

The Era Value of Health Qigong in Promoting Healthy Aging Against the Background of Healthy China

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Abstract

Currently, society is in a period of rapid aging. With the rapid development of the economy, China is also at a critical stage where the aging degree is accelerating and the population structure is changing. The health issues of the elderly have received widespread attention from society. With the in-depth implementation of the "Healthy China" strategy, addressing the challenges brought about by population aging has become an important topic. Through the methods of literature review and mathematical statistics, this paper analyzes the current status of population aging in China under the background of "Healthy China", and explores the contemporary value of health qigong in promoting the physical and mental health of the elderly, improving the family happiness of the elderly, reducing the family economic burden, as well as facilitating the social participation of the elderly and contributing to the development of a harmonious society during the process of healthy aging. Meanwhile, corresponding paths are provided for health qigong to assist in healthy aging.

Keywords

Healthy China; Healthy Aging; The Elderly; Contemporary Value.

1. Introduction

According to the population data survey conducted by the United Nations in 2020, there are currently 727 million people aged 65 and above in the world. It is estimated that by 2050, the number of people aged 65 and above will exceed 1.5 billion. According to the "2021 Bulletin on the Development of the National Aging Cause" published in China in 2021, as of December 2021, the population aged 60 and above in China reached 267.36 million, accounting for 18.9% of the total population; the national population aged 65 and above was 200.56 million, accounting for 14.2% of the total population [1]. The "Healthy China 2030" Plan Outline has listed health qigong as a key supported project. Health qigong has important fitness value and plays an important role in promoting physical and mental health and increasing the social participation of the elderly [2]. With the continuous development of society and the proposal of the concept of Healthy China, people are paying more and more attention to healthy development. As an outstanding traditional ethnic sports event, health qigong has been scientifically proven to be effective in preventing diseases in advance and regulating human physical and mental health. The movements of health qigong are slow, which helps to regulate breathing, and its exercise intensity is moderate, conforming to the physical and mental characteristics of the elderly. By analyzing the practical significance of health qigong in helping the process of healthy aging for the elderly individuals, families and society, certain theoretical support can be provided for health qigong to contribute to aging. At present, the promotion of health qigong among the elderly has achieved remarkable results and has important practical significance for realizing healthy aging and building a harmonious society.

2. The Concept of Healthy Aging and the Characteristics of Aging in China

2.1. The Concept of Healthy Aging

Aging: The concept of aging was first put forward in the "Research on Population Age Classification and Mortality" published by the Swedish demographer Sundbärg in the 20th century. He defined the population aged 50 and above as the elderly population [3]. Subsequently, in 1956, the United Nations defined the population aged 65 and above as the aging population in "The Aging of Populations and Its Social and Economic Consequences". With the development of society, in 1982, at the "World Assembly on Aging", 60 years old was set as the dividing line for aging. According to the classification standard published by the United Nations in "The Aging of Populations and Its Social and Economic Consequences", when the population aged 60 and above in a country or region reaches more than 10%, or the population aged 65 and above reaches more than 7%, it indicates that this country or region has entered the aging stage [4].

Healthy Aging: Healthy aging does not simply refer to the degeneration of physical functions and the increase in physical age. Healthy aging should take the physical and mental health of the elderly as the foundation and aim at improving the quality of life and creating a positive living atmosphere. Healthy aging should be a long-term and persistent process, with health running through a person's whole life. It is an overall concept that keeps developing continuously.

2.2. Characteristics of China's Population Aging

With the development of the economy and society, China is not only faced with a large population base. Similarly, the aging of the labor force is becoming increasingly severe. In recent years, as the aging population intensifies, China's elderly population is under pressure in many aspects such as physical, psychological and social aspects. This is not only closely related to the personal lives of the elderly, but also has an important connection with our national social economy. Population aging is an inevitable trend in China's future development. Actively promoting healthy aging is not only conducive to improving the personal living standards of the elderly, but also beneficial to the stable development of our society. There are similarities between China's aging and that of developed countries, but there are also unique characteristics. The main characteristics of China's aging are as follows:

2.2.1. Accelerated aging rate and a huge elderly population

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, while the population has been increasing, the aging rate has also been accelerating. China is shifting from a period of rapid population growth to a phase of demographic structure change. According to the results of the seven national population censuses from 1953 to 2020, since the reform and opening up, due to the continuous improvement of medical standards, the mortality rate has remained at a relatively low level. Coupled with the implementation of the family planning policy, the aging rate in China has accelerated. China has the largest elderly population in the world. The aging rate in China has far exceeded that of Western developed countries, which is highly inconsistent with China's economic development.

