Strategies for Developing Senior-friendly Tourism Resources in Historic and Cultural Cities from the Perspective of Retirement Living
A Case Study of Practical Explorations in Xi'an

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ABSTRACT
China's population aging is accelerating, and sojourn pension has become an important growth point of the silver economy. With the advantages of cultural heritage and tourism facilities, historical and cultural cities are uniquely competitive in this field. Taking Xi'an as an example, relying on the theory of pension in sojourn, through the practice of "Qinling" inclusive special train for the elderly, Lintong living and pension pilot, silver hair economic e-commerce service center and so on, it forms a characteristic development path of "traffic problem solving, policy empowerment, community extension". However, there are still problems such as product homogeneity, lack of professional talents, and lack of industry standards. Therefore, it is necessary to promote the integration of culture and tourism, the specialization of service supply and the integration of regional cooperation, so as to provide reference for the development of tourism suitable for the elderly in historical and cultural cities.

Keywords: *Pension in sojourn, Elderly-friendly tourism, Historical and cultural city, Silver-haired special train, Xi'an.*

1. INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2024, the number of people over the age of 60 in China has exceeded 300 million, accounting for 22% of the total population. This large-scale consumer group is profoundly reshaping the tourism market pattern. According to the data of the National Aging Committee, the number of silver-haired tourists accounts for more than 20% of the total number of tourists in the country, and has become one of the fastest growing track in the cultural tourism industry. [1] In this context, the traditional sightseeing tourism has been difficult to meet the increasingly diverse needs of the elderly. A new type of business that integrates "pension" and "tourism" — pension in sojourn is accelerating.

"The sojourn in pension refers to the elderly travel and live in areas other than the permanent residence area. The single sojourn time is more than 15 days, and they enjoy a variety of old-age services in the process of sojourn." [2] Unlike short-term tourism, sojourn and old-age care emphasizes "slow rhythm, deep experience, and companionship". The elderly are no longer tourists, but quasi-residents who are briefly "living" at the destination. This model is in line with the transformation of the concept of the new generation of elderly groups (mainly "post-60s" and "post-70s") from "old-age care" to "old-age enjoyment", and its self-pleasing attributes are increasingly apparent. According to the data of the State Administration of Taxation, in the first half of 2025, the sales revenue of elderly tourism services, sports health services and cultural and recreational activities increased by 26.2%, 23.9% and 20.7% respectively, which confirmed this trend. [3]

Due to its unique cultural endowment, mature tourism facilities and high city reputation, the historical and cultural city occupies a natural advantage in the pension in sojourn market. As a world-famous historical city and the first batch of national tourism demonstration areas, Xi'an has 5A-

level scenic spots such as Emperor Qin Shihuang's Mausoleum Museum and Huaqing Palace, as well as rich historical and cultural heritage and hot spring resources. In recent years, Xi'an has carried out a series of innovative explorations in the field of tourism suitable for the elderly. From the opening of the "Qinling" inclusive special train for the elderly, to the selection of Lintong District as a provincial pilot for pension in sojourn, and then to the community practice of Yinfa Economic E-commerce Service Center, a tourism development path suitable for the elderly with Xi'an characteristics has been initially formed. The purpose of this paper is to systematically sort out the practical exploration of Xi'an, analyze its effectiveness and shortcomings, and propose optimization strategies to provide reference for the aging transformation of similar historical and cultural cities.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The Concept Connotation and Type of Pension in Sojourn

According to Cheng Yong, a scholar, pension in sojourn is essentially a kind of holiday tourism for the elderly, which is a kind of tourism activity without mixing work, settlement, immigration and other purposes in a foreign country. [2] The "Evaluation Criteria for Sojourn Aged Care Service Institutions" issued in 2015 gives a more operational definition. Pension in sojourn means that the elderly travel and live in areas other than their usual residence. The single sojourn time is more than 15 days, and they enjoy a variety of elderly-friendly services in the process of sojourn.

According to the development model and path, the academic community summarizes the living and old-age care into three types: the first is the migratory bird type, that is, the elderly migrate according to the seasonal changes “winter south summer north”, with the main purpose of avoiding cold and summer; the second is the rural type, relying on rural ecological resources and slow-paced life to attract the elderly to live for a long time; the third is the round-trip type, which takes tourism trains, cruise ships and other means of transportation as the carrier to realize multi-city joint tours. [2] Xi'an's “Qinling” special train is a typical travel-type residential pension product, while the pilot exploration in Lintong District has both migratory and rural characteristics.

