

# Analysis on Employment Situation of Japanese Elderly Women and Its Enlightenment to China

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## Abstract

The problem of aging population has always been an important issue concerned by all countries in the world. In the process of aging population, the life expectancy of female population is generally higher than that of male population. The longevity gap between men and women is increasing, and the number of elderly female population is in a period of rapid growth. According to the US Census Bureau, the number of elderly women aged 60 and above in the world will reach 650 million in 2025. The proportion of the elderly female population in the developed countries will increase from 10% in 1996 to 14.3%. In 75 developing countries, the elderly female population will also increase by 1.5 times. It is predicted that in 2050, the elderly women aged 80 and above will account for 21.7% of all the elderly female population. The feminization of the aging population brings about a series of new problems in the economic, health and medical care, marriage and family of the elderly women. At the same time, the significance of elderly women's participation in society and how to participate in social issues have attracted the attention of the international community. Japan, one of the most aging countries in the world, has long been widely supported by the view that face the shortage of labor caused by aging actively and the elderly population is essential. In this paper, on the basis of the existing research results, the author take the elderly women as the research object and take the elderly men as the reference, make a comparative analysis between China and Japan on the structure of working age population, employment rate, industry distribution and employment form, study on the employment status and changes of the elderly women in the two countries. The author also explores the background of promoting the employment of older women in Japan, from the perspective of government policies, life expectancy, health and employment intention.

## Keywords

Aging Population, Elderly Women, Employment Status, Japan, Laboring-Age Population, Enlightenment

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## 1. Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the employment status and changes of the elderly women on the basis of the analysis of the laboring-age population structure, employment rate, industry distribution and employment form in Japan, and analyze Japan's measures to promote the employment of elderly women from the aspects of government policies, employment forms and employment intentions. The author hopes that this will provide a salutary lesson for the employment of the elderly

female population in China.

The problem of aging population has always been an important issue concerned by all countries in the world. In the process of aging population, a more prominent problem is the phenomenon of "feminization of the aging population" caused by the large increase in the size of the elderly female population and the rapid increase in the proportion. It brings about a series of new problems in the economic, health and medical care, marriage and family of the elderly women. At the same time, the significance of elderly women's participation in society and

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how to participate in social issues have attracted the attention of the international community. Japan, one of the countries with the most severe aging in the world, is also one of the first countries to pay attention to the employment of the elderly. Many Japanese scholars have pointed out that the aging of Japan has led to the shortage of labor force and the employment of the elderly is essential [1]. In Japan, there is not much special research on the employment of older women, the current research is mainly based on the labor employment system, pension system and labor concept [5]. Employment research on the elderly in China started later, most of the employment research about the elderly women are about the survival status of the elderly female groups and the pension problem. Some scholars have investigated the living conditions of the elderly women including economy, health and family, spiritual and cultural life, protection of rights and interests, they also analyzed and discussed the problems about the elderly women and causes of the problems [2]. Some scholars pointed out that the decisive factor to solve the dilemma of Chinese elderly women's pension is related system [3]. As a developing country with the largest population of elderly women in the world, China should pay close attention to the different living conditions of elderly men and women. China's pension system and other measures need innovative design. In contemporary China with rapid population aging and rapid economic transformation, not only the elderly male population, but also the elderly female population should not exist only as simple dependents and consumers. They should become an important part of the whole labor resources. The employment problem of the elderly female population should also become an important part of the formulation of the relevant national aging policy. Therefore, under the situation of rapidly aging population and increasingly feminization of the elderly population, a correct understanding of the status, role, contribution and characteristics of the elderly women's labor resources has great significance to actively develop the labor resources of older women, promote and protect the employment and re-employment of the elderly female population. Although there are great differences between China and Japan in terms of national conditions and economic development, Japan's attempts and explorations in promoting the employment of elderly women for many years can provide important lesson for China.

