

Exploring the Path to Social Sustainability From Liyun Datong Pian of Liji

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Abstract

The "Liyun Datong Pian," also known as "Great Unity," is the initial section of the "Liyun" chapter in Liji (the Book of Rites), a renowned Confucian classic documenting the ceremonial practices and musical systems in China during the Zhou and Han dynasties. The classic conveys Confucianism's desire for a society characterized by profound harmony in governance, which has had a substantial influence on subsequent views and goals of social advancement over the past two thousand years. Besides Sun Yat-sen's extensive works on this aspect, Zen Master Hunyuan, the founder of Weixin Shengjiao, a contemporary religion in Taiwan, proposed relevant discussions with the aim of fostering societal stability and harmony. This study examines the "Book of Rites—Liyun Datong Pian" along with Sun Yat-sen's doctrines and Zen Master Hunyuan's discussions. It analyzes the implications of this ancient text in terms of public health, public policy, and social welfare and explores its relevance to achieving social sustainability. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a concrete reference for the sustainable development of global societies.

Keywords: Liyun Datong Pian, Social Sustainability, Population Aging

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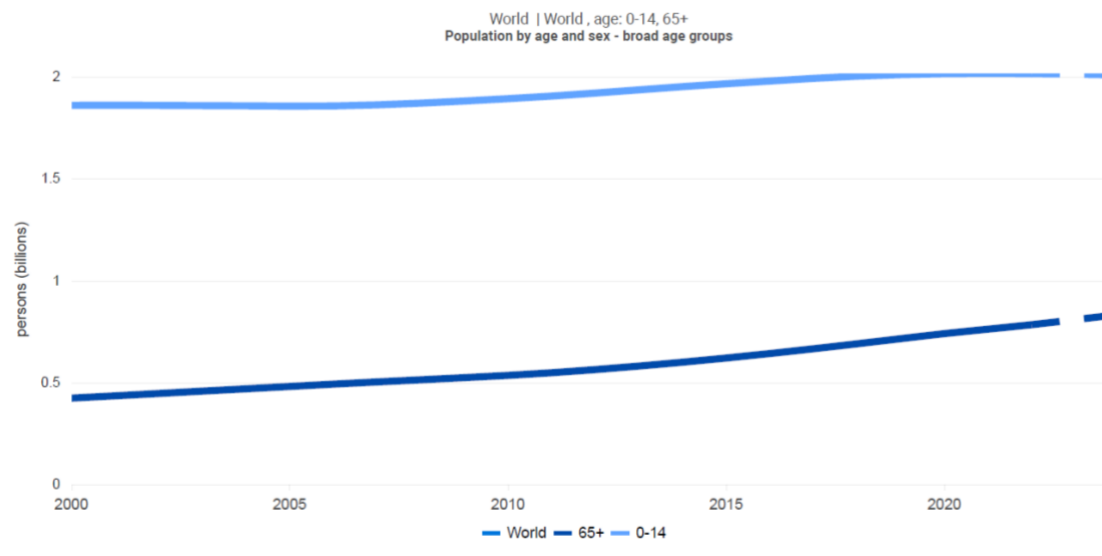
Introduction

This paper explores the global significance of population aging, emphasizing that effectively addressing this issue is crucial for the sustainable development of society. It elucidates the relationship between Datong (Great Unity) thoughts and the elderly population, particularly focusing on how this philosophy can support the elderly, encourage the elderly to grow internally, and achieve better life circumstances.

Furthermore, the paper examines public policies for the elderly, proposing that the application of Datong principles can offer effective strategies to meet the challenges posed by an aging population, thereby enhancing social sustainability amid demographic shifts.

Population Aging: An Important Global Issue

From the United Nations' data, the population aged over 65 is increasing at a faster rate than the population aged under 14 (Figure 1).

