

Research on Social Elderly Care Services by Buddhist Organizations—Based on the Survey Data of Zibo City Buddhist Group to Set up Pension Institutions

Ying Qi*

School of Ethnology and Anthropology, Inner Mongolia Normal University, Hohhot 010022, China

*Corresponding author: Ying Qi, 2045922946@qq.com

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Abstract: The Buddhist circle involved in the pension cause has a long historical tradition and is highly supported by state-issued policies. Hence, the Buddhist pension cause has made certain progress in recent years. This paper takes the Earth Care Home of Huayan Temple, Huantai County, Zibo City as an example, to analyze the establishment and operation of kindness homes. This study also analyzed the daily life of the elderly, sorted out the advantages and constraints of their participation in the elderly care service, and provided relevant suggestions on how to promote the sustainable development of elderly care by Buddhist organizations.

Keywords: Buddhism; Organization; Old age; Buddhist group; Hospice care

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1. The necessity and feasibility of Buddhist organizations participating in elderly care services

The participation of religious organizations in the elderly care service is not only conducive to solving the problems of elderly care caused by the increasing aging population in our country but also provides more diversified services for the current pension market. It also helps stimulate the potential and enthusiasm of religious organizations to participate in social services, so that religious organizations can assume more social responsibilities, provide more social services, deepen their sense of identity with the country, guide religion to adapt to the socialist society, and deeply integrate religious organizations into the socialist cause construction of our country. Of course, the necessity and feasibility of religious organizations to participate in elderly care services are far more than these, which this study will analyze from the following two aspects.

(1) Buddhism practices the idea of compassion for the world

The so-called “mercy” is explained in the Great Wisdom Theory as “great kindness and all sentient beings are happy, and great compassion removes all sentient beings’ suffering.” Since the Buddhist

classics were introduced into the Han Dynasty and translated, the thought of helping the world with compassion has been implemented in the development of Buddhism. In Buddhist practice, the concept of causal reincarnation and blessings is very important. Buddhism believes that only by doing more good deeds and accumulating blessings can people live a happy life in this world. Therefore, since the introduction of Buddhism into the Han Dynasty, it has actively advocated and practiced many good deeds such as abstinence from killing and releasing animals, giving to the poor, supporting the elderly and the young, and benefiting others, which also had a great influence on the development of social charity then. Looking back at history, the spirit of compassion pursued by Buddhism has enabled the practice of charity and altruism for a long time and has made outstanding contributions to maintaining social harmony and stability. Until today, this spiritual core of Buddhism remains. The development of China's elderly care requires the participation of every force, and Buddhism will certainly play a unique role in this field.

(2) Strong support for current religious policies

According to the White paper on China's Policies and Practices for Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief published in 2018, China's religious community actively participates in religious charity activities. According to statistics, the annual Religious Charity Week carried out by the religious community since 2012 has raised more than 1 billion in donations. There are more than 400 institutions for the elderly run by religious groups, with an estimated 29,000 beds. Other charitable acts such as disaster relief, school donations, medical treatment, and environmental protection.

The religious circle's active participation in the construction of our country's charity cause has not only been welcomed by the broad masses of the people but also has been strongly supported by our government's policies and regulations. Various policies and regulations provide perfect systems for the religious circle to legally participate in public charity activities, and guide the religious circle to better serve the people.

2. The advantages of the kindness home to participate in elderly care services

The Kindness Homes have been operating since 2012 and have won the trust of locals. The homes received constant high praise and people around the temple also volunteered to care for the elderly. It can be seen that Buddhism's participation in the construction of pension undertakings in China has exhibited positive significance and unique value.

2.1. Volunteer resources are extensive and rich

Volunteers are individuals who contribute their own time and energy to improve social services and promote social progress. This group fills the loophole of insufficient service personnel faced by philanthropy and plays an important role in the construction and development of the country. These volunteers would voluntarily come to the temple to serve others. Most of them have devout religious beliefs, making up another important group in the temple besides monks.

Most individuals who care for the elderly in the Earth Care home are volunteers. As of today, the home has established a volunteer team of more than 500 people^[1]. Some of them served here for a long time and many others participate in the care of the elderly from time to time. It can be seen that the resources of the Earth Care home are extensive and rich. These volunteers continuously provide manpower, spontaneously contribute to the orderly operation of the house, and promote the long-term development of the house.

2.2. The Buddhist charity tradition has a social affinity

As mentioned above, Buddhism has a long history of participating in charity. Since the early dynasties,

Buddhist charity organizations have shown unprecedented development and actively participated in disaster relief, where all these practices benefit the public. The introduction of Buddhism emphasized compassion. The spirit of Bodhisattva has inspired countless Buddhist believers and monks to actively devote themselves to the cause of compassion and relief, which has formed the general impression of the world on Buddhism.

Among the old people living in the kindness home, many people have a good impression of Buddhist charity and the house. There are some Buddhist believers and elderly monks in the home, who have devout faith in Buddhism, and who expressed happiness staying in the home. Whether or not one is religious, the first impression of Buddhist charity is always very amiable.

2.3. The unique spiritual care of the Buddhist elderly care service

Compared with the common pension institutions in society, Buddhist pension institutions may not have perfect medical equipment and a very professional service team, but the spiritual care of Buddhist unique religious beliefs for the elderly is comparable. Buddhism emphasizes the concept of cause and effect, reincarnation, and life and death. Hence, Buddhism-based care has a different understanding from the secular.

Some of the elderly who live in the kindness home are devout Buddhists who have optimistic views about death. They believe that by devoutly studying the teachings of Buddha, one can transcend to paradise after death. In Buddhism, disease is known to be one's karma and one should confess their sins sincerely. Hence, these elderly do not feel terrible about the problems brought on by old age. They also receive encouragement and guidance from their masters, thus maintaining a positive attitude. Elderlies without religious beliefs, when influenced by this atmosphere, also have a more optimistic understanding of life and death.

