

A Comparative Study of Elderly Education Policies in Hong Kong and Shenzhen

Yilin Deng

Faculty of economy, Shenzhen University, Shenzhen, Guangdong, 518000, China

ABSTRACT

In the context of China's significant aging population, geriatric education has emerged as a crucial strategy to mitigate societal pressures and foster active aging. Consequently, it is essential to formulate a geriatric education policy that addresses local geriatric needs. However, the educational content and characteristics vary across regions, such as Hong Kong and Shenzhen, which, despite their geographical proximity, have developed distinct geriatric education systems under the "one country, two systems" framework. Hong Kong, having entered the aging process earlier, offers a more targeted geriatric education closely aligned with its economic development and policy objectives. In contrast, Shenzhen, characterized by rapid population growth and a substantial number of foreign residents, presents a more diversified geriatric education system, with content that reflects local economic development and policy goals. This study focuses on Shenzhen and Hong Kong, employing an institutional model to systematically compare the similarities and differences in their elderly education policies across three dimensions: institutional background, policy objectives, and resource allocation. Through comparative analysis, the study aims to distill insights into geriatric education practices suitable for both Shenzhen and Hong Kong, ultimately contributing to the development of a regional community of elderly education within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

KEYWORDS

Geriatric education; Policy analysis; Social aging; Resocialization

1 Introduction

Since China entered an aging society in 2000, the size and proportion of the elderly population have been on an upward trend, and the characteristics of aging and advanced aging have become more and more prominent, and China has now entered the stage of "deep aging". Given this, there is an urgent need to explore effective ways to alleviate the social pressure brought about by aging, and geriatric education, is one of the most important ways to promote the realization of positive aging of the elderly (Lv Wenjuan & Chen Jingjing, 2022), has a positive effect on alleviating the pressure of aging. Throughout the existing literature, most scholars mainly focus on the theoretical background, model analysis, and comparison of national policies, highlighting the importance, feasibility, and necessity of geriatric education. Although the existing results have laid a foundation for this research, there are still limitations: first, the study focuses on national macro-policies and ignores the impact of regional institutional background and cultural differences on policy implementation; second, the theoretical framework relies on international experience and is not sufficiently localized; and third, the research methodology is single, and there is a lack of comparative perspectives across regions. In particular, there has been no systematic research on how policy differences between Shenzhen and Hong Kong under "one country, two systems" shape the path of gerontological education.

Based on this, this study takes Shenzhen and Hong Kong as the research objects, and uses the institutional model as the basis for comparative analysis through three dimensions of institutional background, policy objectives, and resource allocation: analyze the similarities and differences of the policies on gerontological education between the two places in terms of the economy, policies, and culture under the different social systems of the two places from the institutional background; use the theory of positive aging to study the objectives of the policies on gerontological education of the two places, and explain the reasons for the differences in the objectives of the policies of the two places; compare the two places with the data in the literature to find out the reasons for the differences in the policies. The reasons for the differences between the two places are explained; the differences in resource allocation between the two places are compared with the literature data, and the advantages and disadvantages of the development of gerontological education in the two places are clarified. In this way, the theoretical academic framework of geriatric education can be enriched. The local connotation of the theory of lifelong education and the theory of positive aging can be deepened, while further promoting cross-regional cooperation in geriatric education to provide theoretical experience for the

realization of the cooperation mechanism of geriatric education in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao Greater Bay Area. This paper

2 Research methodology

Starting from comparing the institutional background and the influencing factors behind elderly education in Shenzhen and Hong Kong, clarifying their respective policy objectives and educational focuses, and analyzing the allocation of educational resources, this study conducts an in-depth investigation to understand the nature and reasons for the differences and similarities of the elderly education policies in Shenzhen and Hong Kong by extensively searching for relevant information and literature and applying the theory of positive aging, institutional model, and the research methodology of comparative study, case study, and experience summary to gain an in-depth insight into the policy differences and similarities. Using the theory of positive aging, we adopt comparative research, case analysis, and experience summarization to gain insights into the underlying causes and influencing factors of the similarities and differences in policies, and summarize the feasible theoretical experiences of the personalized development of gerontological education in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao as representatives of the two places.