## **2. Employment Status and Characteristics of Elderly Women in China and Japan**

### **2.1. Changes in the Population Structure of the Aged Between China and Japan**

Relevant data released by Japan General Administration of

Statistics show that in recent years, the population structure of Japan has changed greatly due to the rapid trend of aging and less birthing. In Japan, the proportion of elderly people aged 65 or above (rate of population aging) exceeded 7% for the first time in 1970, and it increased to 14% in 1994. As of December 2017, the number of people over 65 years of age in Japan has exceeded 35 million 220 thousand and the aging rate has reached 27.8%. Of the population over 65 years old, 56.6% were elderly women, and of the population over 75 years old 60.9% were elderly women, this shows that the aging rate of Japanese women is higher than that of men. On the other hand, in Japan, the total fertility rate has been declining for many years since the mid 70s of last century. The population of children under 14 has decreased to 15 million 560 thousand in 2017, 12.3% of the total population. The aging population and the low birth-rate are becoming more and more serious, which results in the decline of the Laboring-age population in Japan at the age of 15-64. The proportion of Japan's labor force in the total population has dropped from 72.5% in 1990 to 46.6%, which is 58 million 990 thousand in 2017. Among them, the 15-64 year old female Laboring-age population is 26 million 90 thousand, accounting for only 40.1% of the total female population. According to projections, the elderly population in Japan will continue to increase, while the young population will continue to decrease. In 2060, the aging rate in Japan will be as high as 39.9%. At that time, the proportion of Laboring-age population will continue to show a sharp downward trend. It can be said that Japan will face an increasingly serious shortage of labor force in the future. In China, the one-child policy has artificially reduced the birth rate since the late 70s of last century. Data from the National Bureau of statistics show that the birth rate in China in 1982 was 22.28‰, and it dropped to 12.43‰ in 2017. After 1980s, the proportion of children aged 0-15 years is also decreasing. In 1982, there were about 341 million children under 15 years of age in China, accounting for 33.5% of the total population. By 2017, this proportion dropped to 17.8%. Over the same period, the proportion of elderly people over 65 increased from 4.9% to 11.4%, and it is expected that this proportion will increase in the future. Although the ratio is much lower than that of Japan, it is an indisputable fact that China has become an aging society. Gender differences in death make older women the majority of the elderly population. It is estimated that by 2040, the proportion of the elderly population aged 65 and above will account for more than 20% of the total population. Elderly people aged 80 and above are increasing at 5% per year, and will increase to about 74million by 2040. On the other hand, the proportion of the 15-64 year old population did not continue to decrease during this period. It rose from 61.7% in 1982 to 71.5% in 2017, much higher than that in Japan. Even from the

generally recognized Laboring-age population in China between the age of 15-59, the supply of labor is also very abundant. By the end of 2017, the laboring-age population of China between 16 and 59 years old was 901.99 million, accounting for 64.9% of the total population. It can be said

that although the labor supply in the labor market in China is still sufficient, but in the case of continuous and rapid development of the aging degree, if the total fertility rate can not be raised, the future labor market in China will have the same shortage of power shortage as Japan.

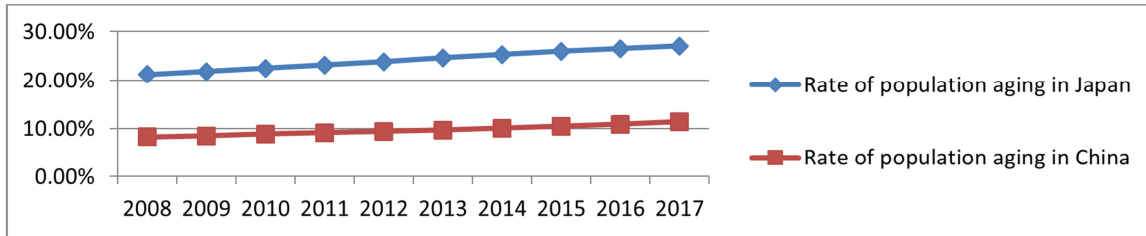


Figure 1. Changes in the rate of population aging between Japan and China.