2.2 The Core Characteristics and Demand Turn of Pension in Sojourn

Compared with the traditional elderly tourism, the pension in sojourn shows three core characteristics.

The first is to stay for a long time, and make in-depth consumption. When a sojourner stays for more than 15 days, his consumption is no longer limited to tickets and catering, but extends to accommodation, medical care, health care, cultural experience and other fields, which has a more significant economic pulling effect on the destination. From January to November 2025, the number of sojourners in Yunnan Province reached 4.9833 million, and the proportion of housing purchases by groups outside the province reached 32.8 %, which fully shows that the “retention” of sojourners can be transformed into economic increment. [3]

The second is to experience from sightseeing to immersive life. Sojourners are no longer satisfied with the “check-in” attractions, but hope to deeply feel the climate, environment, culture and community atmosphere of the destination through college courses for the elderly, community cultural activities, volunteer services and other ways. This means that the sojourn products need to go beyond the primary mode of "living + sightseeing" and upgrade to the composite function of "cultural experience + health management + social participation".

The third is to socialize with interest to strengthen emotional connection. Sojourn enables the elderly to break through the acquaintance social circle of their original place of residence and form an interesting social network with rich emotional support at the destination. With common interests or mutual needs as a link, through the formation of dance teams, Tai Chi groups and other interest communities, they can establish close contact, effectively alleviate loneliness.

From the perspective of demand side, the new generation of elderly people has a high level of education and solid material accumulation. Its definition of old age life has gone beyond simple material satisfaction and turned to multi-dimensional value integration such as leisure vacation, cultural experience, group social interaction and health preservation. [3] This requires the supply of sojourn products to change from “have or not” to “good or not”, and to realize

the cross-border integration of medicine, nursing, health, culture and tourism.

2.3 The Suitability of the Development of Historical and Cultural Cities for Pension in Sojourn

The development of old-age care in historical and cultural cities has three advantages.

The first is the deep experience value of cultural resources. The famous historical and cultural city has rich cultural heritage, historical blocks and folk traditions, which can provide immersive cultural experience scenes for travelers to meet their spiritual and cultural needs. As some researchers have pointed out, the key to the transformation of cultural resources is to link the historical heritage with the emotional needs of the elderly, so as to realize the leap from "static display" to "emotional resonance".

The second is the mature supporting foundation of tourism facilities. Historical and cultural cities usually have relatively perfect transportation, accommodation, catering and other tourism infrastructure, as well as high urban service level, which can provide a good base for aging transformation.

The third is the natural attraction of city brand. The popularity and reputation of the historical and cultural city itself is an important market appeal, which helps to attract non-local sojourners. Lintong District of Xi'an has been selected as a provincial-level residential pension pilot, which is inseparable from the brand effect of its “world heritage site” and “national global tourism demonstration area”. [4]

Based on the above analysis, this paper systematically investigates the development of tourism resources for the elderly in Xi'an from three aspects: policy drive, product innovation and service extension.

3. PRACTICAL EXPLORATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ELDERLY-FRIENDLY TOURISM RESOURCES IN XI'AN

3.1 Policy-driven: Top-level Design and Pilot Guidance

The development of tourism for the elderly in Xi'an benefits from the policy advance and systematic planning at the level of Shaanxi Province. In 2024, Shaanxi Province issued a “Notice on Several Measures to Promote the Healthy Development of the Pension in Sojourn Industry”, and issued a series of policy measures on increasing capital investment, implementing record registration management, building a living demonstration area, and establishing an information platform for the pension in sojourn industry. [5] Subsequently, the “Notice on Promoting the Pilot Work of Pension in Sojourn” was issued, and the pilot work of pension in sojourn was officially launched.