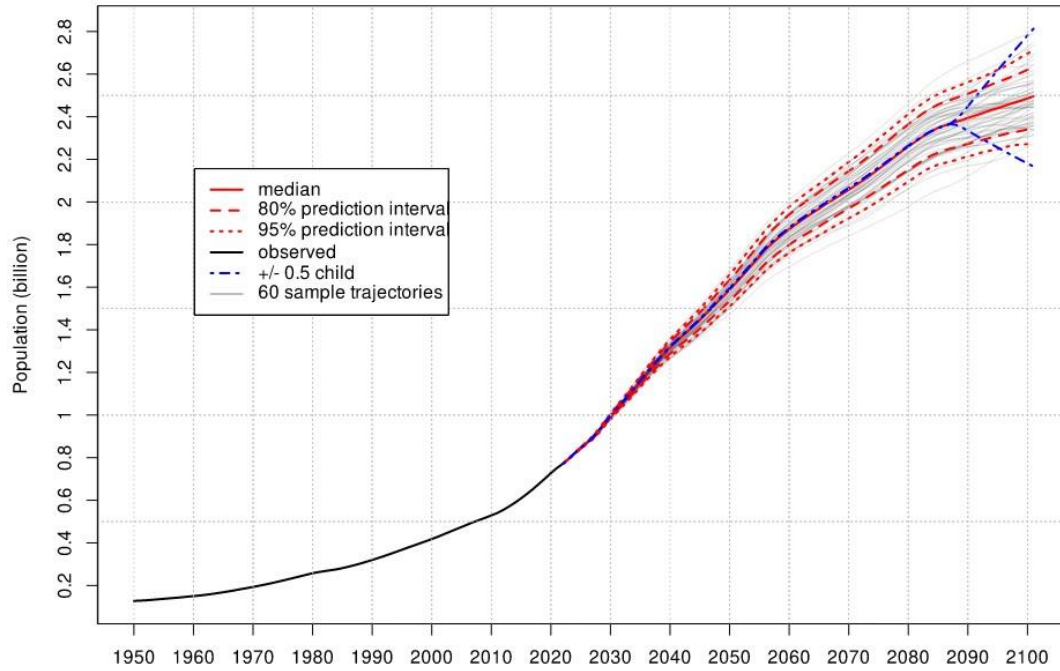


Notes: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). *World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision*. Retrieved from <https://population.un.org/dataportal/data/indicators/70/locations/900/start/2000/end/2024/line/linetimeplotcompare?df=28dfe92b-a52e-4394-924a-d0e27bbd437d>

Figure 1: World Population Keeps Aging

Particularly in the coming decades, the United Nations data projects that the median population of those aged 65 and older will grow sharply for the rest of the century (Figure 2).

World: Population (Age 65+)



