

# Heilongjiang Strategies for High-Quality Development of Cultural Elderly Care Services

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**Abstract:** *As China faces a wave of severe population aging, public attention to the multidimensional needs of the elderly has grown exponentially. Cultural eldercare, centered on meeting spiritual needs, is emerging as a key focus for innovation in the eldercare service system and for high-quality social development. This article explores the issue of high-quality development of cultural eldercare in Heilongjiang by defining cultural eldercare and cultural eldercare services. By focusing on the cultural eldercare service needs of specific elderly groups, leveraging the application of high-tech and the allocation of cultural eldercare resources as breakthroughs, and using the correction of societal cognitive biases as a foundation, the aim is to better promote the well-being of the elderly and social stability in China, thereby building a diverse, equitable, and sustainable high-quality eldercare system in the future.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural eldercare; Cultural eldercare services; High-quality development*

## 1. Introduction

The formal introduction of the concept of high-quality development signifies that China has entered a new stage of development and charts the course for the country's future progress. Against the backdrop of this overarching priority of high-quality development, and to meet the growing needs of the elderly and their aspirations for a better life, it is necessary to establish new requirements for high-quality development in elderly care services.

To implement the national development plan for high-quality elderly care, Heilongjiang has introduced a series of policies and regulations on cultural elderly care in recent years. These proposals aim to meet the basic elderly care service needs—including cultural, sports, and recreational activities—by the end of 2025; and by 2030, to have basically established a rural elderly care service system with full coverage, providing policy guarantees for a high-quality elderly life in rural areas <sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, to further advance the high-quality development of elderly care services in Heilongjiang Province, efforts must focus on quality, age-friendliness, and systematization. We must deepen supply-side structural reforms in elderly care services to strengthen and optimize these services. Cultural elderly care precisely addresses the ever-increasing spiritual and cultural needs of the elderly and is an indispensable component of a high-quality elderly care system.

## 2. Clarifying the Concept of Cultural Elderly Care Services

Cultural elderly care is based on meeting spiritual needs and, through various forms of cultural and recreational activities and service content, ultimately aims to achieve the goals of “learning, contributing, and enjoying life in old age” <sup>[2]</sup>. Cultural elderly care services, however, are encompassed within the concept of cultural elderly care; specifically, they refer to the concrete services provided to realize this concept. They constitute a series of service activities that put the concept of cultural elderly care into practice, placing greater emphasis on targeted service behaviors designed to meet cultural elderly care needs. From the perspective of delivery mechanisms, Zhou Jiuchang argues that cultural elderly care services utilize various literary and informational resources as well as cultural activities as their vehicles, with health and happiness as their goals, aiming to enhance the quality of cultural life for the elderly <sup>[3]</sup>. Other scholars, approaching the concept from the perspective of the stakeholders, argue that cultural elderly care services primarily refer to services provided by families, the government, senior universities, and communities—acting as the main stakeholders—to offer the elderly diverse content and formats capable of meeting their varied spiritual and cultural needs <sup>[4]</sup>. These definitions all emphasize that

cultural elderly care is designed to meet the growing spiritual needs of the elderly and places importance on providing them with humanistic care.

Based on the above, it can be said that cultural elderly care services constitute a series of high-quality practical activities designed to meet the spiritual and cultural needs of the elderly. These services are government-led and involve multi-stakeholder collaboration, with the core objective of addressing the increasingly diverse, complex, and nuanced spiritual needs of the elderly. They strive to realize the elderly's aspirations for a better life and enable them to enjoy physical and mental well-being and a happy life.

### **3. Policy Recommendations for the High-Quality Development of Cultural Elderly Care Services in Heilongjiang Province**

#### ***3.1. Addressing the Cultural Elderly Care Needs of Special Elderly Groups***

Society generally perceives the cultural needs of the elderly as primarily centered on traditional leisure and entertainment activities, such as square dancing and playing chess, with little distinction made regarding the diversity of their cultural needs. Particular attention to the unique cultural needs of special elderly groups is even scarcer. The high-quality development of cultural elderly care services in our province is a balanced endeavor, and addressing the cultural needs of special elderly groups is an inherent requirement.