3. The restriction of the Ci nursing participation in the care service

Since the establishment of the Earth Care home, its development has not been smooth sailing. The huge economic expenses and medical care for the elderly and infirm patients are the problems faced by the long-term development of the home.

3.1. Source of funds

Since its establishment, the construction cost of the Earth Care home has been more than 30 million, whereas the annual cost of water, electricity, and other expenses has reached more than 2 million. In addition to a monthly fee of 600 yuan for elderly people with children, the rest of the funding comes from donations from religious people and revenue from the monastery, which is undoubtedly a single and unstable source of income in the face of the huge annual expenses of the nursing home.

3.2. The nursing services are not specialized

Most of the service team at CSU are volunteers with a certain amount of nursing experience but are inferior as compared to a professional nursing team. Due to the economic level and actual needs of the monastery, the hospital is not equipped with professional medical equipment for medical assistance, and its equipment is limited to daily medical care. The non-professional service personnel and imperfect medical equipment have obvious limitations to the hospital's long-term development. The elderly who need to be admitted to the nursing home have diseases that require appropriate care by nursing staff. In the face of sudden symptoms, timely adoption of appropriate medical means is more conducive to the alleviation and control of the disease. These require more professional medical knowledge and more skilled nursing experience, and the assistance of medical equipment is also indispensable. Given the current circumstances, the Earth Nursing Home can

only accept some elderly people who are relatively healthy with no serious illness. In the occurrence of serious diseases, the patients would need to be sent to another hospital for treatment promptly. These are obvious limits to the scope of the Earth Nursing Home to accepting and providing care for the elderly.

4. Suggestions to improve the participation of Buddhist organizations in social elderly care services

When reviewing the operation process of the Huayan Temple, we found that the development of Buddhist pension institutions cannot be promoted unilaterally by the Buddhist circle. This was because the circle could not be separated from the strong support of the government, the help of the community, and the active participation of the public. However, the development of this cause is not smooth sailing and many aspects still need to be improved.

4.1. Increasing positive publicity and encouraging charitable donations

For a long time, due to religious sensitivities, major media have always been very cautious about the promotion of religious charity and activities. Due to the lack of positive publicity and guidance from the official media, negative news and rumors about Buddhism have become rampant recently, leading to a deviation in the public's cognition of Buddhism and increased negative comments on the Buddhist community, which caused a big blow to the community's enthusiasm.

The implementation of charity activities in the Buddhist circle requires understanding and support from all aspects of life. Only when the public's prejudice against Buddhism is eliminated, then will people actively participate in Buddhist charity. This will encourage people to donate money and aid the development of the cause. This requires relevant departments to eliminate existing prejudice against religion, actively guide the combination of religion and socialist construction in China, and actively guide the social masses to correctly understand the positive impact of religion, which will be of great help for the development of Buddhist charity in China.

4.2. Increasing policy support and improving policies and regulations

Relevant departments in China have issued various policies to encourage and support the development of philanthropy in religious circles. However, there are no perfect laws and regulations implemented specifically for the development of philanthropy in religious circles, and more of them are relatively generally defined. As a result, relevant departments are always concerned with dealing with issues of religious charity. This is not conducive to them carrying out charity undertakings under the law and regulations, and also not conducive to the management of the religious circles by the laws and regulations^[2].

The government should continue to improve the policies and regulations of religious circles participating in charity so that religious groups are no longer subjected to the ambiguity of these policies and the opacity of government management. On the other hand, the policy preference for religious charities should be increased to ease the financial pressure on relevant groups and contribute to the long-term development of philanthropy.

4.3. Increasing the investment in talents and improving the professional level

With the increasing number of elderly population in China, people's demand for elderly care services will be more vigorous, and higher service requirements will be put forward for pension institutions. Buddhist groups need to set higher standards for their elderly care services to meet the people's growing demand for nursing services. Buddhist nursing institutions need to acquire more professional nursing personnel to improve the professional quality of the service provided. Existing volunteer service teams should also undergo professional training so that

they can master basic nursing knowledge and nursing skills to provide better services for the elderly. The medical equipment and nursing equipment should also be completed to better guarantee the life and health of the elderly in the hospital. It should be noted that these are based on Buddhist groups with sufficient sources of funds and a perfect management system, which are an important basis for the development of Buddhist pension institutions.

5. Conclusion

Due to both historical and practical reasons, the Buddhist community in China is still in its initial stage of development. Many Buddhist charity organizations do not have perfect infrastructure and professional service teams and most rely on monks and volunteers in monasteries to provide nursing services for the elderly. The issue of “hospice care” for the elderly in nursing homes can also be considered. With the acceleration of China’s aging society and the increasing number of patients with severe diseases, there is a growing concern for peaceful end-of-life experiences that are free from fear and pain. Hospice care not only brings peace before death and care after death, but also relieves the grief of family members, and reduces the ineffective occupation and waste of medical resources, which has very important social significance. At the beginning of its establishment, Buddhism recorded hospice care, involving its specific concepts and behavioral rituals, and developed a complete set of hospice care guidelines, which play a very good complementary role in the long-term development of Buddhist nursing institutions.

Buddhist participation in the care of the elderly has a long historical tradition, along with strong support of relevant policies issued by the state. Hence, China’s Buddhist cause of elderly care has achieved a certain development in recent years. However, the development of Buddhist charity is not smooth sailing, nor can it be achieved overnight. It requires continuous accumulation of experience, system improvements, and joint efforts of all sectors of society to promote the steady development of this cause. This way, Buddhist organizations in China can broaden and popularize elderly care by religious organizations.

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