

# Current Situation and Cause Analysis of Active Aging in Rural Revitalization Model Villages: Take Chaozhou City as an Example

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**Abstract:** Population aging is an issue of widespread concern in today's society. Active aging is one of the important measures to address the issue of population aging. It helps enhance the self-efficacy of the elderly, encourages them to actively participate in social activities, and realizes the value of the elderly group. The strategies of rural revitalization and poverty alleviation have greatly promoted the development of various undertakings in rural areas and have also had a significant impact on the issue of rural elderly care. By using the methods of questionnaire survey, interview and observation, the current situation of active aging in the demonstration villages for rural revitalization in Chaozhou City was investigated. The analysis was sorted out from three aspects: "health", "participation" and "guarantee". It was found that under the dual influence of the poverty alleviation strategy and traditional concepts, the demonstration villages for rural revitalization in Chaozhou City presented an increase in opportunities for the elderly to participate in social practice and a variety of types. However, there is a contradictory situation where the elderly have a weak willingness to participate actively, and there are practical problems that the basic medical security system is relatively complete but the pension security system still needs to be further improved. Although the current situation of active aging has improved under the promotion of the state, to promote the development of active aging and alleviate the problem of population aging, the joint efforts of the elderly themselves and society are still needed.

**Keywords:** Active Aging; Aging; Rural

**Revitalization; Current Situation; Cause**

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, every country around the world has been experiencing or is about to experience an aging population, and the burden of elderly care in various countries has intensified [1]. When the total proportion of the elderly population aged 65 and above in the total population exceeds 7%, the region or country has entered an "aging society". When the proportion exceeds 14%, it enters an "aged society", a deeply aging society. When the proportion reaches 20%, Then one entered the "hyper-aged society" [2]. The bulletin of the Seventh National Census of China announced that the total population aged 60 and above was over 260 million, accounting for 18.7% of the total population. China is even undergoing a rapid process of population aging. The burden of family-based elderly care is heavy, and the coverage rate of social security urgently needs to be improved [3].

In response to the issue of population aging, China has repeatedly put forward the strategic goal of "actively responding to population aging". This article takes the self-evaluated municipal-level demonstration villages for rural revitalization in Chaozhou City as the research object, analyzes the current situation and causes of active aging in the demonstration villages for rural revitalization in Chaozhou City, and provides thoughts and suggestions for the development of active aging.

Regarding the definition of active aging, the WHO is as follows: "the process of optimizing opportunities for health, "participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age." [4] highlights that "health", "social participation" and "security" are the main components of active aging. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe has also proposed three main action directions for

active aging: participation in labor, maintaining social integrity and ensuring health [5]. Under the promotion of the United Nations and the WHO, active aging has seemingly become the main strategic measure to deal with population aging [6]. Against such a social backdrop, different scholars have also put forward their own opinions on active aging. Walker A proposed that an extremely important part of active aging is participation, arguing that the participation of the elderly is closely related to their sense of happiness. We should establish a society where everyone can participate [7]. Liam, F. & Alan, W. conducted research on active aging from the perspectives of superiority and criticism respectively, and found that social participation can significantly improve the mental health level of the elderly [8]. Boudiny, & Kim. emphasized that active aging should focus on eliminating structural barriers related to age or dependence, such as pension systems related to social security [9]. Torres & Sandra analyzed participation in active aging from a cultural perspective and believed that enhancing the participation of the elderly should fully consider different cultural backgrounds [10]. No matter from which perspective the research is conducted, active aging cannot be separated from three aspects: health, participation and security.

This article follows the definition of active aging by the WHO and will analyze the current situation of active aging in the demonstration villages for rural revitalization in Chaozhou City from three aspects: health, participation and guarantee. "Health" means that the elderly can have a healthy body. All regions should also establish and improve the medical security system to ensure the physical and mental health of the elderly to the greatest extent. "Participation" refers to the fact that the elderly can actively engage in social activities. Society provides the elderly with opportunities and platforms to participate in practical activities. The elderly have enthusiasm and vitality to participate, allowing them to find the joy of life and realize their own value in social participation. "Guarantee" refers to the entire society's joint participation in the great cause of active aging, reducing the impact and problems brought about by population aging, alleviating the current situation where the elderly are isolated, enabling the elderly to enjoy their due rights and interests, and

creating an equal and favorable elderly care environment for them.