### 2.2. Change of Employment Rate of Elderly Women in Japan and China

Statistics from the Statistical Bureau of Japan's Internal Affairs ministry show that since the 1970s there has been an increase in the number of employed people aged 65 and over in Japan. In 2017, it has reached 8 million 70 thousand people, the highest record in history. In 2017, the average annual employment of Japan was 65.66 million. Among them, the average employment rate for men over the age of 65 is 32.2%, and that of women is 16.7%. The employment of elderly women increased steadily, from 2.7 million in 2008 to 3.24 million in 2017, an increase of 56.5%. In the same period, the proportion of elderly male employment increased slowly, and even declined in the middle. It can be said, at present, the total employment population and employment rate of the elderly women in Japan are still far lower than that of men, but the employment rate of the elderly women is growing faster than that of men from the gender structure of the employment population. In terms of employment rate, the gap between elderly men and women is also shrinking. As we can see in chart two.

over 60 years old increased to 178 million and the employed population of people over 65 years old increased to 118 million, the proportion of these two populations in the total employment population has also increased to 19.3% and 12.8%, respectively. This increase has been continuing. Since the legal retirement age in China is generally 55 for women and 60 for men, the employment rate of middle-aged women aged 55-59 should also be concerned. By 2010, the employment rate of women at this age level should be around 50%. Although there is still a big gap in the employment rate of men of the same age, it is true that more and more women are entering the labor market. The employment rate of 60-64 year old women also increased from 16.4% in 1982 to about 40% in 2010. In the same period, the male employment rate decreased by about 6%. This indicates that the gap between the employment rate of 60-64 year old women and men is also narrowing. Due to the limited conditions, the author can not grasp the relevant data of the employment of elderly women over 65 years of age in China. Under the implementation of the continuing employment system, Japan is raising the retirement age of staff including women to 65 years old. Therefore, under this background, it is very unlikely that Chinese women over 65 years old would like to achieve the same level of employment rate as Japanese elderly people at present. In addition, some scholars pointed out that the pension system has not been widely implemented or implemented in China's rural areas [6]. Many rural elderly people over the age of 60 can only earn their income through continuing work. Therefore, the employment rate of rural elderly population has remained at around 43% since 2000. The employment rate of urban elderly population has been declining, which has dropped to around 6% in 2010. Generally speaking, compared with Japan, the employment rate of women over 65 in China is still at a low level, and the gap between urban and rural areas is more significant.

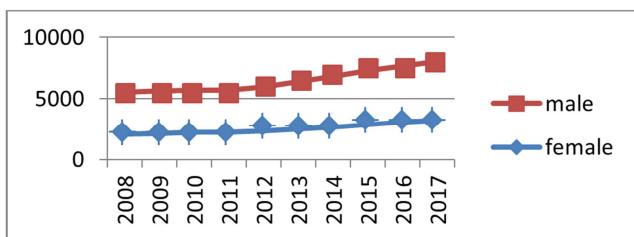


Figure 2. Working population of people over 65 years old in Japan (thousand people).

In China, the labor market is dominated by young and middle-aged labor force, the employment rate of the elderly is still low. Due to the limitation of data, the author's analysis is based on the data of China's latest census in 2010. The data show that in 2010, elderly employment population of people

### 3. Employment Characteristics of Elderly Women in Japan and China

**Table 1.** Employment statistics for elderly people over 65 years old in Japan (thousand people).

	2013 (year)	2014 (year)	2015 (year)	2016 (year)	2017 (year)
Female (Regular)	310	330	350	370	410
Female (Non-regular)	870	1020	1190	1370	1460
Male (Regular)	500	540	590	620	680
Male (Non-regular)	1110	1330	1490	1630	1700

