

Changes in Japan's Welfare Policies in the Context of an Aging Society

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Abstract: This article elaborates on the current situation of an aging Japan, including changes in population structure and the growing needs of the elderly. It reviews the historical evolution of Japan's welfare policies, from the initial construction of the social security system to major reforms in the 21st century. It analyzes the impact of aging on welfare policies, such as increased financial pressure and changes in service models. It also explores the application of intelligent technologies in welfare and the ethical and privacy issues they bring, emphasizing that welfare policies need to be flexible and can learn from the experiences of other countries to meet the challenges of aging.

Japan is one of the countries with the most severe aging problems in the world. The proportion of the elderly population aged 65 and above has exceeded 28%. This phenomenon not only affects family structures and the social economy but also poses new challenges to the country's welfare policies. In order to address various problems brought about by aging, Japan has carried out a series of reforms and adjustments in welfare policies.

1. The Current Situation of an Aging Japan

1.1 Changes in Population Structure

In recent years, Japan has shown a trend of continuous decline in the birth rate and continuous increase in life expectancy, which has directly led to an annual increase in the proportion of the elderly population, profoundly changing its population structure. These changes in population structure have extremely far-reaching impacts on society, especially in terms of resource allocation and family care. In terms of resource allocation, due to the increase in the elderly population, the demand for resources in medical care, elderly-care facilities, and social security has increased significantly, forcing society to allocate more resources to the elderly group, which may, to a certain extent, squeeze the allocation of resources for other age groups in education, employment support, etc. In terms of family care, with the increase in the proportion of the elderly population, factors such as the shrinking of family size and the increasing work pressure on young people make the traditional family care model face huge challenges, and families may be unable to take care of the elderly, requiring more support and intervention at the social level.

1.2 Growth in the Needs of the Elderly

With the intensification of aging, the needs of the elderly for health care and living security have increased significantly. In terms of health care needs, as people age, their physical functions gradually decline, and the incidence of chronic diseases increases significantly. Diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and arthritis are very common among the elderly. This requires more medical resources, including regular physical examinations, professional medical staff for disease management, sufficient drug supplies, and rehabilitation facilities. In terms of living security needs, a stable residence is a basic requirement. For some elderly people with limited mobility, it is also necessary to adapt the living environment for the elderly, such as installing barrier-free facilities. In addition, economic sources are also an important part. Sufficient pensions are needed to maintain daily living expenses, including food, water, and electricity bills. The significant growth in these needs makes it difficult for existing welfare policies to fully cover and meet them, forcing the government to re-examine and adjust policies in order to provide comprehensive and effective support for this large-scale elderly group^[1].

2. Historical Evolution of Welfare Policies

2.1 Initial Welfare Policies

Japan's welfare policies started relatively late. However, since the 1950s, with the gradual development of the Japanese economy, the government has begun to build a relatively complete social security system. In this process, medical and elderly-care services for the elderly have become key construction areas. In terms of medical care, the government has begun to establish a series of public medical institutions and gradually improved the medical insurance reimbursement system for the elderly to make more medical resources accessible to the elderly when they are sick and reduce the economic burden of seeking medical treatment. For elderly-care services, different elderly-care models have been explored, evolving from a simple nursing home model to the coexistence of multiple forms. For example, there are ordinary nursing homes that provide basic life care, and some professional nursing-type elderly-care institutions for special elderly groups (such as disabled elderly) have also begun to emerge. These measures are the manifestations of Japan's initial welfare policies in medical and elderly-care services for the elderly, laying an important foundation for the further development of subsequent welfare policies.

2.2 Reforms and Innovations

After entering the 21st century, Japan's welfare policies have undergone several major reforms. The long-term care insurance system implemented in 2000 is of great significance. This system has promoted the transfer of the government's responsibilities in the field of elderly care. Previously, elderly care was mostly dominated by the government in public services or institutional care, which had problems such as financial pressure and lack of personalization. After the introduction of this system, community-based care combined with family-based care has been vigorously advocated. The community has built a variety of facilities and services. For example, community care centers provide health monitoring, medical care, and rehabilitation training, and day-care facilities meet the needs of daily life care, catering, and social interaction during the day, allowing the elderly to receive care during the day and go home at night. In terms of family-based care, the system provides economic subsidies to reduce the burden, such as subsidizing the purchase costs of care facilities, and also provides professional training to enable family members to master care knowledge and skills. This model makes elderly care more flexible and humane, marking that

Japan's welfare policies in elderly care have entered a new stage.