Comparative research method: This study takes the elderly education policies of Shenzhen and Hong Kong as the subjects of comparison, by collecting a summary and qualitative analyzing the institutional backgrounds, policy objectives, and resource allocation of the two places, we can compare the similarities and differences of the elderly education policies of the two places in these three dimensions, and then draw out the connotation and appropriateness of the elderly education policies of the two places under the background of “one country, two systems”, and ultimately, through the comparison of the two places, we can explore the feasible theoretical experience for the regional personalized development of elderly education in Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Finally, through the comparison of the two, we will explore a route of elderly education policy that is suitable for the integration and development of the two places and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Case study method: Based on the representative elderly education projects in the two places, such as the community education centers and elderly centers in Shenzhen and the Elder Academy Scheme in Hong Kong, this paper analyzes the similarities and differences in the implied policy modes and resource allocation behind the different projects in the two places, to reveal the applicability and limitations of the policies of the two places in different social contexts through the specific cases.

Summarization of experience method: Drawing on the existing literature on the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign policies on geriatric education, scientifically combining the actual national conditions of China and the local differences between the two places, we analyze and summarize the geriatric education policies of Shenzhen and Hong Kong, pointing out the problems of each of the two, as well as their unique strengths, and through generalization, we come up with a geriatric education policy route applicable to the two places and even to Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macao and the Greater Bay Area.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Differences in gerontological education policies in Hong Kong and Shenzhen based on institutional contexts

Elderly education, as a part of social welfare, is affected by local economic development, regional policy support, and regional culture. Although Shenzhen and Hong Kong are separated by the sea, under the role of one country, two systems, the elderly policies of the two places show different development trends. This study analyzes the above three points to understand the influencing factors behind the policy differences.

3.1.1 Economic development affects education design

As two first-tier cities in China, Shenzhen and Hong Kong do not differ much in terms of economic volume, but the different economic structures, development patterns, and capital flows will have an indirect impact on the elderly education policy. Shenzhen, as an experimental area of reform and opening up in China, has industry and high technology as its main economic driving force, and its high technology and manufacturing industries are also the main source of finance for the social welfare system. Influenced by Shenzhen's development speed and economic structure, the

local gerontological education content pays more attention to the popularization of information technology and the enhancement of the digital skills of the elderly, such as providing courses on computer skills and the application of electronic products through both online and offline means, to enable the elderly to better adapt to the development of the modern society and integrate into the society more actively. At the same time, Shenzhen has allocated financial resources to continuously improve public facilities for elderly education, such as by providing financial support to senior universities and community education centers. Hong Kong, on the other hand, as a globally renowned financial center, relies heavily on the capital market and financial industry as a source of revenue. The influence of the economic structure and the pressure of competition increase the local labor market demand for skills, therefore, the elderly education in Hong Kong mainly focuses on improving the employability and social participation of the elderly, to ensure that they can achieve re-socialization through education.