## **2. The Current Situation of Active Aging in the Demonstration Villages for Rural Revitalization in Chaozhou**

In September 2021, Chaozhou City launched a series of selection activities for the "Top Ten Demonstration Villages for Rural Revitalization in Chaozhou City", and ultimately selected the "Top Ten Demonstration Villages for Style Building and Management in Chaozhou City", the "Top Ten Demonstration Villages for Enriching the People and Revitalizing the Village in Chaozhou City", and the "Top Ten Demonstration Villages for Integrated Urban and Rural Infrastructure Construction in Chaozhou City". In April 2024, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Guangdong Province announced the list of the first batch of provincial-level demonstration villages for rural revitalization. One town and 25 villages in Chaozhou made the list. It turns out that several villages, including Dongming Village, Wengcuo Village, Sheguang Village and Dawu Village, which were selected as the top ten demonstration villages at the municipal level in Chaozhou City, made the list. The demonstration villages for rural revitalization in Chaozhou City have distinct characteristics and remarkable effects. This study selects the demonstration villages as the research objects, aiming to explore the current situation and causes of active aging in the process of rural revitalization and provide reference cases for the development of active aging.

The problems of unbalanced urban-rural development and insufficient rural development have emerged between cities and rural areas, leading to a large number of young and middle-aged rural laborers flowing to cities and further intensifying the problem of rural population aging. The data from the seventh national census of Chaozhou City in 2021 shows that the proportion of the elderly population in the total population of Chaozhou City is as high as 19.17%.

### **2.1 Health**

In terms of health, it mainly refers to the fact that the elderly group has a good physical condition and a sound medical and health care system to ensure their health. Good physical

condition includes both physical and mental health as well as good social adaptability. The survey results show that in terms of physical health, 25% of the elderly in the demonstration villages for rural revitalization in Chaozhou suffer from chronic diseases. In terms of mental health, we have learned that all the elderly in the village can maintain good interpersonal relationships, being content with their current lives while looking forward to a better future.

According to the survey, each street is equipped with a community health service center and each village has a health service station. Most health service centers are equipped with basic medical facilities such as general practice clinics, vaccination clinics, laboratories, B-ultrasound rooms, and traditional Chinese and Western medicine pharmacies, which can meet the basic medical service needs of the surrounding residents. The village-level health service stations are mainly staffed by one or two general outpatient doctors and can deal with some common common diseases. Some villages are very close to the community health service center. For instance, Shenguang Village and Woshi Village are less than two kilometers away from the Qiaodong Health Service Center. Many elderly people are accustomed to going to the Qiaodong Health Service Center to get traditional Chinese medicine when they feel unwell.

"Everyone should go to Qiaodong Hospital. There won't be too many people (queuing), and there are also traditional Chinese medicine practitioners. The Chinese medicine is cheap and good." -- Grandma W.

## 2.2 Participation

2.2.1 The types of participated practices are diverse

Chaozhou City is located in the southern coastal area of China, with a pleasant climate and abundant resources. The development of various family businesses and small handicraft workshops is also one of the characteristic sources of income for the rural people in Chaozhou. Against such a backdrop, most elderly people have also been actively involved in various social activities.

2.2.1.1 Traditional cultural activities

The Chaoshan region attaches great importance to the transmission of traditional

culture. However, nowadays, most young people go out to work or study. Even those who stay in their hometowns are more willing to engage in economic activities that can earn money. Few young people are willing to spend time and energy on traditional Chaoju, dance and musical instrument performances. But the older generation does not think so. They believe that these traditional cultures are very beautiful. It should be passed down and known by more people. Therefore, in the village's cultural performances and traditional activities to welcome the gods, the elderly are the main force. Almost every village in Chaozhou has an elderly group. These groups organize various teams to pass on these traditional cultures. The local government strongly supports the social participation activities of the elderly and gives the elderly groups great initiative and financial support.

