The Continuity and Development of Old-age Security System from the Perspective of Ethnic Religious Culture

Zhang Shijie

［**Abstract**］Influenced by the traditional concepts of ethnic religious culture in China, the old-age support of ethnic minorities features the large size of old-age population and the heavy burden of their children. In addition, the incompatibility and incongruity between different ethnic religious cultures and old-age support models need to be addressed. Religious and cultural beliefs and ethnic minority clan cultural concepts affect the choice of old-age support models in ethnic minority areas, and at the same time, the excellent concepts in religious culture can provide multi-faceted institutional inspiration and practical measures for the modern old-age security system. Vigorously promoting the construction of a modern old-age security system under the influence of ethnic religious culture is of great reference significance for promoting ethnic unity and exploring the establishment of a new model of old-age support in ethnic minority areas in the new era.

［**Key words**］ethnic minorities; religious culture; old-age security; model innovation

1　Introduction

Ethnic religious culture is the product of the excellent historical inheritance of Chinese civilization for thousands of years, and plays an important and positive role in promoting social stability and economic prosperity and development. Since the reform and opening up, with the improvement of the country's comprehensive national strength and the improvement of people's living standards, it has become an irreversible fact that China has entered an aging society. How to correctly promote the establishment of a new model of old-age security with a complete system and realize "the ensuring of old-age support and reliance" is an issue that relevant scholars should focus on in today's aging population. The issue of old-age support is related to social stability and people's livelihood development. In the face of the increasing trend of population aging, we must take adequate and appropriate measures in advance. The Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan （2021—2025） for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035 of the People's Republic of China clearly points out that it is necessary to implement a national strategy to actively respond to the aging of the population. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, although the total population of ethnic minorities has continued to rise, the growth rate has slowed down, reflecting a series of trends and characteristics of population aging. According to the data of the Seventh National Population Census Communique released by the National Bureau of Statistics, China's ethnic minority population is 125. 47 million, accounting for 8. 89% of the country's total population, and the proportion of ethnic minority population in 2020 increases by 0. 4% compared with 2010. Among them, the proportion of ethnic minorities aged 65 and above increases from 4. 44% in 1990 to 6. 99% in 2010, and the proportion of long-lived elderly among ethnic minorities is higher than that of the Han population and the national population, showing the characteristics of a large elderly population and a large burden on

children. To sum up, exploring and establishing a new model of old-age security in the new era that integrates the connotation of ethnic religious culture has become the top priority of the current academic research on how to solve the old-age problem in ethnic areas.

At present, the academic community mainly stays in the system construction and practical methods to improve and supplement the old-age support in ethic religious areas, and it is rare to combine the ethnic religious culture with the innovative construction of the modern old-age support model. The elderly population in ethnic minority areas has a strong sense of belonging and identity to the religious and cultural beliefs of their own ethnic groups. Their lifestyles and old - age support models are also closely related to religious beliefs. Promoting national prosperity and common development is of great significance. As an important part of ethnic minority culture, religious culture has the characteristics of inclusiveness and pluralistic symbiosis, and guides the behavior of believers. It is usually reflected in some specific aspects of social life, and provides values and practice norms for ethnic minority groups.

2 In what aspects does ethnic religious culture provide reference for the innovation and development of the old-age support model?

