

'Getting old before getting rich' is usually regarded as one of most important features of the population ageing phenomenon in China. This phrase usually refers to the fact that 7% of the population has reached the age of 65 and above, whereas the economy is not yet fully developed, the process of industrialisation has yet to be completed, and not everyone in the country is living in comfort. Consequently, the country has entered prematurely into an ageing society. We need to demonstrate the phenomenon in a systematic way.

### I. Is China getting 'old'?

The attribute 'old' in the phrase 'getting rich before getting old' refers to the Chinese population structure which is becoming an ageing type. To determine whether the population is ageing, common measurement criteria are: the proportion of the elderly to the entire population, the proportion of children to the entire population, the ratio of the elderly to children, as well as the age median. For China, according to this index system, these four values indicate that the age-structure of the Chinese population is already becoming an ageing type, that is to say that it is 'already old'.

### II. Is China 'not yet rich'?

1. In comparison with the level of socio-economic development in developed countries: based on criteria such as per capita GNP, degree of industrialisation and urbanisation, social security, and the fact that China is becoming an ageing society with a level of socio-economic development below that of developed countries, China is indeed 'getting old before getting rich'.

2. In comparison with the level of socio-economic development in South Korea: both China and South Korea are developing countries but South Korea had an advanced economy before becoming an ageing society. If we observe, either that country's per capita GNP, the per capita GNP calculated by purchasing power parity (PPP); or the degree of its urbanisation, industrialisation and social security, we can say that South Korea belongs to the category of 'getting rich before getting old', while China is just the opposite.

3. In comparison with the average global economic level: whether calculated by per capita GNP, GNP per PPP or GNI1 per capita, the characteristics of the phenomenon 'getting old before getting rich' in China are strikingly prominent.

4. In comparison with developing countries: developing countries like South Korea are 'getting rich before getting old', others like Brazil are 'rich but not old', five developing countries including India and Indonesia are 'neither rich nor old'. Only China is 'getting old before getting rich', a feature that is very 'Chinese' indeed.

### III. Reasons for the phenomenon of 'getting old before getting rich'

1. Under the circumstances of an under-developed economy as well as incomplete industrialisation and urbanization, China is becoming an ageing society.

2. The fertility rate has dropped to a lower level within a short period of time.

3. The ageing phenomenon has emerged under the double effect of socio-economic development and birth control policies (and especially under the influence of the latter). It is not a process of natural development.

#### IV. Employing the concept of 'getting old before getting rich'

1. The phenomenon is a relative concept which is postulated from the basis of comparison of the levels of socio-economic development between developed and developing countries which are ageing.

2. The expression shows basic features of the ageing phenomenon in the country: 'getting old before getting rich' objectively reflects the relationship between the ageing phenomenon in contemporary China and its economic level. It will continue to correspond to the realities in the country in the coming years.

3. The phrase serves as a reminder: 'getting old before getting rich' calls constant attention to current situations of the country as we try to resolve various problems concerning population ageing. On this basis we must therefore institute a system and policies that will be stamped as "Chinese" and correspond to the country's level of socio-economic development and be adapted to the realities of the country.

4. The phenomenon of 'getting old before getting rich' is also incremental: along with continuous socio-economic development and an increase in the country's overall national prosperity, an 'old and yet not rich' China will eventually turn to be both 'old and 'rich'.