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# The Practice Process and Deep Logic of China's Delayed Retirement System Reform

**Yuheng Zhu***

Law and Politics College, Liaoning Normal University, Dalian 116081, Liaoning, China

***Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.***



**Abstract:** The Chinese delayed retirement system has undergone a long period of exploration and improvement, focusing on the balance between flexibility and rigidity and the pursuit of equality. Amid current pressures from population development, reviewing the history of China's delayed retirement system reform, grasping the deep logic of institutional change, and summarizing practical experience are of great help to social governance work. This study combines policy documents related to the retirement system issued by the Party and the government since the founding of the People's Republic of China and divides the process of China's delayed retirement system reform into five stages: the initial and rigid formation stage, the stage of system improvement and local flexibility exploration, the stage of social security transformation and the emergence of flexibility, the stage of top-level design and policy deliberation, and the stage of full implementation and system stabilization. It finds that the institutional evolution shows a trend of weakening coercion and strengthening voluntariness, revealing the deep logic of institutional construction and the system demands involved, the response to the development of the times and social adaptation, and the necessary measures to overcome local institutional defects. This study attempts to provide marginal contributions to the current national retirement system reform.

**Keywords:** Delayed retirement; System reform; Practice history; Deep logic

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## 1. Introduction

Delayed retirement refers to the situation where, under the condition of meeting the legal working years, individuals take active or passive measures to extend their working years and thus retire at a later age. The policy of delayed retirement in China has gone through a process from proposal to discussion, then from consideration to extensive solicitation of opinions from all parties, and has finally become an important measure in China's population structure reform and social governance work. Looking back at history, in 1950, the Financial and Economic Committee of the State Council issued the "Notice on Retirement Procedures for Retirees", establishing the first mandatory retirement age framework in the country. It stipulated that regardless of gender, occupational nature, or physical condition, as long as a worker reaches the age of 50 and has 10 years of work experience, they can retire. By 2024, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress passed the "Decision on Implementing the Gradual Delay of the Legal Retirement Age", stipulating that, based on the legal age, taking into account the choices of individuals and enterprises, there are standards for delayed retirement with fluctuating periods. The delayed retirement system in China has gradually shown characteristics of reform from being universal to specific, from pilot to promotion, and from mandatory to voluntary. Since the new era, China's population development trend has entered a new stage. The inertia of population growth has continuously decreased, the concept of fertility has changed, and the fertility rate has declined. The initial signs of population aging and negative population growth have emerged. Facing new population structure issues, implementing a delayed retirement system with Chinese-style modernization characteristics is a key task for the Party and the government to improve the efficiency of human resource utilization and maintain long-term social stability in the current and future periods. Therefore, reviewing the practical process of the delayed retirement reform of the Party and the government, exploring the deep logic of the reform, is not only a comprehensive summary of the delayed retirement reform process but also a foundation for the experience of achieving "small steps, flexible implementation, classified promotion, and overall consideration" in future delayed retirement work.

## 2. The practice process of China's delayed retirement system reform

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, although China's social contradictions and governance models have undergone several changes, doing a good job in retirement affairs and ensuring the basic rights and demands of the elderly population have always been a main thread in the government's social governance work. Whether during the planned economy period or the reform and opening-up period, the Communist Party of China and the government have always placed doing a good job in the delayed retirement work in an important position. The top-level design and application of policies related to the delayed retirement system have been constantly adjusted in line with social development and changes in the population structure. Therefore, to some extent, it can be said that the reform process of China's delayed retirement system and the country's development have been going hand in hand.