##### ***3.1.1. Cultural Elderly Care Services for Elderly People Who Have Lost Their Only Child***

Elderly individuals who have lost their only child generally face emotional trauma that is difficult to resolve, and they have a particularly strong need for emotional comfort. First, the government should establish a multi-tiered support system. For those with better economic conditions, a platform should be created to connect them with underprivileged children, thereby rebuilding emotional bonds. Second, for ordinary elderly individuals who have lost their only child—especially those in remote areas—community organizations should facilitate “one-on-one” pairing programs to create opportunities for interaction with left-behind children. Finally, dedicated cultural activity centers could be established to facilitate communication among this group through collective activities such as calligraphy and painting, thereby helping to alleviate the trauma of losing a child.

##### ***3.1.2. Cultural Elderly Care Services for the Elderly with Disabilities***

The cultural and elderly care needs of elderly people with disabilities are doubly constrained by physical impairments and social discrimination, necessitating the provision of targeted, more detailed, and in-depth cultural and elderly care services. As the aging population deepens, the decline in physical function associated with advancing age will lead to an increasing number of elderly people with disabilities requiring care in the future. We should primarily focus on safeguarding the right of elderly people with disabilities to participate in cultural activities by enhancing accessibility in cultural venues. This includes improving accessible pathways and guided services in museums and libraries, as well as providing customized services such as audio guides and sign language interpretation for the visually and hearing impaired. Additionally, special cultural activities—such as “reverse experiences,” collaborative creation, and public outreach—can help break down social prejudices and facilitate their social integration.

##### ***3.1.3. Cultural Elderly Care Services for Empty-Nest Seniors***

“Empty-nest seniors” refer to elderly individuals who live alone or as a couple after their children have grown up and left home. According to surveys, empty-nest seniors currently account for more than half of the total elderly population in China, and in some major cities and rural areas, this proportion exceeds 70% [5]. Heilongjiang, as a typical old industrial city in Northeast China, is no exception. With their children working or settling elsewhere, these seniors live alone; while their basic needs for food and clothing are met, their spiritual and cultural lives are often lacking. A dual-track service model combining “offline communities and online platforms” can be established. By forming cultural groups within communities and leveraging digital technology to facilitate cloud-based interactions, we can meet their needs for social connection and self-actualization.

#### ***3.2. Overcoming Challenges in Technology Adoption***

Against the backdrop of continuous technological development and constant innovation, the high-

quality development of cultural elderly care services that keeps pace with the times cannot be achieved without the strong support of advanced technologies. Currently, emerging technologies such as smart elderly care devices, online platforms, and AI are integrating into the supply of elderly care services at an unprecedented pace, opening up broad prospects for enriching the spiritual and cultural lives of the elderly. However, in practical implementation, the high cost of applying these advanced technologies has become a major obstacle hindering their widespread adoption. A single smart mattress can cost as much as 3,000 yuan, while annual service packages at smart senior care facilities range from 5,000 to 20,000 yuan—far exceeding the financial capacity of ordinary households. This makes it difficult to translate technological advancements into accessible cultural benefits, and such price barriers undoubtedly exclude a large number of seniors from the realm of smart cultural eldercare. At the same time, smart eldercare products suffer from significant functional misalignment and homogenized competition. Looking at the high-tech elderly care products currently available on the market, while various smart health monitoring devices are constantly emerging, there is a clear shortage of products designed to provide emotional companionship or leisure and entertainment for the elderly. At the same time, many smart products fail to take into account the cultural background and physical capabilities of the elderly generation; their operation is relatively cumbersome, and their UI design is not sufficiently age-friendly. Against this backdrop, the “digital divide” between the elderly and smart devices is actually widening.