"Last year, the village provided us with funds to buy a batch of new drums and new team uniforms. The village is very supportive. We practice regularly and perform during festivals and holidays." -- Uncle C, the leader of the Dongming Village Art Performance Team

In addition to cultural and artistic performances, study Tours have also become a major feature of the demonstration village in promoting traditional culture. Uncle H's bamboo weaving is a typical example of the traditional craftsmanship inheritance in Dongming Village. Since Dongming Village became a demonstration village, many people have come here for its reputation. Especially some primary and secondary schools organize students to come for study Tours. Uncle H often serves as a study tour instructor, leading students to experience bamboo weaving and earning some fees. However, what makes Uncle H happiest in this matter is that he can pass on these skills to the children. He found his own value here.

"I never thought I could be a teacher when I'm old. I'm willing to do it without paying. Ha ha." -- Uncle H

2.2.1.2 Various economic activities

Perhaps to relieve the pressure of life, or perhaps due to the inherent influence of the diligence of the Chinese people, many elderly people, in addition to helping their children take care of children, also engage in various economic activities such as agricultural cultivation like growing grains and vegetables,

individual business operations like selling fruits and vegetables and running convenience stores, as well as handicrafts like making jewelry, garlands and electronic accessories. With the progress of rural revitalization, many villages have developed rural tourism. Some individual business activities of the elderly have developed well. During the plum blossom festival in Dongming Village, Grandma L's bamboo weaving sold very well. "Many children like my bamboo basket very much. Haha, I'm very happy."

#### 2.2.1.3 Volunteer activities

Through the interviews, we learned that the social participation of the elderly group in the village is relatively active. Some elderly people will voluntarily participate in volunteer activities such as beautifying the village and cleaning the environment. The proportion of elderly people participating in social public welfare activities such as volunteer services is relatively small. This is also related to the fact that the elderly have fewer opportunities or channels to come into contact with such social public welfare activities. Relevant departments need to actively carry out related activities and create a positive atmosphere for social participation.

From the theory of active aging, it is not difficult to find that the development of active aging should show a positive correlation with the degree of social participation of the elderly group. The more active the social participation of the elderly group is, the more ideal the development of active aging will be. Judging from the participation of the elderly in social practice in the demonstration villages for rural revitalization in Chaozhou City, the high social participation rate of the elderly indicates that the development status of active aging in this area is also good. However, through investigation, it was found that the social participation willingness of the elderly group in this region presents a contradictory phenomenon that is completely different from the participation practice.

#### 2.2.2 Willingness to participate

The results of the questionnaire survey show that the majority of the elderly in the sample villages are in good health, which is conducive to their participation in social practice. However, a negative willingness to participate in society is generally presented among the elderly group. Most of them said, "I have

worked hard for most of my life. Now I just want to enjoy my old age in peace." 80.65% of the respondents did not want to realize their own value and just wanted to enjoy their old age in peace.

### 2.3 Guarantee

#### 2.3.1 Insufficient economic security

##### 2.3.1.1 Low income and high expenses

The income gap between urban and rural areas is significant, and there are still many poor and low-income elderly people in rural areas. According to the statistics of 2021, the per capita disposable income of urban residents in Chaozhou City was 47,412 yuan. At present, the age distribution of the elderly population living in rural areas of Chaozhou City is mainly concentrated in the 1940s and 1950s. The vast majority of them mainly engaged in farming when they were young, and it is relatively difficult for them to have a certain amount of savings. Furthermore, during the process of urbanization, many farmlands have been expropriated and prices have risen. The income from farming alone is far from enough to cover the daily living expenses. Apart from daily living expenses, as the elderly age, their various physical functions decline, and the medical expenses are increasing day by day. Even with the help of children and relatives, the elderly dare not fall ill.