In October 2025, 16 counties (districts), such as Lintong District of Xi'an City and Fengxian County of Baoji City, were selected as the first batch of provincial pilot units for sojourn and old-age care, with a pilot period of two years. [4] The pilot requires a clear breakthrough in nine key areas such as elderly-friendly transformation, medical support improvement, and professional talent training, and a "road map" for the development of industrial norms. [5] The selection of Lintong District is based on its unique resource endowment: as the first national global tourism demonstration area, it has 1 world cultural heritage, six national key cultural relics protection units, and two 5A-level scenic spots, with an average annual reception of more than 10 million tourists; at the same time, the hot spring resources are rich, with 10 hot spring sanatoriums and 547 medical institutions at all levels. [4] This compound advantage of "culture + hot spring + medical treatment" has laid a solid foundation for the healthcare sojourn industry.

In the field of tourism trains, in April 2025, the Shaanxi Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism jointly issued the "Implementation Plan for Increasing the Development of Silver-haired Tourism Trains in Shaanxi Province to Promote the Development of Service Consumption", launched 12 specific measures, and clearly proposed to create a "Three Qin and Four Seasons" silver-haired tourism train product system in the province. “It is necessary to normalize the development of theme products such as Qinling Ecological Healthcare Tourism Train, Silk Road Humanistic Tourism Train, Red Classic Tourism Train, and Intangible Cultural Heritage Experience Tourism Train”. [6] The plan also proposes to provide award and subsidy support for the highly exemplary silver-haired tourism train project, and incorporate the development and operation of silver-haired tourism trains into the scope of large-scale equipment update support.

This series of policy measures has formed a promotion pattern of “provincial standard setting, city and county grasping pilot, enterprise making products”, which provides institutional guarantee for the development of Xi'an elderly-friendly tourism.

3.2 Product Innovation: The Breakthrough of “Qinling” Economic Elderly-friendly Special Train

On November 12,2025, the "Qinling" economic elderly-friendly tourism train carrying more than 500 middle-aged and elderly tourists departed from Xi'an for a 12-day trip to Hong Kong, Zhuhai and Macao. [7] This is the first economic elderly-friendly tourism train built by China Railway Xi'an Bureau Group Co., Ltd., which is a landmark breakthrough in the field of old-age tourism product innovation in Xi'an.

The “Qinling” special train upholds the concept of benefiting the people and being suitable for the elderly, and takes multiple measures to optimize travel services. On the price side, through the advantages of large-scale railway operation, the product price is adjusted and compressed under the premise of ensuring quality, and the service pursuit of “high quality but not good price” is practiced. [8] On the server side, the special train has been systematically adapted to the aging transformation, using a mixed carriage with soft and hard bedroom functions, and optimizing storage, charging, sliding doors and other facilities. The toilet has also been adapted to the habits of the elderly. [7] These detailed modifications accurately respond to the actual needs of elderly passengers.

In terms of itinerary design, the train is based on the concept of "one ticket, multiple tours, and no worries in the whole process". It connects Xiangyang, Zhanjiang and other popular tourist cities along the way, so that elderly passengers can enjoy a variety of scenery along the way. [8] The train is well adapted to the travel needs of elderly passengers. It has special leisure and entertainment carriages, equipped with chess and card facilities, launched literary and artistic performances such as Han and Tang dances and Tang wind magic, created a cultural and leisure space for travel, and created a “mobile literary and artistic salon”. [7]

In terms of service guarantee, the special train provides “full-time accompanying service”, equipped with professional tour guides, crew teams and accompanying health doctors to meet the needs of health consultation and emergency response; Xi'an Station has opened up a special entrance channel, and a special person on duty guides to help passengers enter the station. [7] As Xi'an Railway International Travel Agency marketing director Xue Xinru said, “around the actual needs of elderly passengers, we from the hardware facilities, accompanying services to travel arrangements and other aspects of a comprehensive optimization, so that the ‘old man at ease, the family at ease’.” [7] This mode of “getting out of the car to watch, getting on the car to entertain, and being accompanied throughout the journey” effectively solves the pain points of the elderly who “dare not go out, will not go out, and are inconvenient to go out”. [8]

The opening of “Qinling” marks the total number of tourism special trains opened by Xi'an Railway Bureau since this year has reached 100, and also means that the cross-border integration of “railway + cultural tourism + pension” has taken substantial steps in Xi'an. In the future, "Qinling” will be normalized and gradually expand the line network and service content.