3.1.2 Policies tend to mutualize educational institutions

Elderly education, as a part of social welfare, is special in that the institutions of elderly education complement and interact with their policy design. For Hong Kong, the point of return to the motherland in 1997 was a watershed moment for Hong Kong's geriatric education policy, (Tam, 2012). Before the handover, elderly education in Hong Kong was mainly based on non-formal methods of learning for the elderly and was provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as elderly centers and social services. However, after the handover in 1997 and the establishment of the Elderly Commission, the government adopted a more coordinated approach in the formulation of policies for the elderly, putting forward the strategic policy objective of "caring for the elderly" in the first policy direction after the handover (Ma et al., 2021), and estimating the development of gerontological education utilizing social campaigns, initiatives, and even subsidies, and the Elder Academy Scheme was also launched in 2007 to promote the development of gerontological education. The Elder Academy Program was also launched and implemented in 2007. Hong Kong's gerontological education policy is more characterized by a market-oriented model, promoting the diversified development of educational institutions through the mode of partial funding provided by the government and the participation of elderly people in courses at their own expense, thus improving gerontological education policy. Comparatively speaking, the development of geriatric education institutions in Shenzhen was earlier than the birth of its policy, and the establishment of the University of the Elderly in 1986 marked the emergence of geriatric education in Shenzhen (Weng Qin-ling, 2014). Through the organization of several declarations, the "Outline of the Development of China's Work on the Elderly", which was introduced in 2001, as well as the "Tenth Five-Year Plan of the Development of the Elderly Career in Shenzhen", issued by Shenzhen City, gradually put the development of geriatric education in Shenzhen into practice. The "Tenth Five-Year Plan for the Development of the Elderly Career in Shenzhen", gradually shifted the pension system's focus toward elderly education, and the elderly education in Shenzhen also gradually presented a top-down organizational model, through the city, district, street, and community development organizations at four levels, to further implement the implementation of the elderly education policy and the improvement of the organizational grid.

3.1.3 Cultural esteem triggers the demand for education

The different cultures in the two places also influence the demand and content of continuing education for the elderly. In the case of Hong Kong, the cultural influence of neo-liberalism formed by colonial influences spreads to its education sector, and the role of education has been interpreted as securing Hong Kong's competitive advantage in a knowledge-based economy (Kennedy, 2004). As a result, the influence of the ideology has led to the need for high-level skills to maintain Hong Kong's competitiveness in the economy, and thus lifelong learning in Hong Kong emphasizes the continuous updating of such skills. Hong Kong has a serious level of aging, coupled with a high standard of living. Many older adults need gerontological education to learn more new technical skills to re-socialize and maintain their standard of living. Shenzhen, on the other hand, is mainly populated by migrants from different provinces, and as a result, its urban culture is more diversified, coupled with its high-tech-based economic industry, the educational needs of the elderly are mostly based on practical courses on hobbies and life skills, and their social motivation is realized through gerontological education.

3.2 Different focuses on elderly education in Shenzhen and Hong Kong based on policy objectives

The focus of elderly education in Shenzhen and Hong Kong differs according to the objectives, responsibility structure, and operationalization of the elderly policy in the two places.

3.2.1 Policy objectives

The two places have different objectives for elderly education, and the contents of the education triggered by them also have different focuses in different directions. In Shenzhen, which has a predominantly non-native population, gerontological education is more oriented towards teaching interpersonal and digital skills, so that retired elderly people can improve their cultural level and enrich their lives in their twilight years, thus reflecting the policy objective of putting people first. In contrast, in Hong Kong, to alleviate the pressure brought about by aging, and at the same time to further release the economic potential of re-socialization of the elderly, its gerontological education is more inclined to practical education focusing on skill cultivation and health management.

3.2.2 Responsibility structure

Although there is a gap between the two in terms of practice, they both advocate the concept of “government-led and welfare diversification”. Shenzhen, as a representative city on the mainland, has a policy structure of government-led responsibility for geriatric education, emphasizing “strong government, weak society”, and building a geriatric education network through a top-down approach with four levels: city, district, street, and community. In Hong Kong, on the other hand, the government and the market work together to promote market-oriented education, with emphasis on the content of education through different needs of elderly education. Therefore, different responsibility structures simultaneously give rise to different educational content and forms.

3.2.3 Operationalization

Guided by the policy direction, the two are different in terms of policy operability. Shenzhen's gerontological education policy is strong in principle, based on the guidance of the central government's general direction, with the local characteristics of Shenzhen as the entry point for policy implementation, and the operational approach is not uniform. On the other hand, Hong Kong's elderly education policy is planned first and implemented later, which is more operational for local governments.