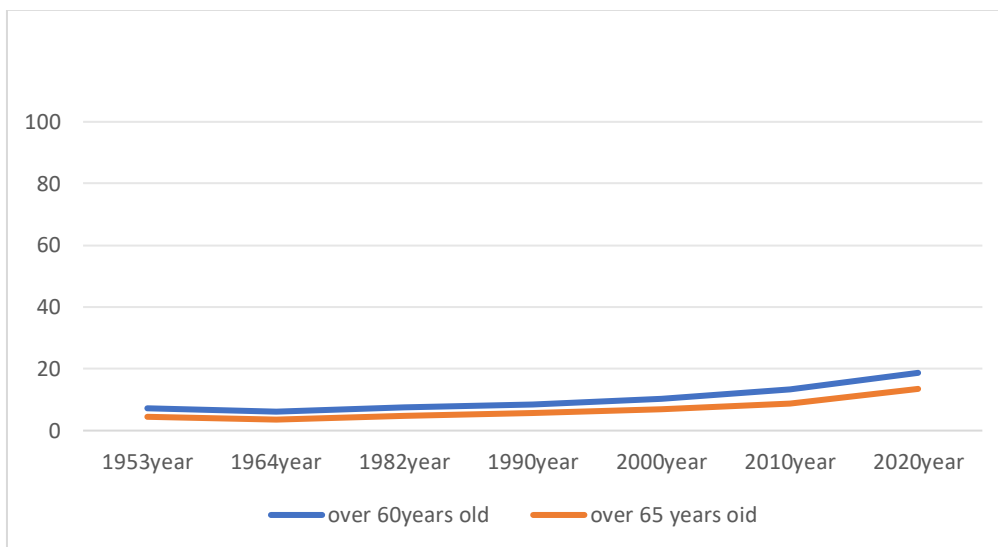


Figure 1 Changes in the Population of People Aged 60 and 65 in the Seven National Population Censuses

Data source: National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, *China Population Census Data* over the years

As can be seen from Figure 1 of the data of the seven national population censuses, the elderly population aged 60 and above has been continuously increasing since the reform and opening up. It increased from 7.32% of the total population in 1953 to 18.7% in 2020. The population aged 65 and above also rapidly increased from 4.41% in 1953 to 13.5% in 2020. With a huge population base in China, the aging rate is accelerating. The large elderly population and the rapid aging trend have brought huge challenges to China's economic and social development. The accelerated aging rate and the huge number of elderly people are important characteristics of China's population aging. In the future, the growth of the elderly population in China will further accelerate. To ease social pressure, promoting healthy aging is an urgent task.

2.2.2. Unbalanced regional development of aging and the urban-rural inversion

In China, the development of population aging is unbalanced across regions. The degree of aging in the north is higher than that in the south. This is mainly because the population in the north has flowed to the south. The developed economy in the south has attracted a large number of people to move in. As a result, the proportion of elderly people left behind in the north has increased, leading to a higher degree of aging than in the south. Moreover, there are also differences in the degree of aging among different provinces. According to the seventh national population census, the top three provinces in terms of the population aged 65 and above are Liaoning, Chongqing, and Sichuan. These three provinces are major labor-exporting regions. The export of labor force has led to a decrease in the population, thus accelerating the aging process.

Table 1 The Population Aged 65 and Above in Urban and Rural Areas in Three National Population Censuses

Year	Proportion of Population Aged 65 and Above in Urban and Rural Areas (%)	
	Urban	Rural
2000	6.42	7.5
2005	8.49	9.55
2010	7.80	10.06

Data sources: Data from the Fifth and Sixth National Population Censuses; Data from the 2005 National 1% Population Sampling Survey.