3.3 Service Extension: Innovative Exploration of Community and E-commerce Platform

The development of tourism for the elderly needs not only the product innovation of " going out", but also the community service of "introducing in" and the platform support of "connecting up". Xi'an has also actively explored in this field.

At the community level, Lianhu District of Xi'an sends tourism services to the doorstep of the elderly through a series of activities of “Silver Age Service”. In August 2025, the Far East East Community Pension Service Station of Tumen Street held the " Building a Healthy Community and Sharing a Good Life " to serve the neighborhood culture festival for the elderly. In the event, a tourism exhibition area was specially set up to promote tourism products for the elderly in the community. [9] This "community + tourism" linkage model deeply integrates product promotion and community service, and effectively solves the problem of single access to information for the elderly. During the same period, Xiyi Community of West Ring Road Street and Social Organization organized the "Time Guardian" brain-building fun garden party, which attracted more than 150 elderly people to participate in the form of "game + science

popularization", and transmitted health knowledge in a relaxed atmosphere. These community-level “micro-services” have cultivated potential customers and created a silver-haired friendly atmosphere for tourism suitable for the elderly. [9]

In 2025, Xi'an International Port District established the city's first e-commerce center that directly serves the silver-haired group. Through online and offline linkage, with the help of market-oriented operation, the center carefully considers the needs of the elderly group, optimizes the functional area of the venue, and strives to create an activity home that meets the daily needs and nourishes the spiritual world. The innovation of this platform is that it no longer treats the elderly as passive consumers, but through the model of "first experience then consumption” and “offline social + online purchase”, it lets the elderly naturally complete the consumption transformation in social interaction. This compound format of "e-commerce + social + service” provides a new idea for the marketing of tourism products suitable for the elderly.

4. CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPMENT

Although Xi'an has made a series of innovative breakthroughs in the development of elderly-friendly tourism, it still faces many challenges compared with the requirements of high-quality development of pension in sojourn.

4.1 Product Homogeneity and Single Consumption Scene

From a national perspective, most sojourn projects still focus on the primary mode of "living + sightseeing", and product homogenization competition is serious. Most of the operating entities superimpose some residential pension products in their main business, fail to fully combine the local natural and cultural resources for refined operation, and loosely connect cultural experience, health management, social interaction and other links. [3] The situation in Xi'an is also not optimistic: although the “Qinling” special train has achieved an aging breakthrough in the transportation link, the cultural experience of the destination is still dominated by traditional sightseeing, lacking the deep excavation of the spiritual needs of the elderly group; although the hot spring resources in Lintong District are rich, most hot spring hotels still remain in the single function of “soaking in hot spring”, failing to deeply integrate with health care services such as traditional Chinese medicine physiotherapy and health testing, and there is a gap compared with the leading healthcare destinations in China.

4.2 Shortcomings of Professional Talents and Service Supply

The key to pension service is talent, and the competition of pension service is the competition of talents. [2] Living in the elderly has put forward higher requirements for the compound ability of service personnel: it is necessary to master the professional knowledge of geriatric psychology and chronic disease management, and to have multiple skills such as tourism service and cultural explanation. However, the current imbalance in the structure of employees is prominent, and there is a huge gap between professional nursing staff and housekeepers. [3]

From the practice of Xi'an, the “Qinling” train is equipped with accompanying health care doctors, but such a configuration is difficult to cover all tourism products suitable for the elderly; the service personnel of the community pension service site are mostly from the traditional community work field, and lack of systematic elderly service training; the operation team of the e-commerce service center is good at business operation, but the grasp of the physiological and psychological characteristics of the elderly needs to be deepened. Studies have shown that the lack of professional talents directly leads to uneven service levels, which has become an important factor for some elderly groups not to choose sojourn for old-age care. [2]

The deeper problem lies in professional identity and salary. The compound requirements for service personnel are high, while the occupational prestige and salary level of the aging-friendly professional service personnel are low, and the occupational attraction is insufficient. [3] In 2025, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People 's Republic of China issued the "Implementation Opinions of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security on Accelerating the Identification of Vocational Skill Levels for Skilled Personnel in Elderly Care Services". By the end of the "15th Five-Year Plan", the proportion of elderly care workers who have obtained vocational skill level certificates has reached more than 80%. [3] The policy orientation is clear, but it will take time to implement.