2.1 Cultural reference: continue the traditional national culture

Traditional Chinese Confucian culture has always emphasized: "honor the elderly and the young in other families as we honor those in our own", which is a concrete and profound expression of the traditional Chinese virtue of filial piety and love for relatives at the level of traditional Han culture. Since ancient times, "the ensuring of old-age support" and "returning to one's homeland at the old age" have been the highest pursuit of all social strata in traditional Chinese culture. In ancient China, both civil officials with operation ability and military officials with great military achievements would ask the emperor for permission to "return to their homeland" when they get old. Even the people living at the bottom of the society stubbornly adhere to the traditional view of "bring up sons to support parents in their old age", reflecting the deep - rooted influence of traditional thinking on old - age support. The old-age support has been a hot issue of concern to people from all walks of life since ancient times, and the long-term lifestyle of ethnic minorities has preserved the fine traditional virtues of respecting and supporting the elderly, and has practiced the long-term consistent goal in their own way. Ethnic culture is the fertile soil for the innovation and development of the old-age support industry of ethnic minorities. People in ethnic minority areas abide by the cultural foundation of supporting their parents, which is in line with the traditional filial piety, maintain a stable old-age support order under the constraints of traditional filial piety, especially in the rural areas, and attach more importance to the old-age support of family members. China is a unified multi-ethnic country with a total of 56 ethnic groups and 55 ethnic minorities. No matter how the times change, the core concept of respecting the elderly remains the same, which has a subtle impact on the choice of old-age support methods in China. In many parts of China today, ethnic minorities still respect the traditional Confucian mode of life of filial piety and love for relatives, and there are often three or even four generations of a family living together. The religious and cultural concepts within ethnic minorities have penetrated into the national genes and profoundly affected their lifestyles, providing a profound social and cultural foundation for the elderly population in ethnic minority areas.

2.2 Institutional reference: work together to build a harmonious society

In recent years, a variety of national policy documents have been promulgated to encourage multiple subjects to participate in social services of old-age support. The old-age support subjects in the society have shown a trend of diversification, giving multiple subjects the institutional guarantee to participate in old-age support services. It is worth noting that the special old-age support model of "religious old-age support" is gradually radiating its own

unique brilliance. By registering religious sites as legal old - age support institutions, more elderly people, especially those of ethnic minorities with religious and cultural beliefs, can be attracted to the model of providing old-age support around religious sites. According to statistics, there are nearly 200 million religious believers in China, and there are more than 144,000 religious activity sites registered in accordance with the law, forming a certain scale of personnel and organizational foundation for religious old-age support. On the one hand, the elderly ethnic minorities with religious beliefs can meet their basic needs such as food, clothing, housing and transportation in religious premises. On the other hand, the unique religious function of religious premises can also meet the religious belief needs of this group of people to a large extent, so as to achieve the dual satisfaction of physical and psychological needs. This measure raises the old-age support model from material support to the level of spiritual support, and improves the level of old-age support services.

The participation of religion in old - age support services is an organic supplement to the existing old - age support model, and plays an important role in achieving social stability and enriching people's social and cultural life in ethnic minority areas. In February 2012, the State Administration for Religious Affairs, together with the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the State Administration of Taxation, issued the *Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles to Engage in Public Interest and Charitable Activities*, which states that religious circles may "apply for the establishment of social welfare institutions that provide care, rehabilitation, trusteeship, and other services for the elderly and disabled in accordance with the provisions of the *Interim Measures for the Administration of Social Welfare Institutions of the Ministry of Civil Affairs*". It provides a policy basis and institutional environment for religious participation in old-age support. At the National Conference on Religion held in December 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed："We should adhere to the direction of sinicization of religion in our country, and actively guide religion to adapt to socialist society and better serve socialist modernization", which provides theoretical and practical guidance for religion's participation in pluralistic social activities at a new level.

2.3 Practical reference：the strong vitality of religious culture

Under the guidance of the Marxist concept of religion and the core values of socialism, "religion itself has the characteristics of social, charitable and spiritual tendencies, which can make it play a special role in hospice care, ultimate care and spiritual sustenance of old-age support services". At the same time, when people are facing high social risks, the spiritual sustenance function embodied by religion itself can enable people to maintain a good living state and spiritual outlook. Therefore, actively guiding religious activities to adapt to China's current national conditions and promoting religious activities to actively participate in old - age security services is an important measure to maintain national security and stability and social prosperity and development.

First of all, it is necessary to create a good old-age support environment and atmosphere in the whole society. Among the religions widely believed by believers in China, many of them contain the core connotation of respecting the elderly and filial piety, which is also embodied in many religious scriptures. Believers with religious beliefs follow the call of their hearts when providing old-age support services, rather than being forced to do it as a last resort as a livelihood job, which ensures the superiority of the old-age support environment at the root. Religious believers participate in the old-age support service, and the firm belief in their hearts makes them more patient in providing old-age support services. At the same time, they also put forward higher requirements for the quality of services they provide.