"My son is very filial and often gives me money. But I have my own hands and feet. What's the point of constantly taking my son's money? It's a waste." -- Uncle Y from Shifeng Village

##### 2.3.1.2 The employment directions for the elderly are limited, and their self-operated industries are underdeveloped

The survey questionnaire shows that only 16.13% of the elderly in Fengxi Second Village have had self-employment experience, while 19.05% in Sheguang Village. This reflects the underdeveloped situation of the self-employment industry in rural areas of Chaozhou City. Self-operated businesses often do not require a high level of education or complex skills. One can earn income merely by relying on a bit of their own craftsmanship and skills to support their family. At the same time, the development of self-operated businesses has also brought more job opportunities, providing more re-employment opportunities for the elderly population. To

sum up, the underdeveloped self-operated industries in rural areas of Chaozhou City have further exacerbated the problem of the elderly having a single employment direction.

2.3.2 The rural pension security system is not perfect

The contribution standards for the new rural social endowment insurance are divided into five levels. The higher the contribution level, the higher the subsidy. A large proportion of the elderly in rural areas, influenced by their income levels, choose the low-contribution level. Those with low contributions can receive subsidies the fastest, but they also get the least pension. At the same time, the payment of the new rural social pension Insurance must also meet certain conditions. That is, at least 15 years of payment must be made before the age of 60. If it is less than 15 years, residents need to make up the payment of the endowment insurance in one lump sum before they can receive the subsidy on a monthly basis. However, for some elderly people who have exceeded the payment age or have not paid for enough years, or whose family economic conditions are difficult, it is very difficult to pay the full amount at one time. As a result, they will choose to give up purchasing the new rural social insurance. Therefore, a considerable number of elderly people will not be able to enjoy this welfare system.

Judging from the health status of the elderly group and their participation in social activities, the active aging situation in the top ten demonstration villages for rural revitalization in Chaozhou City is good. The physical health of the elderly is in good condition, and the government has also established a relatively complete medical system to ensure the health of the elderly. Under the background of rural revitalization, the demonstration village has developed its own characteristic industries, providing diverse forms and channels for the elderly to participate in social activities. The elderly have realized their own value in the process of participation. However, from the perspective of the elderly's willingness to participate and social security, the situation of active aging in the demonstration village is not optimistic. Although the elderly's participation practices are rich and diverse, most of them are passive. The majority of the elderly still believe that they should rest when they are old. Their participation in some social activities

may be to reduce economic burdens or they may be passively arranged to participate. From this perspective, the elderly in the demonstration villages have a relatively low willingness to participate in society, lack the awareness of active aging, and their understanding of their own value needs to be improved. In addition, in terms of rural elderly care security, although the security system has been gradually improved in recent years, for elderly families with stubborn diseases and those in particularly difficult circumstances, the security intensity still has a certain gap from meeting their needs.

### **3. The Causes of the Current Situation of Active Aging in Demonstration Villages for Rural Revitalization**

#### **3.1 The Poverty Alleviation Strategy Promotes the Development of Active Aging**

Since the launch of the targeted poverty alleviation work in Chaozhou City in the new era, effective measures have been taken around employment poverty alleviation, industrial poverty alleviation and other measures. Through unremitting efforts, the economic income of poor households has increased significantly. Most elderly people in rural areas of Chaozhou City are engaged in agricultural work. In the process of poverty alleviation, Chaozhou City has made full use of the funds for building new rural areas and assistance funds, and carried out poverty alleviation activities targeting characteristic agricultural industries based on local conditions. Many villages have followed the development path of "agriculture + tourism". In Chaozhou, the tea gardens and bamboo forests in Shuikeng Village, the White Egret Lake in Shifeng Village, and the shared farm in Shuguang Village, among other agricultural and tourism integration industries, are also thriving. This has further driven the development of rural agriculture, increased the income of village collectives, and further stimulated the enthusiasm of the elderly to participate in social production and operation, enabling them to fully develop their potential in contributing to society and engaging in productive labor, and gain a sense of happiness and satisfaction. Poverty alleviation efforts have improved the material living standards of villagers. Once their material needs are met, their demands for