4.3 Industry Standards and Cross-sectoral Governance Problems

The industry of pension in sojourn involves many fields such as accommodation, catering, health care, medical care, and community services, and it is difficult to formulate industry standards. Although Shaanxi Province has issued a pilot work document for residential care for the elderly, the standards in terms of qualification audit, service process, and safety responsibilities still need to be refined. It is difficult for local standards to recognize each other, hindering the cooperation and business development of service agencies in different places.

The industry regulatory boundary is also vague. The civil affairs department is in charge of the pension business, the cultural and tourism department is responsible for the tourism business, and the tourism industry has both attributes. The traditional block management model easily leads to governance vacuum and service breakpoints. For example, the medical insurance reimbursement problem of sojourners in the destination, although there is a policy direction, there are still obstacles in practice; in terms of community participation, the identity of sojourners between tourists and residents makes it difficult for them to deeply participate in community affairs. [3]

In addition, from the perspective of industrial ecology, the healthcare sojourn industry is facing the challenge of "involution". He Chengbi, who has been engaged in the health care and living industry for many years, said frankly: “The demand of the elderly group is actually very strong, but the impact of consumption downgrade is more obvious, and the number of health care institutions and travel agencies entering the bureau is increasing. The market competition is extremely fierce, and the ‘involution’ situation is very prominent.” [5] This vicious competition directly compresses the profit space of enterprises, and in the long run, it is more likely to lead to a decline in service quality and damage the elderly consumer experience.

5. OPTIMIZATION STRATEGIES AND PATH SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Immersive Integration of Culture and Tourism: from “Static Display” to “Emotional Resonance”

The key to crack the homogenization of products is to transform historical and cultural resources into immersive products that can be experienced, participated and resonated. Drawing on Chinese advanced experience, Ningbo proposes to create a "nostalgia +" immersive experience chain. By constructing a "global root-seeking memory" product system and activating the IP carrier of "Shanghai Grandma's Home", the scattered historical memory is connected in series into an experiential tourism route. [1] Xi'an also has rich historical and cultural resources, which can explore the following paths:

The first is the development of “Tang Culture Immersion Sojourn” products. Relying on the Tang Dynasty sites such as Daming Palace and Huaqing Palace, the people there designed one-day and three-day residence products of “Tang Clothing Experience + Tang Dining Appreciation + Tang Music Appreciation”, so that elderly sojourners can deeply experience the Tang culture in role-playing. We can learn from the IP development experience of “Liu Sanjie's hometown” in Yizhou District of Guangxi, integrate intangible cultural heritage elements into the wellness experience, and create thematic products such as “intangible cultural heritage workshop + longevity diet”. [10]

The second is to develop a “Tracing the Origins of Zhou and Qin Civilizations” itinerary. In collaboration with Baoji and other regions rich in Zhou and Qin culture, design a cultural tourism package featuring “bronze artifact appreciation + Zhou ritual experiences + recitation of the ‘Book of Songs’” to meet the spiritual needs of the elderly in tracing the origins of Chinese civilization.

The third is to create a “Starting Point of the Silk Road” nostalgia tour. Targeting the elderly population in Northwest China, we have designed a “Silk Road Starting Point—Xi’an” nostalgia-themed itinerary that connects Silk Road heritage sites such as the Tang West Market and the Small Wild Goose Pagoda. By incorporating oral history interviews and exhibitions of vintage photographs, this itinerary aims to evoke collective memories and emotional resonance among the elderly.

5.2 Specialization of Service Supply: Talent Cultivation and Standard Construction

In view of the shortcomings of professional talents, it is necessary to make efforts from three aspects: training, certification and incentive.

In the training link, local colleges and universities and vocational colleges are encouraged to set up residence and pension-related majors, and a “school-enterprise cooperation” directional training mechanism is established. We can learn from the experience of cooperation between Yizhou District of Guangxi and Guangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the development of homologous products of medicine and food,[10] promote the cooperation between universities and medical institutions in Xi'an, and cultivate compound talents who understand both traditional Chinese medicine health and tourism services.

In the certification link, it is necessary to implement the national requirements for the identification of the vocational skill level of skilled personnel in pension service, establish a special ability certification system for living in old-age care, and promote the certification of service personnel.