The second is to provide higher quality end-of-life care for the elderly. At this stage, a large part of the

reason for the difficulty in old-age support is the anxiety and fear they show when facing death in the twilight of their lives. Religious believers should pay attention to the mental health of the elderly population when providing them with old-age support services, and achieve the purpose of making the elderly feel spiritual belonging and recognize their own value through meticulous care and in-depth recognition of spiritual beliefs. Although traditional Confucianism does not emphasize the spiritual realm of transcending things like Taoism and Buddhism, it emphasizes a positive attitude towards life in the world. It does not depict the scene after death in detail like Taoism and Buddhism, but starts from death itself, and discusses the rationalist attitude that death must come. Confucius said, "Unknown life, how can you know death?" Living well while being alive also achieves the immortality of life in a way. The Buddhist concept of life and death and the theory of cause and effect are also reflected in the specific services of hospice care, "the interpretation of end-of-life care and the development of afterlife etiquette in Buddhism are an important way to help the elderly dispel the fear and anxiety of death".

Finally, it is necessary to fully affirm the positive role of charitable assistance. In areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, under the influence of religious and cultural beliefs, many families are large families tied together by many people, and the elderly in the family can get a favorable environment for the old-age support. However, the elderly who cannot have a good old-age support environment and lack an old-age support environment also exist in reality, so it is necessary to carry out fixed-point charitable assistance for this kind of elderly people. The doctrines of Buddhism teach people to be good at heart, and to reach out to those who are suffering in a timely manner. Traditional Confucianism also believes that "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". No one wants to see and experience the end of being helpless and displaced when you are old, so it is necessary to carry out charitable relief activities in the whole society to prevent the occurrence of such tragedies from the root.

3　The collision between ethnic religious culture and modern old-age support system

3. 1 The conflict between the internal principles of traditional religious culture and the existing old-age support model

The traditional view is that it is the duty of future generations to be able to support the elderly within the family, but if the elderly are sent to a professional institution for the old-age support, it is an inappropriate or even unfilial rebellion. However, in fact, many families are subject to the influence of family income and family members, and cannot provide sufficient manpower and material resources to provide a good home environment for the elderly. With the rapid development of modern economy and society, many people in ethnic minority areas have participated in the country's vast economic and social construction, and in the process, they have realized the exchange and integration of ethnic cultures. Generally speaking, in addition to the differences in their own ethnic backgrounds, the people of various ethnic groups have no obvious differences in many other aspects of their lives, including the choice of old-age support model. The modern way of life has brought convenience to people, as well as an impact on the traditional old-age support model. Although the elderly are more eager to "have children and grandchildren around their knees" and "family happiness", the youth still have no time to spend with the elderly due to their participation in social activities and the responsibility of providing for their families. At the same time, due to the fact that most of the old-age services initiated by ethnic minority religions are in a spontaneous and disorderly state, and there is a lack of adequate and stable financial support, among which the service level of those who provide old-age services is uneven, there is a large deviation from the expected effect of old-age support services for the elderly population of ethnic minorities. In this context, there is an irreconcilable contradiction between the principle of filial piety and respect for the elderly propagated within the traditional religious culture and the actual situation, calling for the organic integration of the modern old-age support service system and the

national religious culture.

3.2 The lag of policies and regulations restricts the process of religious and cultural participation in old-age support services

At present, although China encourages multiple subjects to participate in old-age support services, and has successively introduced many policies and regulations to better serve the socialist modernization drive, it is worth noting that the lag characteristics of relevant laws and regulations have led to problems such as legitimacy in the participation of religion and culture in old-age support activities. Policies and regulations promulgated at the national level need to be appropriately adjusted according to local conditions, making many religious sites and people participating in religious old-age support services not meeting the requirements of relevant policies, and ultimately failing to achieve the goal of serving the elderly population. There are layers of barriers in the process of religious culture participating in old-age services, and it is difficult to truly and effectively achieve the ultimate goal of religious culture serving the old-age security system. Legal documents are often accompanied by the resolution of various social hot issues, and the particularity of the proposition of religious culture exacerbates this characteristic. If ethnic and religious culture wants to truly serve the modern old-age security system, it must be paid attention to from the legislative level, solve the "absence" and "dislocation" of the legal level of religious old-age support, and ensure the legal status of ethnic and religious culture in the old-age service link.

