There is an urgent need to establish

a diversified investment mechanism to invigorate social capital engagement [10].

Regarding social perception, some segments of the public express concerns about health risks, generational conflicts, and the lingering influence of traditional family caregiving ideologies. Moreover, insufficient outreach has resulted in low awareness and acceptance of these care models, thus requiring enhanced family participation.

3.2 Localization Exploration in Meizhou City

3.2.1 Facility construction

The construction of intergenerational care facilities in China exemplifies a model characterized by pilot initiatives and diverse explorations. Some community service centers have been repurposed into demonstration sites for intergenerational care, achieving a shared use of space by integrating day care and childcare functions. These centers invariably conduct health monitoring and cultural activities for the elderly in the morning, transform into after-school care spaces for children in the afternoon, and organize intergenerational activities in the evening [11].

According to planning objectives, by 2025, regional comprehensive service centers are set to be established, with dedicated spaces for intergenerational care. These facilities are required to be equipped with accessible pathways, emergency call systems, and multimedia teaching equipment. However, the current state of facility construction reveals significant shortcomings. There is a notably low coverage rate of existing intergenerational care facilities, an imbalance in the ratio of nursing care beds to infant care beds, and inadequate digital management systems that fail to meet precise service demands. Researchers like Zhang Xiaojing [12] have pointed out that the construction of community intergenerational integration facilities necessitates coordinated planning, optimized spatial layouts, and enhanced composite utilization efficiency. This can be achieved through a combination of repurposing existing space and incrementally building new facilities to create a comprehensive community service complex that facilitates shared use by the elderly and children.

3.2.2 Operational mechanisms

The operational model manifests a characteristic blend of government leadership and social participation. The municipal government has

established special funding to support qualifying institutions with construction and operational subsidies. Pilot “intergenerational integration” projects have been launched, organizing preschool children to regularly engage in activities at elderly care facilities, thereby fostering intergenerational communication through interactive activities such as painting and gardening. Some studies have found that the “Dual-Age Care” model effectively achieves “intergenerational reciprocity” through shared spaces and service mechanisms [11].

In terms of human resources, there is an acute scarcity of “dual-qualified” professionals. It is imperative to construct a digitalized ecosystem that enhances intergenerational care capabilities via an incentive mechanism combining “academic education, professional qualifications, and salary subsidies” [13]. Currently, the percentage of personnel possessing both elder care and childcare credentials is exceptionally low, with most caregivers only receiving training in one area, rendering them ill-equipped to meet the integrated service demands. Research indicates that a community complex building mechanism premised on the ideas of “diversity, participation, and sharing” can effectively address the issue of talent shortages [14].

Service provision has coalesced into three primary modules: health management, daily care, and cultural entertainment; however, there is an insufficient supply of medical rehabilitation services, and the coverage of telemedicine remains low. The policy framework is in its preliminary stages, as articulated in the *Comprehensive Solution for Elderly and Child Care in Meizhou City*, which delineates construction standards and subsidy policies. The civil affairs and education departments have established a joint meeting system to alleviate departmental fragmentation. The 2025 implementation of the “Fifteen-Minute Living Circle” plan mandates that each community must have at least one intergenerational care facility; however, there are still inadequate supporting details regarding land supply and funding guarantees [14].

4. Conclusion

The successful implementation of Japan's intergenerational care model demonstrates that its effective operation requires a systematic framework characterized by “policy guidance, facility integration, and community support”,

with “intergenerational mutual assistance” and “coexistence and mutual prosperity” serving as its core values. The experiences gleaned from this model reveal that intergenerational care is not merely a spatial overlay but rather a creative process that institutionalizes the traditional family values into social service resources through thoughtful design. While Meizhou City has achieved initial successes in its localized exploration, it still faces structural challenges in areas such as policy coordination, talent supply, facility coverage, and societal awareness. These challenges reflect the typical dilemmas encountered during the institutional adaptation period of emerging service models.

Based on the preceding analysis, this paper proposes the following optimization pathways: First, enhance the policy and regulatory framework. Drawing from Japan's legislative experiences, establish the *Management Measures for Intergenerational Care Service Institutions in Meizhou City*, which will clarify construction standards, service processes, and cross-departmental regulatory responsibilities, thereby creating a normalized collaborative mechanism among the civil affairs, health, and education departments to resolve the dual challenges of overlapping governmental mandates and regulatory vacuums. Second, construct a dual-qualified talent development system. Deepen collaborations with local institutions, such as Jiaying University, to establish a composite specialization in “Elderly Care and Preschool Education”, and implement an incentive mechanism that combines “academic education, professional qualifications, and salary subsidies”. Third, promote the transformation to intelligent services. Create a unified digital platform for intergenerational care across the city, integrating functions such as health monitoring, activity reservations, and telemedicine, thus overcoming the current limitation where only 40% of institutions achieve data interconnectivity, thereby enhancing service accuracy and accessibility. Fourth, expand diverse funding channels. Establish a municipal special development fund to leverage public financing, guiding charitable donations, lottery public welfare funds, and social capital participation to form a sustainable investment mechanism characterized by “government guidance, social participation, and market operation”. Lastly, strengthen cultural recognition and promotional efforts. Integrate

the traditional values of “respecting the elderly and cherishing the young” into service design, and enhance social recognition through intergenerational activities that foster family engagement.

In summary, the localization of the intergenerational care model necessitates the organic integration of traditional ethics with modern service systems. Future research could further pursue long-term tracking evaluations and comparative analyses across dimensions such as urban-rural disparities and operational models to continually refine practical pathways that align with China's socio-cultural context, providing theoretical support and decision-making references for constructing a uniquely Chinese intergenerational care system.

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