### 2.1. The initial and rigid formation period (1950–1978)

Historically, the design and implementation of China's delayed retirement system have been closely linked to the social mode of labor production and the supply-demand relationship of the workforce. In the early years after the founding of the People's Republic, under Mao Zedong's leadership, the gradual realization of socialist industrialization was achieved through the implementation of the "First Five-Year Plan," leading to the establishment of a relatively comprehensive industrial system in China. This not only provided a material foundation for the subsequent phase of social development in China but also created a favorable social environment for the design and discussion of the retirement system [1]. Given the nation's need to rebuild from scratch and the limited scale of the workforce, there was an urgent demand for an institutionalized, large-scale, and stable labor force to rapidly adapt to industrialization and meet the fundamental requirements of restoring social production [2]. Therefore, establishing a scientifically sound retirement system became essential for ensuring production efficiency and achieving effective labor management in the early post-independence period. Notably, in 1958, the "Provisional Regulations of the State Council on the Handling of Retirement for Workers and Employees" standardized retirement systems across enterprises, government agencies, and public institutions nationwide. Characterized by broad coverage, standardized benefits, and well-defined regulations, these provisions became the foundational framework for China's mandatory retirement system during its initial years. Therefore, this paper argues that the period from 1950 to 1957 represents the initial stage of the retirement system, during which China had not yet established a unified legal concept of the retirement system. The period from 1958 to 1978 constitutes the phase of rigid institutionalization of the retirement system. Together, these two phases contributed to the formation of the compulsory retirement system in the early years of the People's Republic of China, with its content primarily characterized by mandatory provisions. Although they belong to the same historical period, the retirement system and the delayed retirement system differ significantly in terms of content and operational mechanisms. The primary role during this period was to establish and implement the retirement system. First, during the initial stage (1950–1957), policy design evolved from general to specific approaches, gradually addressing the interests of special groups and reflecting consideration for individual workers' circumstances. The 1950 "Notice on Retirement Measures for Retirees" did not account for factors such as gender or occupation; individuals could retire simply by meeting the required criteria. While this regulation aligned with the social realities of the early Republic, its rigid framework overlooked the needs of special groups. To demonstrate policy sensitivity and accommodate these interests, the 1955 "Retirement Measures for State Organs" introduced distinctions between male and female retirement ages and emphasized special treatment for individuals who had lost their capacity for work. This regulation further enhanced the flexibility of retirement provisions. Second, during the rigid institutionalization phase (1958–1978), national retirement regulations were further refined, with increased mandatory enforcement, and some provisions have been retained to this day, serving as key markers of the system's finalization. The 1958 "Interim Provisions of the State Council on Work and Employee Retirement Management" further consolidated the 1955 "Retirement Regulations for State Organs," standardizing retirement rules for employees across enterprises, government agencies, and public institutions nationwide. In 1962, the State Council issued the "Supplementary Provisions on Retiring Bourgeois Industrialists and Merchants," which clearly defined retirement ages for staff in state-owned and public-private joint ventures, expanding policy coverage significantly. By 1978, the State Council's "Interim Measures for Worker Retirement and Resignation" and "Interim Measures for Placing Elderly, Weak, Ill, or Disabled Officials" explicitly set retirement ages at 60 for male officials, 55 for female officials, and 50 for female employees—ages that could be adjusted for those working in specialized occupations or having lost labor capacity. These retirement standards have remained largely unchanged to this day, serving as the fundamental framework for China's retirement system and establishing its core structure.