Statistics from the Statistical Bureau of Japan's Internal Affairs ministry show that in the employment patterns, the employment of elderly people over 65 has been dominated by non-regular employees. Due to the constraints of various factors, the growth rate of regular employment was not significant. From 810 thousand in 2013 to 1090 thousand in 2017, the growth rate was 34.6%. In the same period, the growth of non-regular employees has increased dramatically. In 2013, there were 1980 thousand people, up to 3160 thousand in 2017, with an increase of 59.6%. On the whole, the employment of women of all ages is increasing, but the employment of women over the age of 65 is relatively slow. Among them, non-regular employment of older women has always been the absolute majority, and the development rate is significantly faster than the formal employment of older women. A substantial increase in the proportion of non-regular employment shows that women's non-regular employment is further deepened. As shown above, in 2013, the number of employed women over the age of 65 was 1180 thousand, the proportion of non-regular employment is up to 73.7%. In 2017, the number of employed women over the age of 65 increased to 1870 thousand, and the proportion of informal employment increased to 78.1%. And combined with the analysis of the other data, it will be found that the non-regular employment rate of the elderly women in recent years is not only increasing, but also the higher the age level is, the higher the proportion of informal employment. In addition, according to statistics, over 80% of the non-regular employed women over the age of 55 are hourly workers and casual workers. However, the proportion of hourly workers and casual workers in non-regular employed men is much smaller than that of women. This is because male employees often use contract mode and entrustment mode when they are still employed by the original company after retirement. These two forms of employment account for more than half of the employment of elderly men. The stability and staff benefits of their employment are generally higher than that of hourly workers and casual workers. Therefore, it can be said that compared with men, the degree of informal employment of elderly women in Japan is very high, and the growth rate in recent years is obvious. The average labor participation level of Chinese women is much higher than that of Japanese

women. But, since the 90s of last century, with the transformation of market economy and large-scale industrial restructuring, female employment has been more impacted and impacted than men in urban areas. The proportion of urban female laid-off workers in the total number of laid-off workers is higher, and it is more difficult to return to the formal employment field after laid-off than men. Because of the wide range of informal industries, flexible employment and low cost, it is very attractive to women workers who have no skill or lower cultural level, as well as the surplus rural labor force. Old women can not be employed regularly by enterprises or companies. The trend of informal employment is becoming increasingly significant. The statistics of the China National Bureau of statistics show that the average proportion of employees in the 55-64 year old urban elderly women is 11.6% in 2013, and the proportion of women over 65 years is less, only 3.6%. The average proportion of women over 55 with self-employment status is over 87%, the proportion of those over 65 years old is up to 93.7%. In China, self-employment is a self-employed occupation, and may include some non-regular employees.

From the distribution of the employment population in various industries, most of Japanese female workers have been working on wholesale and retail trade, catering and accommodation, medical welfare for many years. Employment characteristics of 60-64 year old women also show the same characteristics. Statistics show that the largest number of employed women aged 60-64 are in the medical welfare industry, followed by wholesale and retail trade and catering and accommodation. The highest proportion of employed women aged over 65 is wholesale and retail trade, farming and fishing industry. The second is the medical welfare and the catering and accommodation industry. Especially in the latter two industries, the employment of elderly women far exceeds the male employment population of the same age in the industry. Generally speaking, the greatest feature of the employment of elderly women in Japan is that most of them engage in wholesale and retail trade, catering and accommodation and medical welfare industry. Some scholars believe that the career choices of Japanese women are closely related to their educational level and professional development [8]. Because of the level of



education and majors, it will have a great impact on career choices before entering the workplace and the level of vocational training after entering the workplace. It can be said that women's education level and professional training are the fundamental factors affecting women's career. The average Japanese education level is very high, but the proportion of women in higher education has always been lower than that of men. The higher the level of education, the smaller the proportion of women accounts for. And their majors have more obvious sex characteristics. More than 80% of the students in Japan's short term university are girls, and most of their majors are "education", "housekeeping", "health care" and so on. The proportion of female students in universities has always been lower than that of boys. The difference in educational level restricts the development of women's workplace. The major choice also determines that Japanese female employees, including the elderly, show obvious gender characteristics in career choice. Compared with Japan, the employment industry of the elderly in China has its own characteristics. First of all, most of the elderly employed in China, especially the elderly women, are concentrated in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery, far exceeding the proportion in Japan. Moreover, compared with the Japanese labor force allocation structure, the gender difference between men and women is still small in China. China's female employment structure does not show obvious gender characteristics. The highest proportion of women over 60 years old employed in all trades is in farming and fishing industry, followed by wholesale and retail trade and manufacturing. The same is true for men over 60 years old, and the difference in proportion is not large.