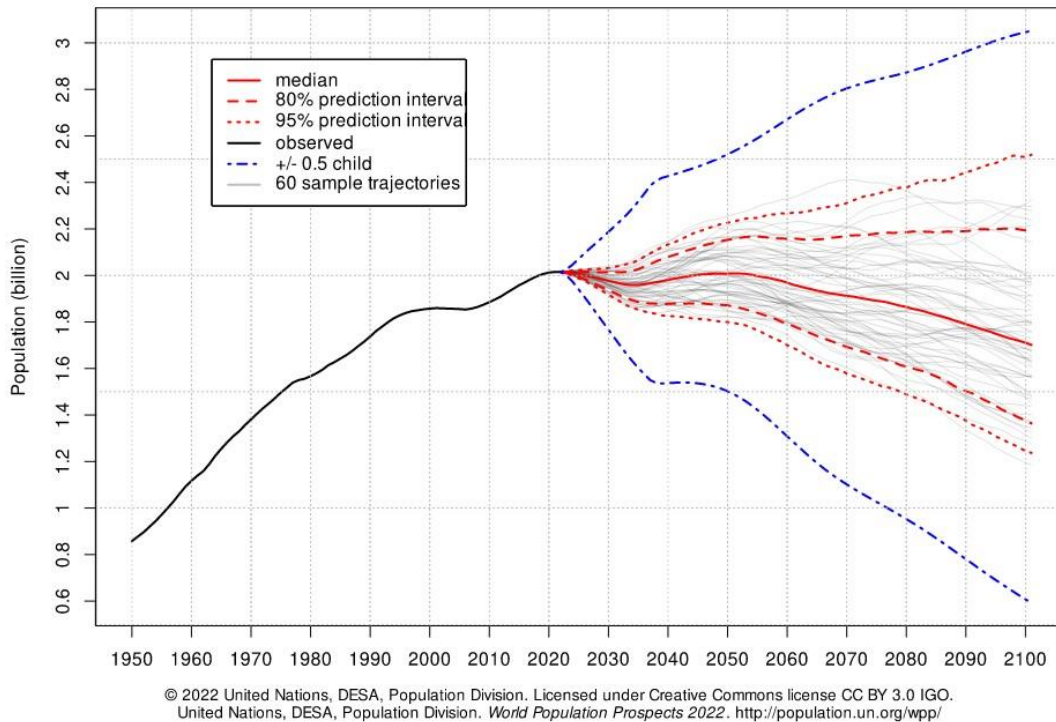
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Notes: United Nations, Population Division (2022). *World Population Prospects 2022*. Retrieved from <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/65plus/900>

Figure 2: World Population of the Aged to Climb Sharply

Furthermore, in the coming decades, the United Nations data also projects that the median population of those under 14 will decline (Figure 3).

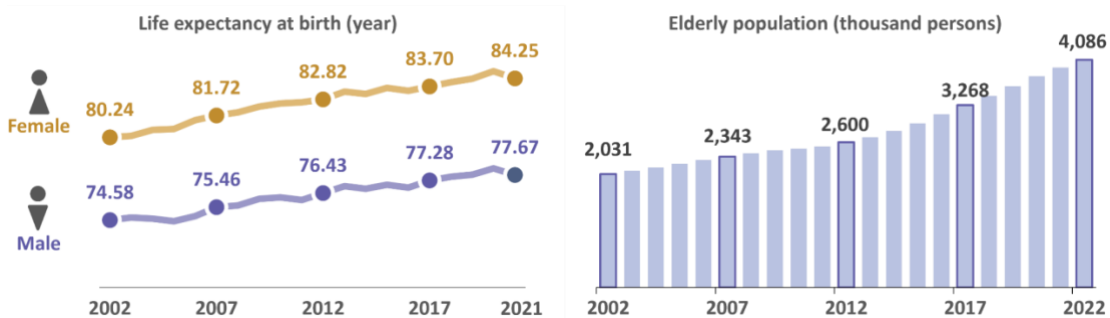
World: Population (Age 0-14)



Notes: United Nations, Population Division (2022). *World Population Prospects 2022*. Retrieved from <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/0-14/900>