the spiritual world will become more prominent, and the elderly's need for a better spiritual life has also increased. After achieving certain victories in the battle against poverty in Chaozhou, the village general branches and village committees have gained more solid economic support and the ability to carry out rural spiritual civilization construction. They have gradually added infrastructure such as elderly activity centers, comprehensive cultural service centers, and cultural parks. In addition, various regions have also held elderly entertainment activities based on their own village characteristics. For instance, in Shenguang Village, Xiangqiao District, Chaozhou City, a string band named "Every Month and Half Moon is Full, Jointly Building the Chinese Dream" has been established. The village collective allocates 500 yuan every month as the activity funds for the string band. Every year on the full moon day of the 15th lunar month, the string band performs at the Wenge Public Shrine. It has achieved the goal of "enjoying old age" in a way that suits local conditions, enriching the spiritual and cultural life of the elderly.

### **3.2 Traditional Social Concepts Influence the Progress of Active Aging**

In the process of promoting active aging, misunderstandings in concepts and social biases are the biggest obstacles to the development of elderly talents. Traditional concepts of elderly care and social discrimination against the elderly to a certain extent restrict the operation of the multi-level elderly care service system currently being implemented.

#### **3.2.1 The concept of "raising children for old age support" has a relatively profound influence**

The concept of "raising children for old age support", as the name suggests, means raising children to prevent oneself from having no one to rely on in old age. In the concept of "having someone to rely on in old age" held by most elderly people in rural areas of Chaozhou, "relying" inevitably refers to relying on their descendants. Nowadays, influenced by this traditional concept, the family-based elderly care model still dominates the elderly care methods in rural areas of Chaozhou, and many families still rely mainly on their children for support. The phenomenon of "raising children

for old age support" reveals the lack of self-efficacy among the elderly and their rejection of new things. Under such psychological influence, the elderly in rural areas of Chaozhou generally have uncertainties and relatively negative expectations about their own retirement. "We are all old, what else can we do?" This is a consensus among most elderly people in rural areas of Chaozhou. Therefore, when they get old, they choose to rely on their children for a long time, believing that they should stay at home and be by their children's side when they are old, and age at home. When it comes to leaving home and children and choosing to live in a nursing home, one may feel a sense of insecurity, fearing that their children will be criticized as being unfilial and also losing trust in social nursing institutions. On the other hand, the lack of self-efficacy among the elderly and their rejection of new things have, to a certain extent, restricted the widespread implementation of the national strategy of actively responding to population aging and the effective promotion of the multi-level elderly care service system.

#### **3.2.2 Age discrimination exacerbates the "old and incompetent" situation of the Elderly**

In rural areas of Chaozhou, the common stereotype of the elderly is that they are useless in old age and are discriminated against for re-employment. Most industries believe that the elderly in rural areas cannot keep up with the development of society in terms of physiology or ability, and thus do not accept the re-employment of the elderly. As a result, those elderly people who are in good health and still capable have no place to apply their talents and abilities, and are unable to fully realize their self-worth, which restricts the development of elderly talents. On another level, the stereotypes of the elderly further undermine the self-efficacy of the elderly in rural areas of Chaozhou, causing them to fall into self-doubt and develop negative emotions of lack of confidence, which leads them to be even less willing to participate in social activities.

### **3.3 Unbalanced Economic Development Hinders Active Aging**

#### **3.3.1 The unreasonable industrial structure in rural areas hinders active aging**

Under the background of rural revitalization,

Chaozhou City has been actively developing characteristic rural tourism routes, and several demonstration villages have also established multiple leisure and sightseeing demonstration sites. Particularly outstanding is Sheguang Village in Qiaodong Sub-district, Xiangqiao District, which has been recognized as a beautiful and leisurely village in China in 2022. The rural tourism industry is booming. However, the development of tourism relies on a single historical resource, and tourism resources have not yet been transformed into sustainable development resources. Especially at present, new business forms such as "culture and tourism + games" and "culture and tourism + animation" are still in the process of exploration and development. There is a lack of professional R&D teams and unified data collection platforms, and there are information barriers among research institutions. Since the relaxation of the epidemic control measures, the tourism industry in Chaozhou City has witnessed a wave of enthusiasm. The Chaozhou Municipal Government has jointly organized relevant entertainment programs with scenic spots in various districts. However, there are still some problems, such as the distribution of tourism benefits is unbalanced, improper management of the flow of people at scenic spots, ambiguous directions for red tourism scenic spots and cultural and tourism integration products, and the lack of market regulation in the pricing of hotel accommodations around. Such situations are not conducive to the long-term development of the tourism industry.