## 2.2. Period of system improvement and partial elasticity exploration (1979–1990)

The reform and opening-up policy injected tremendous impetus into the socialist construction efforts. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, special economic zones were established, economic belts were delineated, and regions with certain conditions were encouraged to develop first. The state provided development guarantees for emerging industries through means such as capital investment, policy support, and technical guidance. At this time, China explored a series of retirement methods that were compatible with the socialist market-oriented reform based on the existing institutional framework, and presented three aspects: retirement determination, overall planning pilot, and elasticity exploration. This period was the improvement period of the planned economy retirement system and also the elasticity exploration period of social security in the socialist market economy. At this time, the elasticity exploration was not an attempt to modify the retirement age, but focused on the reform of the social security system, aiming to achieve an elastic adjustment of the social security system from unit guarantee to social security. In the retirement determination aspect, in 1980, Deng Xiaoping clearly proposed the establishment of a cadre retirement system and at the subsequent 11th Central Committee's Fifth Plenary Session, he proposed the abolition of the lifelong system for cadre leadership positions. Under the guidance of the Party's policies, in 1982, the Central Committee made the "Decision on Establishing the Retirement System for Cadres", classifying them by administrative ranks and stipulating their corresponding retirement ages, clarifying the retirement benefits for cadres. This decision improved the existing retirement policies while ensuring the mobility and scientificity of the personnel structure in state organs, and provided a system basis for the alternation of new and old cadres. In the overall planning pilot aspect, in 1984, the social pooling pilot was initiated, opening the curtain on the reform of the basic old-age insurance system for urban employees. From 1984 to 1987, the Party and the government mainly made clear plans for the establishment, operation, and management of social insurance institutions, and at this time, the retirement insurance gradually transformed from unit insurance to social old-age insurance pooling. In 1985, the Ministry of Labor and Personnel issued the "Opinions on Doing a Good Job in the Management of the Pooling of Retirement Funds and Services for Retirees" requiring localities to establish social insurance institutions and uniformly collect, manage, and distribute retirement funds, promoting the transformation of enterprise protection to social pooling protection, and balancing the burden of enterprises. Correspondingly, in the following years, the Party and the government successively introduced supporting policies to ensure the smooth operation of social insurance institutions. For example, in 1986, the State Council issued the "Notice on Strengthening the Collection and Management of Old-Age Insurance Funds", requiring labor contract workers to be compulsorily insured, and enterprises and individuals to pay according to different proportions of the total salary. In 1987, the Ministry of Labor and Personnel issued the "Notice on Establishing the Centralized Management Committee for Retirement Expenses at All Levels", requiring all localities to manage the pooling of retirement expenses uniformly, opening the precedent for the establishment of social insurance management institutions at all levels. From 1984 to 1987, the quantitative management of retirement expenses and the establishment of the social pooling pilot successively became the core content of the elasticity exploration stage. Under the guidance of the central policy documents, local Party and government authorities actively carried out pilot construction work, focusing on promoting the orderly development of social insurance work, and providing economic security for the retirement system of our country. By 1990, the Ministry of Labor and Personnel issued the "Notice on Strengthening the Collection and Management of Old-Age Insurance Funds," further emphasizing the principles of fund collection, dedicated account use, and dedicated funds use, and strictly prohibiting misappropriation. The release of this notice marked the completion of the transition from unit guarantee to social security preparation.

### 2.3. Social security transformation and the emergence of flexibility (1991–2012)

The period from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century was a comprehensive construction and deepening stage of the socialist market economy system. In 1992, the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly established the socialist market economy system, completely ending the debate between planning and market, and the country officially shifted to the goal of market economy reform. During this period, old-age insurance also changed from the planned economy's "unit guarantee" to the market economy's "social security" as the development model underwent profound changes. At the same time, the trend of population aging became apparent, the number of eligible workers increased, and the pressure on pensions rose, forcing the issue of delayed retirement to surface. The idea of flexibility and local pilot programs emerged simultaneously. Therefore, the overall social characteristics and institutional design direction from 1991 to 2012 jointly constituted the period of social security transformation and the emergence of flexibility for the country's delayed retirement system. During the period of institutional improvement and local flexibility adjustments, the country had basically determined the basic direction and content of social security reform. After a long period of preparatory pilot work, by the end of 1991, a total of over 2,900 provincial, municipal, and county-level social insurance management institutions had been established across the country, with more than 25,000 full-time social insurance staff, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent national social security transformation work. In 1991, the State Council issued the "Decision on the Reform of Enterprise Employees' Old-Age Insurance System", establishing a three-party contribution system for old-age insurance, marking the completion of the transition from "unit guarantee" to "social security" and laying the institutional groundwork for subsequent adjustments to old-age pressure, retirement age, and the establishment of multi-pillar pension systems. In 2000, China officially entered the aging society, and the degree of aging continued to deepen. Therefore, actively adapting to the population development situation and making full use of and developing human capital became the background of China's delayed retirement reform in the early 21st century. Facing issues such as the extension of average life expectancy and the delay in entering the working age due to the popularization of basic education, China began to explore the flexible retirement system. The precedent of China's flexible retirement policy can be traced back to the "Notice on the Retirement Age of Female Cadres at County (Department) Level and Above" issued by the Organization Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1992, which stated that female cadres at the above-level positions could retire at the same age (60 years old) as men under their own will. This notice initiated the precedent of flexible retirement. After a long period of policy implementation and institutional adjustment, the "Social Security 'Twelfth Five-Year Plan Outline" of the State Council in 2012 first proposed "researching the policy of gradually delaying the age of receiving pensions" in the country's future planning, and "flexible delayed retirement" subsequently officially rose to a national-level reform topic. In the same year, the Ministry of Human