Figure 3: World Population of Children Expects to Decline

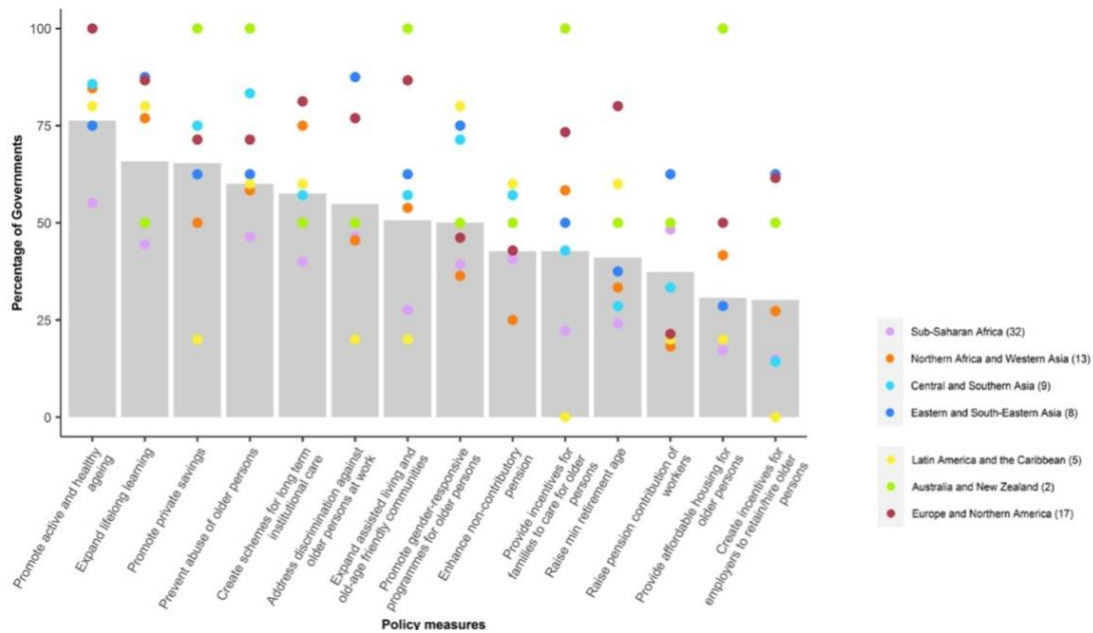
In Taiwan, the situation is even more intense. Taiwan became an aged society in 2018, with over 14% of its population being elderly. It is expected to turn into a super-aged society in 2025, with the elderly population surpassing 20% (Figure 4).



Notes: National Development Council. *Population Aging*. Retrieved from https://www.ndc.gov.tw/en/Content_List.aspx?n=85E9B2CDF4406753

Figure 4: Rising Life Expectancy in Taiwan

To cope with the significant phenomenon of population aging, governments around the globe have implemented various policy measures (Figure 5).



Notes: Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020). *Government policies to address population ageing, 2020 (1)*, Retrieved from https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2020_pf_government_policies_population_ageing.pdf

Figure 5: Specific Ageing-related Policy Measures of Governments -during the five years prior to data collection (roughly 2014-2018)

According to the report "Government Policies to Address Population Ageing" by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2020, the three most commonly adopted policy measures on population ageing are:

- Promotion of active and healthy aging (76%)
- Expansion of lifelong learning (66%)
- Encouragement of private savings (65%)

Definition of Health

Among the policy measures most commonly adopted by governments to address population ageing, the promotion of active and healthy aging is the most prevalent. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as follows:

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." (WHO Constitution, 1948)

This implies that the health of the elderly should also encompass multiple dimensions.

Sustainable Development Goals

Additionally, in 2015, the United Nations introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as illustrated below (Figure 6):



Notes: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development (2015). *17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/>

Figure 6: 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - THE 17 GOALS (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, 2015)

Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, 2015) the authors suggest that the following are most pertinent to the issues discussed in this paper:

- Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages
- Goal 4: Ensure quality education and promote lifelong learning
- Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive, and productive employment for all
- Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable
- Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies and build effective, accountable institutions
- Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Furthermore, in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, prosperity is defined as ensuring that human economic, social, and technological progress can coexist harmoniously with nature.

From the Prosperity aspect of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

"We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social, and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature." (Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Prosperity, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development)

Social Sustainability

The term sustainability was first used in 1713 by Carl von Carlowitz in his work about the long-term use and preservation of raw material in the field of forestry. Currently, the most widespread concept of sustainability (Colanto-nio & Dixon, 2010; Hogberg, 2015; Pareja-

Eastaway, 2012) originates from the United Nations report *Our Common Future*, in which sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (UN World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, Chap. 2). Sustainability development concerns economic, environmental and social goals, which can be understood as the three pillars (dimensions) of sustainability (Purvis et. Al., 2019; Azapagic et. al., 2016). These dimensions should not be considered in isolation from one another (Hinz, 2014). Compared to the economic and environmental dimensions, the social dimension is the least developed, but in recent years, an increasing number of studies have been discussing the term social sustainability (Lee & Jung, 2019).