4   Ethnic religious culture plays an important role in the old-age security system

4.1 Participants in social charitable assistance

The participation of ethnic religious culture in social old-age support services is essentially the continuation and development of social security. As a social welfare undertaking, the main body of social security can be divided into three categories: policy subject, business subject and practical subject. The government is the main body of policy, social organizations including enterprises and institutions, and the community are the main body of business, and many volunteer workers who are committed to social security are the main body of practice. The government is one of the main bodies of policy, but not the only subject. With the development of the economy and society, the diversification of the main body of old-age support service participation is the general trend of the development of the modern old-age support service industry. Practice has fully proved that religious institutions can be the main body of operation and have ability to become old-age support services, and religious believers and people from all walks of life can become the main body of practice to participate in social old-age support services. In many western countries, relief for the elderly population began with private organizations, but it was only later that religion and law intervened in this area because they could not solve the problem of the large number of poor elderly people. Similarly, in traditional Chinese Confucianism, the idea of "benevolence", the Buddhist concept of "saving a life is more meritorious than building a seven-floor pagoda", and the Taoist idea of "nature is impartial: it treats the creation like sacrificial straw-dogs" are all concrete manifestations of the spirit of friendship and mutual assistance and charity.

4.2 Providers of old-age support services

Religious and cultural participation in old-age support services refers to providing basic living security for the elderly to meet their material and spiritual needs. As a vital part of the old-age security system, old-age support services determine the quality of life of the elderly population. Religion is not only a resource for the elderly, but also an advantage for the elderly, which is especially evident among the elderly of ethnic minorities. Religious institutions and religious professionals can provide wholehearted, multi-faceted and meticulous services for the elderly, including daily living, daily medical care, health care, and hospice care.

The reason why religion is accepted and believed by the majority of believers all over the world is that many

basic doctrines of religion contain the part of guiding people to goodness. At the same time, the idea of old-age support in religious doctrines is inseparable from the traditional filial piety. Traditional Confucian culture points out that "filial piety is the foundation of benevolence"; although Buddhism has the concept of cutting off the fate of dust and becoming a monk, it also includes the traditional virtues of observing filial piety and being grateful and repaying one's parents; in the Quran, the Islamic classic believed by Muslims, Muslims clearly put forward the requirements of filial piety to their parents and respect for the elderly, and these requirements are still the universal moral norms for the majority of believers to restrain their behaviors.

With the development of modern economy and society, there is no obvious difference between the population of ethnic minority areas and the population of Han nationality at many levels, and the core concept of respecting the elderly coincides with the ideological and cultural systems of different ethnic groups. The indoctrination of religious culture for old-age support service providers is reflected in the fact that only under the premise that a person's own cultivation has been greatly improved, will he or she do his or her best to provide better services for the elderly, forming a more harmonious atmosphere and environment for the elderly.

4.3 Those who meet psychological needs

The rapid development of modern society has not only provided people with a broader vision, but also accelerated the loss of faith among various groups of people, among which the elderly population bear the brunt. With the rapid progress of science and technology, more and more elderly people find it difficult to keep up with the pace of development of the times, which eventually leads to their lack of spiritual level and loss of value orientation. On the one hand, with the gradual increase of age, the physical function of the elderly gradually declines, and they begin to appear sluggish and even disease-ridden. On the other hand, due to the take-off of China's economy and the imbalance of regional economic development in recent years, more and more children choose to leave their parents to go to a broader world to work hard, which is undoubtedly a cruel blow to the elderly who are already at retirement age and mentally lonely. Based on this situation, the important role of ethnic religious culture is self-evident. First of all, religion, as a spiritual belief, can provide spiritual support for the elderly to a large extent, making their lives more colorful. Secondly, religion as a link for old-age support services can form a cohesive force between the elderly with the same religious beliefs, and they will generate a sense of identity and belonging in the group as religious believers, which greatly strengthens the connection between the elderly population and makes their relationship more harmonious.