3.3 Differences in the modes of elderly education between Shenzhen and Hong Kong based on resource allocation

Both of them focus on the content of education, and the allocation of resources for elderly education is also different, mainly in terms of the source of funding, the degree of digitization, the form of education, etc. In Shenzhen, there is a relatively single source of funding for elderly education. Shenzhen's geriatric education is funded by a relatively single source, mainly relying on financial allocations, currently relying on government investment, has built 745 schools for the elderly (Shenzhen has built 745 universities for the elderly-Shenzhen Government Online_Shenzhen Municipal People's Government Portal, not available). However, there are large differences in the region, and a lack of stable and sufficient funding for running schools, such as street-level universities for the elderly, in addition to the Luohu and Longgang districts, other than the school, are no special funding for running schools, all of which have no special funding for running schools. There is no special funding for running schools, which is transferred from the funding of the elderly center. Hong Kong, on the other hand, has positioned elderly education and other elderly services as a complementary industry of the market economy, with government funding only serving as a small part of the financial support in its system. In terms of digitization, Shenzhen combines online and offline teaching resources to impart practical experience through offline lectures and then builds the “Shen I Learn” platform online to realize online learning and multi-point interaction, bringing mobile learning opportunities to the elderly. On the other hand, Hong Kong mainly builds online education platforms for the elderly through cooperation with universities, such as the “Evergreen Digital Filling Station” project of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which aims to enhance the sense of digital participation of the elderly and narrow the digital gap between generations, to quickly adapt to the digital era of artificial intelligence. The different educational resources in Shenzhen and Hong Kong have led to different forms of education. Although there are differences in the contents and forms of education, both places have adopted the hybrid education mode of “online + offline” in the modern era.

4 Summary and analysis

By comparing the differences in the three dimensions of elderly education in Hong Kong and Shenzhen in terms of institutional background, policy objectives, and resource allocation, the thesis analyzes the characteristics and operational similarities and differences of elderly education in the two places, which is of great significance for the mutual support of the elderly policies of the two places, and even for the development of elderly education in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The study finds that the two places have certain similarities in three dimensions. In terms of institutional background, both adhere to the concept of people-centered education, which enhances the quality of elderly education by increasing the sense of well-being and participation of the elderly in their retirement life. In terms of resource allocation, both places have governmental financial support, and provide more diversified educational content through the resource support of the local government. This further proves that Shenzhen and Hong Kong can promote the synergy of education for the elderly and improve the quality of education through the complementarity of funds and the exchange of educational resources, thus enhancing the synergistic effect of education for the elderly between the two places.

At the same time, the study also found that there are differences in policy objectives and educational content between the two places. For example, Shenzhen's gerontological education focuses more on the implementation of macro-level welfare for the elderly, providing a wide range of gerontological education programs to improve the quality of life and social participation of the elderly, and implementing the concept of people-centeredness. Compared to Shenzhen, Hong Kong focuses more on the micro level, by enhancing the skills and comprehensive literacy of different elderly individuals, thus further improving the depth and breadth of the re-socialization of the elderly, and thus enhancing the development of Hong Kong's knowledge-based economy. Through the integration of the two models, education for the elderly in Shenzhen and Hong Kong will gradually take into account the macro and micro levels, fully stimulate the social role and economic impetus of education for the elderly, so as to promote and help the elderly through learning, and provide policy examples for other cities in the Greater Bay Area.

Summarizing the above comparisons, it can be concluded that both places adhere to the general direction in implementing the overall policy of elderly education and regulate the practice of specific objectives with their characteristics. In Shenzhen and Hong Kong, with their geographical proximity and complementary industries, there can be content cooperation and resource sharing in elderly education, to enhance the synergistic effect of elderly education in the two places. Cooperation in gerontological education between Shenzhen and Hong Kong can also provide an example of cooperation in gerontological education in the Greater Bay Area of Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao, promoting the interoperability of gerontological education personnel between the two regions, sharing of resources and further alleviating the pressure of aging in the Greater Bay Area.

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