Resources and Social Security clearly stated at the regular press conference that “delayed retirement is an inevitable trend”, proposing the three principles of “small steps, differentiated promotion, and voluntary choice”, and subsequently forming a complete policy framework.

## 2.4. Top-level design and policy molding period (2013-2024)

After 2013, the number of eligible working-age people aged 18 to 60 in China was 920 million, and the number was gradually decreasing. The number of people participating in basic old-age insurance and basic medical insurance in that year was 840 million and 600 million, respectively[3]. The social old-age situation became increasingly severe, and the pressure on pensions gradually increased. The call for delayed retirement and the development and utilization of elderly human resources, from academic discussion to a major national livelihood guarantee issue, became increasingly strong. The 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China’s Third Plenary Session of 2013 first clearly proposed “researching the policy of gradually delaying the retirement age”, incorporating delayed retirement into the national reform agenda and establishing the basic principle of “gradualism”, laying the groundwork for subsequent flexibility adjustments in the context of delayed retirement. In 2015, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed in its “Proposal on Formulating the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development” that “a progressive policy for delaying the retirement age should be introduced”, requiring the formulation and implementation of the policy plan to be completed from 2016 to 2020. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security clarified the schedule for formulating the policy plan at the press conference of the Two Sessions in the same year, with the principle being “small steps and slow progress, postponing several months each year”. In 2020, in the “Proposal on Formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Term Goals for 2035”, the Central Committee clearly stated, “to implement the progressive delay of the legal retirement age”. The following year, at the Fourth Session of the 13th National People’s Congress, the “Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Term Goals for 2025” was formally adopted, officially establishing the four implementation principles of “small step adjustment, flexible implementation, classified promotion, and overall consideration” for the flexible retirement system in our country, and incorporating modernization factors such as average life expectancy, education years, and labor structure into the consideration scope of the conditions for delaying retirement. The entire process from the research and formulation of the “13th Five-Year Plan” to the implementation of the policy in the “14th Five-Year Plan” reflects the strict implementation procedures of the Party and the government, such as formulating plans, conducting research, proposing plans, and measuring public opinion. This also means that the progressive delay of the retirement age system in our country has achieved a rapid leap from proposal to implementation. In 2024, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress passed the “Decision on Implementing the Progressive Delay of the Legal Retirement Age”, deciding to postpone the retirement age gradually in a steady manner over the next 15 years, and further elaborating on basic pensions, medical care and elderly care integration, and elderly employment work. This decision, in the form of formal legislation, marks the conclusion and implementation of the design and policy formulation period of China’s delayed retirement system, and creates a favorable situation for the comprehensive implementation and finalization of the national delayed retirement policy and the system design period.

## 2.5. Full Implementation and System Consolidation Period (2025–now)

The “Decision on Implementing the Gradual Delay of the Legal Retirement Age” clearly stipulates that it will be officially implemented on January 1, 2025. Besides making gradual adjustments to the retirement age, it also sets out regulations for many aspects related to the creation of an environment for older people to work, such as extending the pension contribution period from January 1, 2030, and allowing employees who have reached the minimum contribution period to choose to retire earlier, while also allowing them to postpone retirement based on their own will appropriately. Additionally, the country will improve pension incentive policies and vigorously implement the employment priority strategy to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of the elderly population. The realization of the goal of the delayed retirement system not only depends on the establishment of the institutional framework but is also constrained by the social development situation and whether the elderly group acts as “actual delayed retirees”. In other words, whether the delayed retirement system can operate efficiently has become a complex institutional proposition based on the premise of institutional choice, the core of behavioral decision-making, the regulatory variable of the overall social environment, and the result of policy structure effects.