3. The Impact of Aging on Welfare Policies

3.1 Increased Financial Pressure

With the continuous increase in the elderly population, Japan's social security expenditures have shown a rapid upward trend, which has undoubtedly brought extremely huge pressure on the national finance. In the social security system, pension expenditures have been rising steadily with the increase in the number of the elderly population. The government needs to ensure sufficient funds to meet the basic living needs of the elderly. At the same time, expenditures on medical care and health of the elderly are also not negligible. Because the elderly are more likely to get sick and have a longer disease cycle, they account for a large proportion of the consumption of medical resources, including hospital diagnosis and treatment costs, drug purchase costs, and long - term care costs. In order to maintain the sustainability of welfare policies, the government must actively look for new sources of funds. For example, it may consider adjusting tax policies, adding tax items related to social security, or increasing the tax rates of certain tax types. In addition, effective measures also need to be taken in terms of expenditure control. For example, optimizing the distribution standards of social security benefits to ensure that funds can be accurately distributed to the elderly groups that need them most, avoiding unnecessary waste, and reasonably controlling the cost of medical services to improve resource utilization efficiency ^[2].

3.2 Changes in Service Models

In order to effectively respond to the many challenges brought about by aging, Japan has gradually shifted from the traditional institutional care model to the community - based home care model. The traditional institutional care model often concentrates the elderly in nursing homes and other institutions for unified care, but this model has some drawbacks. For example, the elderly may feel lonely and lost because they are far away from their familiar family and community environments, and institutional care is difficult to fully meet the personalized needs of each elderly person. The community - based home care model emphasizes personalized services and family participation. Under the community - based home care model, the community can provide diversified services for the elderly and provide customized care plans according to the health status, living habits, and hobbies of each elderly person. For example, providing door - to - door medical care services for the elderly with limited mobility and providing catering services according to the dietary preferences of the elderly. At the same time, family participation also plays a crucial role in this model. Family members can provide emotional companionship and life care for the elderly in daily life, which not only helps to improve the quality of life of the elderly but also enables the elderly to feel the warmth and a sense of belonging of the family, so that they can be better taken care of both physically and psychologically ^[3-4].

4. Application of Intelligent Technologies and Policy Reforms

4.1 Application of Technologies in Welfare

In the future, new technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things have great application potential in elderly care, which will bring numerous new solutions to the welfare field and improve service efficiency and quality. Artificial intelligence technology can be applied to the health monitoring of the elderly. For example, physiological data of the elderly, such as heart

rate, blood pressure, and blood oxygen, can be collected through smart wearable devices, and then analyzed using artificial intelligence algorithms to give early warnings of potential health risks, enabling medical staff to intervene in a timely manner. In terms of life assistance, smart robots can provide services such as companionship, reminder of taking medicine, and assistance in daily activities for the elderly. The Internet of Things technology can connect various devices in the home to form an intelligent home environment. For example, sensors can sense the activity status of the elderly, automatically adjust indoor temperature, light intensity, etc., and can send out alarms in time when the elderly have an accidental fall or other emergency situations. However, with the application of these technologies, a series of ethical and privacy issues also need to be noticed by policy-makers. In terms of ethics, when an artificial intelligence system makes important decisions related to the life and health of the elderly, how to ensure the fairness and rationality of the decisions is a challenge. For example, there may be ethical dilemmas in resource allocation decisions (such as which elderly people should be given priority for emergency rescue). In terms of privacy, smart devices collect a large amount of personal data of the elderly, including health data and lifestyle data. How to ensure that these data are not leaked or misused and how to respect the wishes of the elderly during the data collection and use process are important issues that need to be urgently solved^[5].

4.2 Welfare Policy Reforms

Facing the increasingly severe challenges of aging, Japan's welfare policies need to be more flexible and adaptable. With the continuous development of aging, social situations are in a dynamic change. For example, the health status of the elderly population will change over time, and new disease types or disease epidemic trends may emerge, which requires welfare policies to be able to adjust the relevant contents of medical security and health care in a timely manner. Family structures are also constantly changing, with more and more small families and empty-nest families emerging, which pose new requirements for policies such as pension distribution and family care subsidies. In addition, fluctuations in the social and economic environment will also affect the implementation of welfare policies. For example, during an economic recession, it may be necessary to adjust the ways of raising funds for social security and the scale of welfare distribution. In order to respond to these social changes and needs in a timely manner, welfare policies must be flexible and be able to quickly adjust policy contents, implementation methods, etc. At the same time, cross-national learning and experience reference are also important directions for future policy optimization. Other countries may have some successful examples in dealing with the aging problem. For example, some European countries have innovative practices in the long-term care insurance system for the elderly, or some countries have effective experiences in using social forces to participate in the welfare undertakings for the elderly. Japan can study and learn from the experiences of these countries, carry out localization transformation in combination with its own national conditions, and thus continuously optimize its own welfare policies to better meet the challenges of aging^[6].

5. Conclusion

An aging society has brought unprecedented challenges and opportunities to Japan's welfare policies. In the process of continuous reform and innovation, the joint efforts of the government, society, and families will be the key to promoting the successful implementation of policies. In the future, how to better ensure the quality of life of the elderly will depend on the continuous improvement of policies and the effective allocation of resources.

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