In the incentive link, there is a must to improve the salary and social recognition of the elderly living in the pension practitioners, explore the mechanism of “skill level and salary linkage”, and enhance the attractiveness of the profession.

In terms of standard construction, we should promote the formulation of local standards such as grading standards, service quality standards, and aging-friendly facilities configuration standards for pension in sojourn institutions, and explore mutual recognition of standards with other pilot counties (districts) in the province to lay the foundation for cross-regional cooperation.

5.3 Integration of Regional Cooperation: Building an Ecological Circle of Pension in Sojourn

To solve cross-sectoral governance problems and industry “involution”, it is necessary to promote coordinated development from the regional level.

The first is to establish a “Guanzhong Plain Living Pension Collaboration System”. We can collaborate with cities in the Guanzhong region — such as Baoji, Xianyang, and Weinan — to integrate cultural resources from the Zhou and Qin dynasties, the Han and Tang dynasties, and folk traditions, and launch a “Guanzhong Grand Loop” travel and retirement pass to facilitate the sharing of tourist traffic, mutual recognition of standards, and complementary services.

The second is to deepen the coordination mechanism of “railway + cultural tourism + civil affairs”. On the basis of the successful operation of the “Qinling” special train, we will further promote the settlement of medical insurance in different places and the boarding of medical institutions, and build the special train as a “mobile healthcare station”. The local government can will implement the requirements of the “Implementation Plan for Promoting Service Consumption Development by Developing Silver-haired Tourism Trains in Shaanxi Province”, promote the full coverage of barrier-free channels in scenic spots above 4A level, and add elderly rest areas, portable oxygen supply points, large-type signs and other aging facilities. [6]

The third is to build a information sharing platform for pension in sojourn. It can integrate the data of cultural tourism, civil affairs, health and other departments, establish the information database of health records, service evaluation and demand preference of sojourners, and provide data support for accurate matching of products and optimization of service supply. Shaanxi Province has started the construction of the information platform for the elderly care industry, [5] Xi'an should take the lead in access, first try.

5.4 In-depth Integration of Communities: Transforming Sojourners from "Passers-by" to "Residents"

To solve the problem of community integration of sojourners, it is necessary to innovate the community governance model.

On the one hand, it is to establish a “sojourner station”. A special service window is set up in the community where the sojourners are concentrated to provide information services such as policy consultation, health management and cultural activities, and to assist the sojourners to handle temporary registration, medical insurance settlement and other affairs.

On the other hand, it is to design the “silver-haired community mentor” program. It is necessary to encourage sojourners with expertise to participate in community volunteer services, such as teaching calligraphy, guiding horticulture, and

sharing life stories, so that sojourners can gain a sense of value in dedication and promote the integration of subject and object. This is in line with the emotional needs of pension in sojourn: the elderly group is not only the object of service, but also the creator of value.

6. CONCLUSION

As a new form of integrated development of "pension + tourism", sojourn pension is reshaping the industrial pattern of silver-haired economy. Due to its unique cultural endowment and mature tourism supporting facilities, historical and cultural cities have natural advantages on this track. The practice of Xi'an shows that the development of tourism suitable for the elderly can go out of a characteristic path of "traffic problem solving, policy empowerment and community extension". The inclusive products for the elderly, represented by the “Qinling” special train, solve the travel problems of the elderly through systematic aging transformation; the policy guidance represented by the pilot project in Lintong District defines the road map for the development of industrial norms; the community exploration represented by the e-commerce service center of silver hair economy opens up the “last kilometer” of service.

However, compared with the requirements of high-quality development of pension in sojourn, Xi'an still faces challenges such as product homogeneity, shortage of professional talents, lack of industry standards, and insufficient community integration. In the future, it is necessary to promote the integration of culture and tourism to the upgrading of immersion, from “static display” to “emotional resonance”; it is also necessary to promote the supply of services to specialization, from “service” to “professional service”; we can also promote regional cooperation to expand to integration, from "single point breakthrough" to "ecological co-construction". Only in this way can the cultural ' family background ' of the historical and cultural city be truly transformed into the perceived, experienced and treasured living quality of the silver-haired group, so as to realize the comfort and comfort of the elderly group.

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