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China's population aging is reflected not only in the differences between northern and southern provinces, but also in the inverted distribution between urban and rural areas. According to Table 1, there is a significant difference in the degree of aging between urban and rural areas in China. The elderly population in urban areas is slightly lower than that in rural areas. The medical level and pension service system in cities are relatively complete. Theoretically, the elderly population in cities should be higher than that in rural areas. However, the opposite phenomenon occurs in China. The infrastructure such as medical facilities in rural areas is poor and can hardly keep up with the current aging rate in China. Therefore, it is even more necessary to promote fitness qigong and other exercise programs suitable for the elderly to relieve the rapid aging trend and alleviate the economic pressure on the country and society.

2.2.3. Getting old before getting rich, increasing social and economic pressure

China is in a new stage of socialist development and has not yet entered the developed stage. Its economic development level is still insufficient. However, the aging process in China has already entered a stage of rapid development. Compared with Western developed countries, China's current economic level is lower than that of developed countries during the same period, but the aging rate is higher. The rapidly developing aging trend has brought huge pressure on China's economic development. The increase in the elderly population has exerted great pressure on China's old-age security system. The mismatch between the economic level and the degree of aging has posed an unprecedented challenge to China's pension fund. As the aging rate continues to accelerate, the burdens on China's health care, labor force, and society will also keep increasing. Facing the rapid aging trend and the situation of getting old before getting rich, the various problems brought about by aging urgently need to be addressed.

3. The Practical Significance of Fitness Qigong in Promoting Healthy Aging

3.1. The Concept and Characteristics of Fitness Qigong

Fitness Qigong can be simply defined as a sport that cultivates the body's vital energy through the exercise of postures, breathing, and mental focus [5]. Fitness Qigong was first put forward in the "Notice on Strengthening the Management of Social Qigong" jointly issued by the State Physical Culture and Sports Commission, the Ministry of Health, and other departments in 1996. At the same time, the scientific nature of its fitness function was further clarified. In the early 21st century, the General Administration of Sport of China initially proposed the concept of Fitness Qigong in the "Measures for the Administration of Fitness Qigong": "The fitness Qigong referred to in these measures is a traditional national sports event mainly characterized by the combination of physical movements, breath regulation, and psychological adjustment. It is an integral part of China's long - standing culture [6]." Fitness Qigong is a form of exercise that coordinates physical movements and breathing to exercise the body and mind, cultivate the body's vital energy, and relax and strengthen the body and mind. As an excellent traditional Chinese culture, the effects of Fitness Qigong in cultivating the mind and strengthening the body have been scientifically proven. In recent years, it has been very popular among the elderly. Fitness Qigong also plays an irreplaceable role in promoting healthy aging, such as promoting social participation and increasing the happiness of the elderly. As the elderly grow older, they are prone to the following problems: 1. The decline of various organ functions and muscle strength in the body; 2. Mental health problems such as anxiety and loneliness; 3. Reduced social participation. Fitness Qigong has the following characteristics: 1. It emphasizes the holistic concept, which is conducive to the simultaneous improvement of physical and mental

health; 2. The movements are slow, safe, and effective; 3. It combines relaxation and tension, making it suitable for the elderly to practice. The characteristics of Fitness Qigong in terms of fitness, mental cultivation, and enriching social life meet the needs of the elderly and well satisfy their pursuit of a healthy life.

3.2. The Significance of Fitness Qigong in Promoting Healthy Aging for the Elderly

As an outstanding traditional Chinese sport, Fitness Qigong plays an important role in preventing diseases and promoting health preservation. Fitness Qigong is characterized by slow movements that are closely coordinated with breathing, with a moderate intensity. The slow and gentle movements, combined with the alternation of relaxation and tension, can exercise both the body and the mind [7]. These characteristics of Fitness Qigong are in line with the physical characteristics of the elderly, not only meeting their physical and mental needs but also helping them prevent diseases and reduce the probability of getting sick.