Social sustainability can be referred to as the well-being of humans and society and the safety of consumers (Govindan et. al., 2021; Chiu, 2003); the provision of a viable long-term urban setting for cultural development, social integration, human interaction and communication (Dempsey et. al., 2011; Polese & Stren, 2000); or by recognizing every person’s right to belong to her or his community and participate as a valued member of it (Castillo, Moobela, Price, & Marthur, 2007; AISuwaidi et. al., 2018; Huq et. al., 2014). However, to find the ways constructing a sustainable community will be very important. According to McKenzie (2004), social sustainability is a process resulting in life-enhancing condition within community. Therefore, Bristol Accord (2005) defined the sustainable communities as “Place where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good service for all” (p. 12).

Sustaining With Population Aging

Based on the above analysis and observations of social phenomena, the authors propose that effectively addressing population aging is crucial for achieving a sustainable society. When the elderly can maintain their quality of life and continue to grow, it contributes to a rejuvenation effect, allowing society as a whole to recirculate and attain a sustainable state (Figure 7).

When the elderly maintain a high quality of life and continue to grow, where the overall vitality and dynamism of a society are enhanced. This process leads to a more vibrant and sustainable society, as the aging population contributes positively to social, economic, and cultural dimensions, effectively counteracting the typical decline associated with aging demographics.

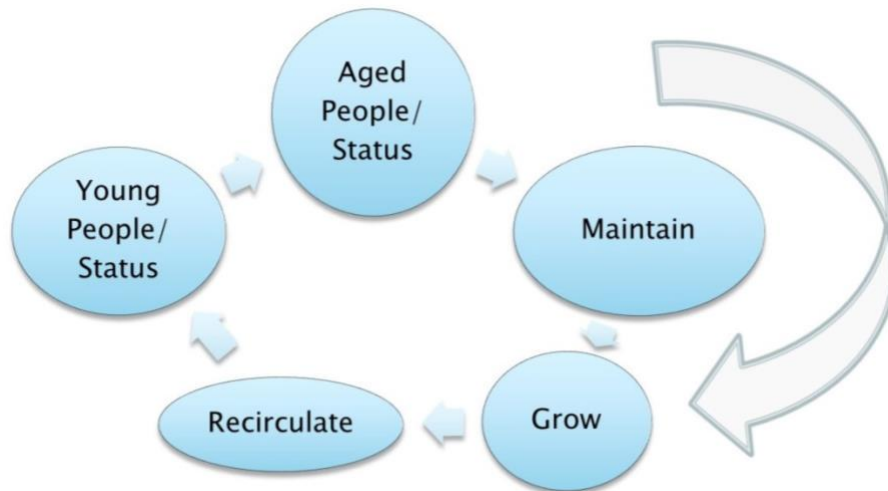


Figure 7: Society Recirculates and Attains a Sustainable State

The authors of this research examine various approaches to addressing the issue of aging population, ranging from the Confucian concept of harmony and unity in the "Li Yun Da Tong Pian" chapter of the Book of Rites nearly two thousand years ago, to the thoughts of Sun Yat-Sen from about a century ago, and more recently, the ideas of Zen master Hunyuan in Taiwan. This literary and refined essay explores potential solutions to the challenges posed by population aging.

Confucian Classic in Liyun Chapter in Liji (The Book of Rites)

The Datong Pian section of Liyun states: "A competent provision was secured for the aged till their death.". This can be interpreted as advocating for the provision of care and security for the elderly until the end of their lives.