Relying solely on government efforts is insufficient to resolve this dilemma; it requires a collaborative effort among the government, businesses, and social organizations to systematically advance the initiative across three dimensions: cost reduction, targeted supply, and service optimization. First, the government should fully leverage policy guidance and fiscal leverage to provide institutional safeguards for the application of technology in the cultural elderly care sector. The government should implement targeted support policies for the application of cultural elderly care technologies, such as offering preferential measures—including additional deductions for R&D expenses and tax breaks—to enterprises developing and producing age-friendly cultural service products, thereby effectively reducing corporate innovation costs. Building on this, the government should provide appropriate subsidies to consumers purchasing cultural elderly care products, lowering the purchasing threshold for elderly households. By regulating both supply and demand, a universally applicable path for cultural elderly care can be forged. Second, enterprises must fundamentally shift their R&D approach, prioritizing cost reduction, operational simplification, and enhanced practical functionality in product development. Rather than pursuing complex, high-cost premium products, they should identify a single essential need to specialize in, thereby driving down prices and enabling mass production. For example, low-cost intelligent companion robots need not incorporate numerous features; instead, they should focus exclusively on emotional companionship in their design, ensuring that technology truly resonates with people’s hearts. Third, social welfare organizations, charitable institutions, and communities should actively engage in the daily lives of the elderly to help them bridge the digital divide. Only in this way can high-tech innovations truly take root in Heilongjiang’s black soil, allowing more ordinary seniors to enjoy the cultural benefits brought by technological progress.

### ***3.3. Optimizing Resource Allocation***

Given the current situation in Heilongjiang, there is a significant regional imbalance in the allocation of cultural elderly care resources. In downtown areas of cities like Harbin and Daqing, cultural venues are concentrated, activities are plentiful, and transportation is convenient, making it easy for the elderly to access cultural facilities such as libraries and museums. In contrast, rural areas and some suburban regions suffer from a marked scarcity of cultural and elderly care resources, leaving many rural seniors facing the dilemma of outdated facilities and a lack of engaging activities. Data indicates that the aging trends in Heilongjiang show marked urban-rural disparities. Rural seniors face more severe challenges than their urban counterparts in terms of age structure, the rate of empty-nest households, and health conditions, and there is also a significant gap in economic income levels and the ability to afford elderly care services. This structural imbalance in resource allocation not only constrains the overall effectiveness of cultural elderly care services but also completely contradicts the original intent of equalizing basic public services. At the same time, even in urban areas where resources are relatively concentrated, cultural elderly care resources suffer from low utilization efficiency. There is a lack of effective integration and coordination of resources across different departments and administrative levels, preventing the formation of a cohesive service system. In fact, Heilongjiang’s cultural resources—such as intangible cultural heritage, winter sports, and music—are not inherently scarce; rather, there are certain shortcomings in their spatial distribution and coordination.

Therefore, optimizing resource allocation requires efforts in both spatial planning and coordination.

In terms of spatial planning, the primary task is to increase investment in cultural and elderly care resources in rural and suburban areas. Heilongjiang Province can repurpose underutilized existing buildings—such as idle school buildings, ancestral halls, and former village committee sites—into cultural venues and senior activity centers equipped with facilities for reading, movie screenings, board games, and cultural heritage preservation. This approach enables the provision of nearby cultural services at a relatively low construction cost. The government should also vigorously promote the development of mobile cultural services to deliver high-quality urban cultural resources to rural areas in a flexible and convenient manner. For example, drawing on the successful experience of Xichuan County’s “Mobile Museum” visiting nursing homes, mobile museums should be established to regularly bring replicas of museum collections or digital exhibitions to rural areas, allowing rural seniors to access high-quality cultural resources without leaving their villages. While strengthening physical infrastructure, efforts should also be made to improve transportation infrastructure in rural areas, enhance public transportation conditions, and increase the number of bus routes and frequencies to cultural venues, thereby providing convenience and accessibility for rural seniors to participate in cultural activities. In terms of collaboration, efforts should focus on breaking down departmental barriers and promoting the coordinated integration of resources from multiple sectors—including culture, civil affairs, education, and health—to incorporate existing cultural resources into cultural elderly care services. Examples include the creation of intangible cultural heritage handicrafts, as well as the appreciation of ice and snow culture and music. Mature senior universities, social organizations, and community groups in urban areas should be encouraged to continuously deliver high-quality cultural education and performing arts resources to areas with relatively scarce cultural resources through remote video interactions or regular on-site guidance in rural communities. Only by achieving a balanced spatial distribution of urban and rural resources and realizing synergistic benefits through multi-resource collaboration can we truly promote the high-quality development of cultural elderly care services in Heilongjiang. This will ensure the equitable distribution and targeted supplementation of cultural elderly care resources, allowing every senior citizen to enjoy a high-quality life in their golden years, enriched by cultural experiences.