On the basis of having clearly defined the implementation framework of the gradual delayed retirement system, China is establishing relevant supporting policies one after another during the full implementation and system consolidation period of the delayed retirement system, and continuously improving facilities for assisting older people and the development of elderly industries. The choice of institutional system, in addition to following the principles of “small steps adjustment, flexible implementation, classified promotion, and overall management” to carry out the delayed retirement work, China is also actively developing and improving the three pillars of pension, namely basic pension, enterprise annuity, and individual pension, which complement each other, shifting the responsibility for providing pensions from the government alone to the government, employers, and individuals sharing, so as to alleviate the pressure on government finances while ensuring that the national pension fund can accumulate fully and effectively, and achieving long-term sustainability of the social security system while alleviating the pressure of basic pension payments under the condition of population aging.

On this basis, the length of personal social security contribution and the choice of retirement time are linked, and when meeting the minimum social security contribution period, one can flexibly choose the retirement time. In terms of behavioral decision-making, with the improvement of medical and health conditions, the physical fitness and quality of life of the elderly population are constantly improving. Compared with older people with advanced age, the social participation ability and enthusiasm of the low-aged elderly population (aged 60–69) are relatively higher. Many older adults are willing to contribute to society [4]. With the arrival of the new round of technological revolution, digital technology has deeply integrated into people’s daily lives. Digital technology provides older adults with access to the external society through powerful information transmission and processing means, expanding their external environment cognition, and the improvement of the adaptability of elderly identity transformation and social development adaptation further promotes their social participation level [5]. The potential of the elderly group to participate in social construction is huge. In terms of the overall social environment, in the 14th Five-Year Plan of 2020, developing the silver economy has been elevated to the national future development focus in the field of elderly care. Under the orderly promotion of the state, the elderly industry is booming, and the living environment of the elderly group has been further improved. In addition, the iteration of the elderly care model has also provided development opportunities for the Party and government to mobilize the social participation of the elderly group. From the original single institutional elderly care to a model of home-based self-care and community mutual assistance elderly care, it has diversified the elderly care models and created a supportive and elderly-friendly social environment. In conclusion, during the full implementation and system consolidation period of the delayed retirement system in China, the state is relying on institutional choice, behavioral decision-making, and the all-round creation of the overall social environment to promote the emergence of policy structure effects.

## 3. The deep logic of China’s delayed retirement system reform

The process of China’s delayed retirement system reform has always changed along with the specific development of the country, reflecting the characteristics of the changing times and the transformation of the population structure. The initial and rigid formulation of the system in 1950 was designed to fill the gap in the retirement security policy for the working population, covering areas such as employment of workers, social security, and retirement arrangements, and taking into account the systematic needs of various interest groups. Over time, with the reform and opening up bringing about a market-oriented development model in China, the basic economic system began to change, and the types and nature of labor participation of workers showed a diversified feature. To respond to the development of the times and social changes, China's flexible retirement system began a long period of adjustment and a pilot period. During this period, the process of China's delayed retirement system reform was also a process of overcoming the limitations of the old system. Therefore, the practical journey of the Party and the government's delayed retirement system reform fully reflects the process of system construction and the system demands involved, the response to the development of the times and social changes, and the inevitable requirement of overcoming local defects of the system.