The full passage reads: *"A competent provision was secured for the aged till their death, employment for the able-bodied, and the means of growing up for the young."* (Liyun Datong Pian, the initial section of the "Liyun" chapter in the Book of Rites)

In the original text: 《禮記·禮運》：“使老有所終，壯有所用，幼有所長，矜寡孤獨廢疾者，皆有所養。”

The Liyun chapter in the Book of Rites, originating from the Zhou and Han dynasties in China about 2,000 years ago, was written during a time of continuous warfare and ineffective governance. In this turbulent era, people longed for stability and development. Liyun envisioned a world free from disorder, reflecting Confucianism's deep desire for a harmonious society. This ideal state of living remains a profound aspiration in contemporary society.

Sun Yat-sen's Thought

Approximately 100 years ago, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic of China, proposed not only ensuring support for the elderly but also advancing the idea that they should receive tangible assistance in their daily lives. This went beyond mere hopes for security, advocating for national and societal policies to aid the elderly in their livelihoods.

As stated by Sun Yat-sen in "Introduction of Two Supplementary Chapters to Lectures on the Principle of People's Livelihood, San Min Chu I":

"The young people to have education, the grownups to have jobs, the old people to have means of support, and all persons irrespective of age and sex to enjoy security and comfort."

In the original text: “少年的人有教育，壯年的人有職業，老年的人有養活，全國男女，無論老小，都可以享安樂。”

Zen Master Hunyuan's Discussions

In addition, Zen Master Hunyuan (2008) in Taiwan offered profound insights into aging, viewing it as a multifaceted process. He emphasized that aging involves not only the natural progression towards maturity in the human life stage but also the attainment of inner tranquility. Furthermore, Zen Master Hunyuan advocated for elders to play a pivotal role in society by imparting wisdom and guidance to younger generations. He envisioned aging as a journey toward an ideal place and a better future, where individuals can find fulfillment and contribute to societal harmony. Zen Master Hunyuan's perspective underscores the holistic development and meaningful contributions that elders can bring to both personal growth and societal well-being.

Thoughts for Tackling Issues

From the above viewpoints, we observe a significant evolution in the thinking process, advancing from the provision of security to the attainment of social harmony. Initially, competent provisions were secured for the aged until their death, ensuring their basic needs were met. Subsequently, the focus shifted to providing old people with means of support, encompassing both financial stability and access to essential services. This progression then highlighted the importance of mental tranquility and a secure future, acknowledging that true harmony requires addressing both material and emotional needs. Ultimately, this advanced thinking process aims to create a mature, peaceful, and harmonious society.