From the perspective of the overall layout, the rural industrial support in Chaozhou City mainly relies on modern agricultural industries and rural tourism. These industrial orientations are highly dependent on environmental resources. Some relatively barren and untourism-oriented villages have lost the dividends brought by regional economic development, which in turn leads to an imbalance in economic development among various villages. The guarantee and support for the elderly are also insufficient. It has affected the process of active aging.

### 3.3.2 Uneven resource distribution affects active aging

On the path of rural revitalization, each village will explore its own development path based on its geographical location and advantageous

resources in a way that suits local conditions. For instance, Xiangshan Village in Guantang Town, relying on its traditional advantageous industry of "beef hot pot", actively builds a distinctive "beef street" to promote the increase in output and quality of the "beef hot pot" industry in Guantang Town. Drive employment for villagers in Xiangshan Village and its surrounding areas, increase economic income, and jointly build a beautiful countryside. Gaocuo Tang Village in Fengxin Sub-district, relying on its advantageous resources of revolutionary sites and red bases, has taken the path of cultural and tourism development, actively promoting the cultural and tourism economy, and developing rural ecological tourism and sightseeing industries. It uses culture to drive industries and promote rural development. Relying on its geographical location in the urban-rural junction, Sheguang Village in Qiaodong Sub-district focuses on economic development and follows a path where economic construction drives cultural and ecological construction. Taking advantage of the numerous residential complexes, dense population and strong purchasing power within its jurisdiction, Sheguang Village has built the "Sheguang Village Fish, Meat and Vegetable Comprehensive Market". Based on local characteristic agricultural products, it has created brands such as "Sheguang Bamboo Shoots" and "Sheguang Chinese Kale". Develop local characteristic industries, and at the same time introduce the time-honored enterprise "Bao Ji Gu Fu Su Xiang Fu" to develop in the village to increase villagers' income. On this basis, develop agricultural leisure tourism to generate income for villagers while promoting the construction of urban-rural integrated infrastructure, building public service centers, and improving the villagers' security system. Each village in Chaozhou City has different advantages, adopts different economic development models, and the economic benefits they obtain will also vary to a certain extent. Sheguang Village enjoys a superior geographical location, diverse industrial types, high stability of industrial circulation and guaranteed income for villagers. The cultural and tourism industry in Gaocuo Tang Village is greatly influenced by information technology, seasons and other factors, with high variability. The income of villagers is also unstable.

Uneven resource distribution leads to different rural industrial development, and industries are closely related to villagers' income. A stable industrial structure and an unstable one will lead to an imbalance in economic development among different regions, and the income gap among villagers will also widen. Without an economic foundation, the social security of the elderly population will also be affected. The elderly are struggling to make a living, and their social participation remains mainly passive. The development of the spiritual and cultural world is also restricted to a certain extent, which is not conducive to the improvement of the elderly's self-efficacy and the development of active aging.

#### 4. Conclusion

The favorable background of rural revitalization has brought good development opportunities to various villages in Chaozhou City and promoted the development of active aging in rural areas. The elderly in the demonstration villages have a relatively high participation rate in social practice, and the basic medical security system is relatively complete. However, there are still problems such as a low sense of social participation, mostly passive participation in social practice, and the need for further improvement of the pension security system. Active aging is conducive to the elderly realizing their personal and social values, enriching their spiritual world and alleviating economic pressure. It is an important way to relieve the social pressure of elderly care. According to the analysis, the development of active aging can be promoted from aspects such as promoting economic development, establishing and improving the pension security system, and enhancing the self-efficacy of the elderly.

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