5   The practical path to realize the organic combination of ethnic religious culture and old-age security system

5.1 Promote a more positive concept of old-age support

In the eyes of the people in ethnic minority areas, the best way to be filial to the elderly is to be able to provide a good care environment for the elderly at home. However, due to the difficulties of the real environment, sending the elderly to special nursing institutions is not a violation of the traditional principle of "benevolence and filial piety". On the one hand, the elderly inevitably need the continuous investment of time and energy of some family members due to their own physical conditions, but many families cannot provide such realistic conditions that meet the requirements of the elderly; on the other hand, many elderly people at home will think that their old age is a "drag" to the whole family, and thus need to endure both physical and mental torture. In this case, sending the elderly to special nursing institutions for care can not only ensure that they receive meticulous physical care, but also give good comfort to the spiritual level of the elderly under the care of religion and culture. In the face of the overall trend of population aging, only by choosing an old-age support method suitable for the family environment according to one's own situation can we bring better experience and feelings to the elderly themselves and their

family members.

5.2 Provide better quality old-age support services

Professional old-age support service institutions are a pure land for the elderly to spend their old age in peace, but in recent years, the reputation of the entire industry have been damaged because of the personal behavior of individual personnel. People in many ethnic and religious areas are reluctant to send the elderly to professional nursing institutions, not only because of the influence of their own ethnic and religious complexes, but also because of their worries about institutional old-age support. Young people are worried that it will be difficult for the elderly to receive meticulous care in nursing institutions, so they prefer not to trust nursing institutions. Therefore, it is appropriate to improve the market access conditions of old-age support services, and conduct full screening before old-age support service personnel enter the industry, so as to ensure that relevant service personnel have excellent professional skills and professional quality, and provide more old-age support options for the majority of the elderly population. At the same time, we will continue to increase business training to provide better old-age support services for the elderly population, and ensure that the elderly population can receive real humanistic care in religious old-age support institutions.

5.3 Improve relevant policies and regulations to promote the sustainable and healthy development of the religious old-age support industry

According to the pattern of economic and social development, we should introduce reasonable policy documents in a timely manner, and vigorously promote and encourage the combination of ethnic religious culture and old-age security system. Compared with many countries in the world with the deep integration of ethnic religious culture and modern old-age support service system, China still has deficiencies, and it is urgent to promulgate relevant laws and regulations to ensure the reasonable and orderly development of the religious old-age support industry. At present, the lag of relevant laws and regulations has hindered the deep integration of ethnic religious cultural undertakings and the old-age security industry to a certain extent, so we should combine the current situation of China's religious development to explore an innovative model of combining China's ethnic religious culture with the modern old-age service system. Under the guidance of the theory of socialist religion with Chinese characteristics, promote the legalization, standardization, and specialization of ethnic religious culture's participation in old-age support, dialectically view the role of religious culture in social services, and actively explore religious participation in old-age support services.

6　Conclusion

In May 2015, at the Central United Front Work Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping once again proposed to "guide religions to serve the promotion of economic development, social harmony, cultural prosperity, ethnic unity, and the reunification of the motherland". Religion participating in the old-age support activities, which plays a very prominent and important role in the old-age support, solves the practical problem of insufficient old-age support resources at this stage, and makes an important contribution to promoting the improvement of the quality of old-age support services and the construction of a socialist harmonious society. China is a unified multi-ethnic country, and there are different and diverse religious and cultural beliefs, which also affect the old-age support choices of the elderly population of different nationalities to a certain extent. In response to the problems caused by the old-age support pressure of the elderly population of ethnic minorities and the difference in old-age support concepts, we should adhere to the people-oriented policy unswervingly, and at the same time give full play to the cohesive role of ethnic religious culture, and integrate ethnic religious culture into the modern old-age support service system. By promoting the deep integration between the modern old-age support model and the ethnic religious culture, we will promote the sustainable and healthy development of the modern old-age support

service system, and constantly improve and enrich the in-depth connotation of the integration of the ethnic religious culture and the modern old-age support service system. Exploring the innovative old-age support path of deep integration of ethnic religious culture and modern pension service system promotes the construction of old-age support services in ethnic minority areas and narrows the gap between different regions in the level of old-age support services on the one hand, and properly resettles the elderly population in ethnic minority areas, and explores the new model of the modern old-age support service system on the other hand, consolidating the stable situation of unity and unity of multiple ethnic groups in China, and forging the sense of community of the Chinese nation.

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