### 3.1. Content setting: System construction and systemic demands involved

In terms of system construction, a complete legal system should consist of elements such as the executive body, the target subject, the execution goal, the execution method, and the execution content. It is a system formed by multiple institutional rules following a certain institutional logic. Regarding China's delayed retirement system, the scope of the subjects, conditions and benefits, relief methods, and policy tools can all be included in the system construction [6]. Taking the scope of subjects as an example, the subjects covered by China's delayed retirement system include supervisory subjects, rights subjects, and obligation subjects. The Party committees and government departments at all levels, as the earliest supervisory subjects, are responsible for rule-making, retirement security, and execution supervision, which are closely related to the national development model in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China. After 1950, China's retirement system entered the period of initial establishment and rigid formulation. At this time, the system design was adapted to the social situation of the planned economy and a lower average life expectancy, and the retirement work was mainly regulated by the central government, with local Party committees and governments supervising. After the reform and opening up, the country underwent a historic leap from a planned economy to a socialist market economy. The number of urban employees of various enterprises began to increase, and flexible employment gradually became the mainstream trend. The management and guarantee forms relied on by the retirement system gradually shifted from "state guarantee" to "social insurance".

At this time, the service supervision subjects also showed characteristics of professionalization and refinement. The national social security management institutions and human resources management departments gradually took on service functions, but rule-making and system supervision still could not be separated from the overall control of Party committees at all levels. Secondly, the workers who have the right to retirement and have reached the retirement age are the rights subjects, and the positioning and scope determination of their role is the core issue in the design of China's delayed retirement system. The obligation subjects are the units and individuals with the obligation to contribute. It is worth noting that the definition of the obligation subjects in China's delayed retirement system and the change of the supervisory subjects are consistent with the initial unified responsibility of the state to a gradual division of responsibility among the state, enterprises, and individuals. The content of the scope of subjects, conditions and benefits, relief methods, and policy tools continuously shows diversified characteristics during the process of socialist construction, which also promotes the improvement of China's delayed retirement system construction.

In terms of system-related aspects, after discussing and analyzing the content of the system itself, the country still needs to consider the logical relationship between the delayed retirement system and other systems to reflect further the structural and overall nature of China's delayed retirement system. To facilitate the distinction between the delayed retirement system and its logical relationship, this study divides the delayed retirement system-related aspects into direct and indirect aspects. The direct concerns mainly include work related to the termination of labor relations, pension security and retirement care and rehabilitation services, which are all related to the interests of retired individuals and those approaching retirement. The termination of labor relations, as a legal act, involves workers beginning to enjoy the legally prescribed basic pension benefits and choosing to terminate their labor contracts with the employer upon reaching the legal retirement age. This is an important prerequisite for the country to delay retirement. However, the termination of labor relations has a clear distinction before and after the reform and opening up. During the planned economy period, the termination of labor relations for workers was mainly regulated by the state through mandatory regulations. In the socialist market economy era, there has been a gradual popularization of the flexible termination of employment relationships through mutual agreement between workers and employers. Additionally, pension insurance and retirement care services concern the basic rights and interests that workers enjoy after retirement and play a role in providing pension security. The indirect concerns refer to a series of social issues that are not directly related to retirement itself but interact with it. Such issues include re-employment problems, intergenerational relationship problems, and the capacity to bear social security. The system requirements for the construction of the system and intervention affect the basic framework and main contents of the country's delayed retirement system. Regardless of any period, this demand is a practical issue that the Party and the government need to consider seriously and provide necessary practical problem orientation for system design.