#### **4. Measures to Promote the Employment of Elderly Women in Japan and Its Enlightenment to China**

Overall, the majority of elderly female employees in Japan are now concentrated in service industries such as wholesale and retail trade, catering and accommodation, and medical welfare. The degree of informal employment is also accelerating, and the quality and level of employment is still lower than that of men. However, in recent years, the employment population and employment rate of the elderly women in Japan, especially the elderly women over 60 years old, have increased significantly. The importance of degree of labor participation is increasing. Compared with Japan, the employment situation of the elderly female labor force in China is not optimistic. The overall employment rate is low and the gap between urban and rural areas is significant. Employees are mostly concentrated in farming and fishing industry, with a high degree of informal employment, and

their status and role in the labor market is significantly smaller than that of elderly Japanese women. The author will make a brief discussion on the factors that promote the employment of Japanese elderly women from policy support, life expectancy, health level and employment will, in order to provide enlightenment for the protection and promotion of the employment of the elderly women in China.

First of all, the government's policy support is an important guarantee for the elderly to achieve employment and re-employment. Since the middle of the 70s of the last century, with the growing aging process, the Japanese government has begun to promote reemployment of the elderly as one of the important labor employment policies. The Japanese government is trying to solve the employment problem of the elderly in the labor market by "postponing the retirement age". For example, Japan has stepped up policies and regulations on delaying retirement age step by step. It is the first time to put the postponing retirement age as a national policy in the "The law on correcting employment" in 1973. "The ninth basic plan of Employment Countermeasures" was promulgated and implemented in 1999. And the promulgation and implementation of some relevant legal documents after that make it is possible for employees to retire at the age of 65. The Japanese government also made indirect policy inducement by providing large amounts of aid to enterprises. For example, for ten years from 1997 to 2007, the Japanese government continued to implement the system of "Assistance grants for promoting continuing employment". In 2010, the system of "ensuring the elderly's employment bonus" was established. These push and ensure the smooth implementation of policies and regulations from the side. At the same time, the Japanese government is also actively promoting women's employment. "Equal opportunity law for employment of men and women" was implemented in 1986.

"Aid for female reemployment" was implemented in 2008. The implementation of a series of laws and regulations provides a solid legal guarantee for women's employment and re-employment. According to the survey, in recent years, the proportion of enterprises employing the employees over 65 years of age wishing to continue to be employed is up to 95%. Statistics from the Statistical Bureau of Japan's Internal Affairs ministry show that as of September 2015, the unemployment rate of 55-64 and over 65 years old in Japan was 3.1% and 2.4%, respectively, which were lower than the average unemployment rate (3.4%), of which the female unemployment rate of 55-64 years old was 2.5%, lower than the age of the same age (3.5%), and lower than the female average (3.1%). It is obvious that although the Japanese government does not have special employment support policies for the elderly women, the more than 10 policies and regulations and the promulgation and implementation of many aid gold systems have also provided effective employment