### **3.4. Correcting Social Perceptions**

#### **3.4.1. Enhancing Older Adults’ Ability and Opportunities to Learn New Things**

Many people believe that older adults have poor learning abilities and struggle to adapt to new cultural activities and technological products; this is a common misconception. This brings us to Cattell’s theory of crystallized and fluid intelligence. Crystallized intelligence is generally understood as the knowledge and experience gained from a series of task contexts and the challenges of daily life, while fluid intelligence refers to abstract cognitive abilities—such as reaction speed—that are independent of specific knowledge reserves<sup>[6]</sup>. In fact, older adults do not lack the ability to learn; they may simply learn at a slightly slower pace, and while their fluid intelligence may decline somewhat, their accumulated crystallized intelligence continues to grow. However, current teaching methods on the market tend to focus more on fluid intelligence, while instruction targeting crystallized intelligence remains relatively weak. Educational institutions and cultural departments should collaborate with research organizations to conduct research and innovate teaching methods tailored to the characteristics of older adults—namely, lower fluid intelligence and higher crystallized intelligence. In instruction, content requiring rapid reaction and memorization should be reduced, while teaching segments based on life experience and accumulated knowledge should be increased. Scenario-based teaching should be adopted; for example, when teaching smartphone use, real-life scenarios such as shopping or visiting a doctor can be simulated, allowing older adults to apply their existing life knowledge to understand and master the operational steps. At the same time, the case study method can be employed, using local news and community stories familiar to older adults as examples to explain the application of digital technologies. This makes the teaching content more aligned with the cognitive level of older adults and provides the necessary platform and opportunities for those who wish to learn new things.

#### **3.4.2. Fully Harnessing the Social Value of Older Adults**

Some members of society view older adults solely as individuals in need of care, overlooking their value and potential in social development. This cognitive bias severely dampens older adults’ enthusiasm for participating in cultural enrichment and social activities. In reality, many older adults possess rich life experience, professional knowledge, and skills—such as retired teachers, doctors, and engineers—and are fully capable of contributing to society. The government and society can organize and establish talent service platforms for older adults, integrating resources from retired teachers, doctors, engineers, and other senior professionals. Based on their professional skills and preferences, these platforms can provide channels for them to participate in social and cultural activities. For example, retired teachers could be

organized to provide after-school tutoring and cultural lectures for youth in the community, while retired doctors could participate in community-based free clinics and health education campaigns. Additionally, community “Silver-Age Think Tanks” could be established, inviting retired professionals to offer advice on community development and participate in cultural initiatives, thereby achieving positive outcomes. According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, guiding older adults toward altruistic social participation— not only aligns with the highest need for self-actualization but also conforms to the intrinsic logic of high-quality development.

#### 4. Conclusion

We must first accurately identify the diverse needs of specific elderly groups and leverage external entities and technology to ensure the targeted allocation of cultural eldercare resources. By reshaping social perceptions and breaking down prejudices, we can build a high-quality cultural eldercare service system and comprehensively enhance the quality of life for the elderly.

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