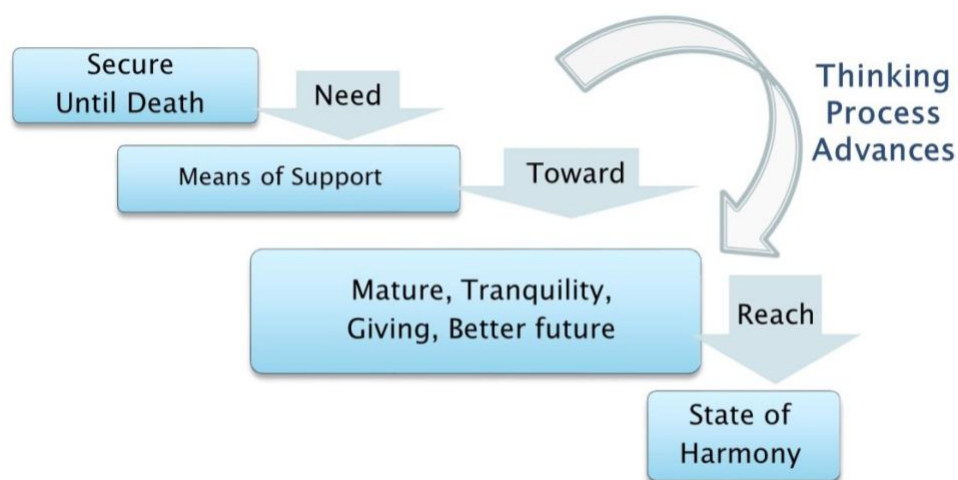


Figure 8: The Evolution of Thought towards Achieving Social Harmony

Public Policy for the Senior

It can be argued that under the above viewpoints, governments strive to adopt public policies to support seniors. In Taiwan, for example, the government has implemented Friendly Care Services and measures to sustain economic security for the elderly. They have established community care stations and diversified senior welfare programs, including senior citizen schools. These comprehensive initiatives ensure that seniors receive continuous and reliable support throughout their lives, securing their well-being until death (Figure 9).

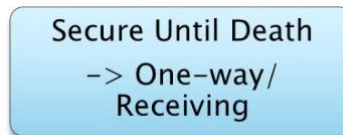


Figure 9: The Public Policy for the Senior (a)

Scholar Lee (2010) proposed that seniors adopt more active approaches to the aging process. These include encouraging participation in volunteer work, facilitating compensated employment opportunities, promoting communication to lower material desires, fostering intergenerational communication, and training seniors to develop skills to care for other elderly individuals or children. These strategies aim to empower seniors and enhance their engagement and well-being in society (Figure 10).



Figure 10: The Public Policy for the Senior (b)

Datong Perspective for Senior Health Care Mechanism

Furthermore, Scholars Lin and Hu (2016) advocate for a Senior Health Care Mechanism based on the Datong Perspective. This approach underscores the belief that the world belongs to everyone, emphasizing a care system designed for mutual benefit. Their research introduces a more comprehensive framework for senior care, encouraging seniors to thrive in an environment aligned with Daoist principles. Care teams are encouraged to embrace the philosophy that the world is a shared resource, guiding them to deliver services with a mindset of mutual support and care (Figure 11).

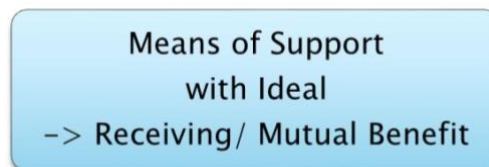


Figure 11: The Public Policy for the Senior (c)

From Receiving to Recirculation and Sustainability

Aligned with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the framework for senior care incorporates various levels of requirements, spanning from physiological necessities to emotional fulfillment and social engagement, all aimed at achieving sustained harmony. Senior care

strategies echo Maslow's model in their approach: Beginning with the fulfillment of fundamental physiological needs, they prioritize providing essential supports and promoting physical well-being. They also emphasize the importance of achieving emotional and psychological maturity, fostering inner peace and tranquility. Furthermore, these strategies encourage seniors to contribute meaningfully to their families and communities, enhancing their sense of belonging and purpose. Additionally, senior care aims to facilitate personal growth and development, guiding individuals towards a more fulfilling and secure future. Lastly, it ensures the provision of an appropriate caregiving environment that facilitates harmony and long-term social sustainability, enabling seniors to live a dignified and fulfilling life in their later years.

Conclusion

Drawing insights from various social perspectives, including the Confucian classic "Datong Pian Section" from the "Liyun Chapter" in Liji, Sun Yat-sen's Thought, and Zen Master Hunyuan's teachings, the authors propose a Mechanism of Sustainable Development for Global Societies (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Mechanism Sustainable Development of Global Societies

This mechanism begins with prioritizing the use of resources to maintain physical health, progressing towards achieving emotional and mental maturity. It emphasizes the importance of contributing positively to both family and society and actively engaging in constructive activities. Ultimately, the goal is to foster a state of harmony and sustainability that supports enduring well-being and prosperity across global communities.

The authors believe that our proposed mechanism aligns with the WHO and UN agendas for health and sustainable development of society (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Proposed Mechanism Echoes the WHO and UN Agenda

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