and reemployment guarantee for the elderly women. Therefore, we can say that the government's policy support is an important guarantee for promoting the employment of older women. Secondly, the extension of life expectancy and healthy life is an objective and necessary condition for the elderly to achieve employment and re-employment. Because of the improvement of living environment, the improvement of dietary nutrition and the improvement of medical technology after World War II, Japan's population mortality rate dropped sharply, while its life expectancy has been greatly extended. At present, the average life span of the Japanese is the first in the world. The average life span of the 2010-2015 years is 83.5 years, of which female is 86.9 years old and the male is 80 years old. The survey shows that the remaining life span of Japanese over 65 is increasing. In 2013, the residual life span of Japanese men and women over 65 had extended to 19.08 years and 23.97 years respectively. The average life expectancy of women is expected to reach 90.93 years by 2060 and 84.19 years for men, and the average remaining life will be further extended to 27.72 and 22.33 years. The health of the elderly in Japan is also increasing. Ministry of Health, Labor and welfare conducted a survey on the health status of the elderly, about 85.2% of the 60-64 year old people thought they were in good health or general condition, and those who thought they were not good or good were only 13.8%. From a gender comparison, it is clear that Japanese women have higher life expectancy or healthy life than men. If Japan has been using a system of retirement at the age of 55, it would mean that a large number of people who are still in a state of health have not worked for more than 20 years, even longer after retirement. This will be a huge loss for both the elderly and the society, and the elderly, as a potential human resource, should be used more effectively. It should be said that, for the elderly in Japan, in addition to their strong sense of social participation, this consensus, which is gradually formed under the trend of the average life span of the population and a substantial extension of the health life, has also strongly stimulated their willingness to work. Continuing to serve the society has gradually been considered as a natural measure to conform to the development of the times. The average life span of the population and the extension of the healthy life span should be the objective and necessary conditions for the elderly to realize employment and re-employment. The improvement of employment intention is the precondition for the elderly to achieve employment and re-employment. The labor participation of the elderly in Japan is in the forefront of the world, which is not only higher than in China, but also in many developed countries in Europe and America. Strong employment intention has become an important prerequisite for Japanese elderly women to maintain high labor participation rate. The survey shows that as the 65 year old retirement system is widespread in Japan, more and more

elderly women are hoping to have longer working time than the retirement age.

According to statistics in 2017, the average life expectancy in Chinese mainland is 76.34 years old, the male is 73.64 years old, and the female is 79.43 years old. There is a big gap in this data compared with Japan. Therefore, in terms of postponing retirement age to promote employment of the elderly, China needs to take full account of the average life expectancy of the population and the current situation of healthy life expectancy. More efforts and attempts have been made to further promote and improve the health service system for the elderly, promote the social security of the elderly and the fairness and sustainability of the employment system. Compared with the high employment aspirations of the elderly in Japan, the desire for employment of Chinese elderly women is very low. Research results of urban areas also show that the employment intention of the elderly in China is very low. In some areas, the proportion of elderly women willing to work is less than 10%. But, elderly men in the same area have relatively strong willingness to work. The high employment aspirations of elderly women in Japan are directly related to the high average life expectancy and high health life mentioned above. It is also believed that the elderly continue to work to relieve loneliness and increase family income. However, compared with China, the desire for high employment of elderly women in Japan is obviously inseparable from the influence of traditional social culture. In China, the proportion of elderly women who want to continue to work is far lower than that of men, not only because the former is less educated than the latter, but also lacks the conditions to participate in reemployment. Elderly women have a heavy household burden and have to take care of their families for a long time so that they do not have the time and energy to devote to employment. The elderly in China, especially the elderly women, shoulder the important responsibility of bringing up grandchildren and housework. The elderly in Japan rarely undertake the responsibility of raising grandchildren. The main way for Japanese families is to assume the responsibility of child care by their wives in the family. In Japan, it is common for women to quit their jobs on the grounds of marriage or having children and to re-enter the labor market when their children are self-reliant or adults. In fact, if the government can provide better social services by further training of relevant talents and adding public service institutions, the government can not only increase more employment opportunities and create more social wealth for the society, but also make it effective for the women in tending period to give consideration to both the work and the family. Moreover, it can liberate a large number of elderly labor force and improve their employment intention, so that they can continue to serve the society more effectively.

## 5. Conclusions

Through the above comparative analysis on the changes of employment rate, the characteristics of industry distribution and the characteristics of employment patterns between Japan and China, We can see that the status and role of China's elderly female population in the labor market is much less than that in Japan. Therefore, in order to improve the degree of labor participation of the elderly women in China, it is very important to recognize the status, the role and the status and characteristics of the labor resources of the elderly women. And it is very important to improve the recognition of the whole society for the elderly women's social participation behavior and their own social participation consciousness too. Attention should be paid to gender differences in the formulation of employment policies for the elderly. In order to maintain and improve the employment environment of the elderly female labor force, we must effectively protect the legitimate rights and interests of the elderly women.

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