3.2.1. Fitness Qigong Helps the Elderly Maintain Physical Health

The value of Fitness Qigong in promoting healthy aging lies in fitness and disease prevention. According to traditional Chinese medicine theory, Fitness Qigong can balance yin and yang and regulate qi and blood. Traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes the balance of yin and yang. The imbalance of yin and yang can lead to many diseases. Fitness Qigong plays a unique role in maintaining and regulating the balance of yin and yang. Qi and blood are important components of the human body. Disorders of qi and blood can cause many diseases, such as anemia, blood stasis, and qi stagnation [8]. Through the practice of Fitness Qigong, the elderly can promote blood circulation and remove blood stasis, maintaining an adequate supply of qi and blood. Persistent practice of Fitness Qigong can effectively promote blood circulation and accelerate the heart's pumping function [9]. The movements of Fitness Qigong are slow, gentle, and graceful, which can effectively exercise various organs, muscles, and ligaments of the body. Fitness Qigong contains elements of stillness within movement and movement within stillness, with a moderate intensity that meets the physical and mental needs of the elderly. Moreover, after practicing Fitness Qigong, unlike high - intensity exercise, it will not cause various discomforts to the body, which is in line with the physical health needs of the elderly.

3.2.2. Fitness Qigong Helps the Elderly Adjust Their Mental State

Fluctuations in human emotions can lead to endocrine disorders, resulting in a series of diseases. Emotional fluctuations can also affect a person's mental state, leading to some psychological problems. Fitness Qigong coordinates the mind and the body, emphasizing slow and relaxed movements, which plays an important role in stabilizing emotions and relieving mental fatigue [10]. In recent years, due to its unique movements and effects, Fitness Qigong has been very popular among the elderly. Studies have found that the elderly often experience pessimistic emotions such as anxiety and loneliness, which can seriously affect the quality of life and physical and mental health of middle - aged and elderly people [11]. Exercise is an important way to regulate the mental state, which can effectively relieve the psychological anxiety, loneliness, and other negative emotions of the elderly. With the acceleration of the aging process in China, more and more elderly people feel anxious and lonely in their retired lives. Through the practice of Fitness Qigong, the anxiety of the elderly can be relieved, their lives can be enriched, and their spiritual needs can be met.

3.3. The Significance of Fitness Qigong in Promoting Healthy Aging for the Elderly's Families

With the acceleration of the aging process in recent years, the retired lives of the elderly have received extensive attention from society. Since the 21st century, the number of empty - nest elderly people in urban and rural areas of China has been increasing continuously, posing a

huge challenge to China's elderly care services. After retirement, the elderly, through the practice of Fitness Qigong, can exercise their body and mind and at the same time reduce some medical expenses for the family, alleviating the financial pressure on their children and contributing to family harmony. When the elderly participate in Fitness Qigong activities together with their family members, it can increase mutual understanding and support among family members and enhance family cohesion. Through the practice of Fitness Qigong, the elderly can improve their quality of life and enjoy family life better.

3.4. The Significance of Fitness Qigong in Promoting Healthy Aging for Society

As the elderly grow older, they will face retirement, and their leisure time will also increase. This may cause the elderly to lose their sense of direction in life and lose interest in things. By participating in the practice of Fitness Qigong, the elderly can not only exercise their body and mind but also increase their social participation, enrich their lives, and regain a sense of self-worth. Through Fitness Qigong activities, the sense of loneliness and marginalization of the elderly can be reduced. While improving the physical and mental health of the elderly, Fitness Qigong can also effectively reduce the social medical burden and save social resources. By practicing Fitness Qigong, the elderly show a positive attitude towards life, which helps to enhance their social image and break the stereotypes of society towards the elderly. Through the practice of Fitness Qigong, the elderly can increase their awareness of a healthy lifestyle and enhance public awareness of health. The wide spread of Fitness Qigong can effectively reduce the social medical expenses in China, relieve social pressure, and promote social harmony and development.