### 3.2. Overlapping background: The realistic response to the development of the times and social changes

If the various aspects involved in the establishment of the system and the common aspects related to the system collectively constitute the basic content of China's delayed retirement system, then the development of the times and social changes provide the external environment for policy iteration. The history of China's delayed retirement reform is actually a practice history of the Party and the government actively seeking to improve the system to meet the needs of the times and the changes in the population structure. During this process, there is a reform logic from coercion to voluntariness and from rigidity to flexibility. It should be noted that in the early days of the founding of the country, the concept of "delayed retirement" did not exist. The design of the retirement system by the state was mainly influenced by the basic national conditions and the Soviet model, focusing on establishing a national insurance-type retirement system and solving the problems of elderly care and the rotation of the labor force for national industrial construction. The main content focused on the definition of retirement age and occupational type. Due to the low average life expectancy, the industrial labor force was young and needed rapid job rotation, and the national retirement system under the planned economy presented the characteristics of government guarantee and unified benchmark. After the reform and opening up, the socialist market economy flourished, and the number of urban employees and flexible employment personnel increased. At this time, relying solely on a single regulation and administrative order to require workers to retire compulsorily and make unflexible choices was clearly unable to meet the needs of the times. Facing the population structure problem of prolonged average life expectancy, increased pension pressure, and the transformation from planned economy to socialist market economy, the state began to actively explore the transformation of workers' retirement security from "state guarantee" to "social insurance", gradually establishing a modern pension insurance framework of "national guarantee + social pooling + individual account", and began to explore flexible retirement methods. In the 21st century, the problem of population aging in China began to emerge. The increase in average education level, education duration, average age, and gradual improvement of physical functions in society became the prerequisites for the design of China's delayed retirement system. Under the coordinated effect of top-level design and local pilot programs, China gradually formed the consensus of "small steps adjustment, flexible implementation, classified promotion, and overall consideration" for the delayed retirement reform. Comprehensive deepening of reform is an important task and mission bestowed upon the Party and the government by the times. "We must comprehensively deepen reform at a new historical starting point, constantly enhance confidence in the path, theory, and system of socialism with Chinese characteristics." Comprehensive deepening of reform involves all aspects, and the delayed retirement reform is an important part. The development of the times has brought an opportunity for China's delayed retirement reform, while the system design is also constantly adapting to the reform needs and safeguarding the real interests of older people.

### 3.3. Target anchoring: A must-implement measure to overcome partial defects of the system

Viewing the development of the times and social changes as the time axis, and the construction of the system and related matters as the coordinate axis, from the initial stage and rigid formation period of the retirement system to the comprehensive implementation and stabilization period of the delayed retirement system, the corresponding main scope, conditions, and benefits, assistance methods and policy tools all exhibit partial differentiated characteristics. Some policy measures have limitations in terms of time and will expose some problems when not in line with the development of the times. The Communist Party of China and the government have continuously overcome the partial defects of the system, and this process is also the process of iterative reform of the country's delayed retirement system. For example, during the initial stage and stabilization period of the retirement system, the main scope covered state officials, employees of state-owned enterprises and private and public joint ventures, rural and urban unemployed residents without formal old-age security. In terms of conditions and benefits, the retirement benefits of state organs and enterprises implemented a "dual-track system", which also laid the groundwork for subsequent differences in benefits. In response to this problem, in 2014, the country implemented pension integration, requiring state organs, public institutions and enterprise employees to implement the method of social pooling and individual accounts for paying pensions, adhering to "more contributions, more benefits, longer contributions, more benefits, and later retirement, more benefits". This reform logic is also reflected in the transformation of the retirement age from mandatory to flexible, the transformation of social insurance payment from pooling to collaboration, and the transformation of pension storage from single to diversified.

## 4. Conclusion

The design and improvement of the retirement system by the Party and the government is an extremely significant national condition research topic. The history of China's delayed retirement system reform is an important part of the history of reform and opening up and the history of socialist development. Reviewing the reform process of China's delayed retirement system, each stage is mutually reinforcing and builds on previous achievements, presenting the historical characteristics of each stage while also embodying the commonalities of the country's retirement system strategy. Each stage not only inherits the important achievements of the previous reform but also lays the preconditions for the next round of retirement system reform. In 2025, the statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics showed that the number of older adults aged 60 and above in China had reached 323 million, surpassing the combined number of older adults in Western developed countries. The problem of population aging is still ongoing, and the pressure on population structure is still increasing. The unprecedented governance challenges have made it impossible for the country to follow any governance model of a single country, while also providing an opportunity for exploring models for China's modern governance. Therefore, it is necessary to correctly understand the history of China's retirement system reform and draw valuable experience and beneficial inspirations from it, so as to promote the continuous advancement of national social governance work, create an environment suitable for older people in society, promote the high-quality development of the Chinese economy, and smoothly achieve the long-term goals set for 2035.

## Disclosure statement

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