4. Approaches for Fitness Qigong to Facilitate Healthy Aging

4.1. Establish a Scientific Management System and Foster an Atmosphere for Fitness Qigong

In recent years, the fitness value of Fitness Qigong has been scientifically proven. As a treasure of Chinese excellent traditional culture, Fitness Qigong has remarkable effects in strengthening the body and preventing diseases. In recent years, the General Administration of Sport of China has introduced relevant policies to actively encourage people across the country to participate in the practice of Fitness Qigong. However, when the government manages the relevant Fitness Qigong sites, it should cooperate fully to eliminate institutional and mechanism barriers. During the development of Fitness Qigong, the government should manage it indirectly, and social organizations, the market, civil affairs departments, and relevant associations should coordinate and cooperate with each other, supervise one another, and jointly promote the better development of Fitness Qigong. At the same time, the quality of Fitness Qigong sites should be improved. More young people should be involved in the management of Fitness Qigong sites, making these sites accessible to people of different age groups. This will also encourage people of various ages to participate in Fitness Qigong exercises. It is necessary to emphasize the standardization and rationalization of the site management system, clarify the relevant responsibilities of each department, and create a favorable environment for Fitness Qigong.

4.2. Integrate Sports and Medicine and Explore the Value of Fitness Qigong in Preventing Diseases

The "Healthy China 2030 Plan Outline" and the "14th Five - Year Plan for Healthy Aging" issued by the central government emphasize promoting national health, attaching importance to the health problems of the elderly population, and popularizing sports suitable for the elderly, such as Fitness Qigong and Tai Chi. The state and the people are paying more and more attention to the health of the elderly. Fitness Qigong plays an important role in promoting the physical

health of the elderly and regulating the balance of yin and yang. Through consulting relevant materials, it is found that when the elderly practice Fitness Qigong, the stretching of corresponding joints and muscles can promote blood circulation and metabolism. At the same time, it can also stimulate relevant acupoints, effectively improving the health level of the elderly. By combining the disease - prevention function of Fitness Qigong with traditional Chinese medicine theory, we can fully explore the value of Fitness Qigong in preventing diseases. With the help of Fitness Qigong, the elderly can not only strengthen their bodies, reduce the risk of diseases, and increase their lifespan. Moreover, during the exercise of Fitness Qigong, the concept of healthy exercise can be conveyed to the elderly, enhancing their awareness of health, enabling them to actively understand aging and senescence, and develop the habit of healthy exercise.

4.3. Balance Regional Development and Strengthen the Cultivation of Professional Talents

The aging speed in China is accelerating, and the aging speed is unbalanced between urban and rural areas. Cities have relatively complete fitness and elderly care services, and there are relatively more Fitness Qigong sites. In contrast, there are relatively fewer Fitness Qigong sites in rural areas, and the elderly in rural areas have a relatively weak awareness of healthy aging. In the process of Fitness Qigong facilitating healthy aging, we should not only give full play to the relatively complete elderly care service mechanism in cities but also increase investment in and improve the elderly care service mechanism in rural areas. At the same time, Fitness Qigong should be actively introduced into the spare - time lives of rural elderly people to enrich their lives, help them develop healthy lifestyles, and form the habit of active and healthy exercise. Meanwhile, schools should increase cultivation efforts to provide compound reserve talents for the development of Fitness Qigong and inject "young blood" into it. Society should strengthen the training of professional Fitness Qigong coaches and conduct regular training related to Fitness Qigong, providing a solid talent foundation for the future development of Fitness Qigong and better serving China's rapid aging population.

5. Conclusion

China has entered a stage of accelerated aging, and the lives of the elderly have received extensive attention and discussion from society. Healthy aging is not only a stage - specific expression but also an expression of the continuous development of individuals in various aspects such as life and society during the aging process. As an excellent traditional culture in China, Fitness Qigong has important value in promoting the physical and mental health of the elderly and increasing their social participation. The path of Fitness Qigong facilitating healthy aging is long and arduous. It is necessary to give full play to its basic functions of preventing diseases and cultivating the mind. On this basis, we should combine it with the times, pay attention to the elderly in urban and rural areas, and promote the coordinated development of urban and rural aging. We should actively mobilize the elderly to participate in Fitness Qigong exercises, increase their social participation, and create a good social environment. There is still a long way to go for Fitness Qigong to facilitate healthy aging. It needs to be continuously improved in line with the development of the times to better meet the needs of healthy aging.

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