



As the workforce ages, job opportunities and security become acute concerns

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The word “employment” was mentioned more than 20 times in the work report delivered by then Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at the opening of the 14th National People’s Congress on March 5, signaling that jobs are a major priority.

Delegate discussions during the congress suggest efforts be made to create more jobs for young people and improve workplace opportunities for people 35 years and older.

The reference to 35-year-olds took me back more than 10 years to a tour I took of the headquarters of tech giant Tencent in Shenzhen, southern Guangdong Province. During the tour, I learned that some middle-aged workers were thinking of early retirement.

Confucius once said, “I took my stand at 30,” but in the hectic cyberworld, many workers seemed slow to adapt to changing times and were

reluctant about working overtime when necessary.

According to a survey by China Youth Daily, 70 percent of respondents said they have gotten their last promotion before the age of 35.

That was particularly true for those engaged in clerical jobs or work that involved methodical procedures — people who are suffering from work fatigue, people who didn’t have the mental ability required of their jobs and people who couldn’t cope with rapidly changing times. The exceptions, it appeared, were people employed in advanced technology or finance.

A 2022 national survey by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions found that 54 percent of workers aged 35-39 were anxious about possibly losing their jobs, 71 percent feared they would become “obsolete” in the information age, and 95 percent reported work stress.

The feeling of “marginalization” by people in this age segment is

disturbing. Workers 35 years and older should be in their prime of experience and productivity.

Whatever digital changes confront them should be easily remedied by in-house training.

Lu Guoquan, a political adviser, has been vociferous on the issue for several years. During the two sessions of the National People’s Congress and its political consultative assembly, Lu urged more legal remedies to prevent age discrimination in the workplace.

Many workers, he noted, feel compelled to use the fullness of their youth to make a lot of money and don’t have the time or incentive to build on those professional skills into middle age.

This short-term exploitation of demographics at the expense of creating the benefits of long-term experience will be detrimental to the nation’s industrial development, according to Lu.

In a country with an aging population, it is important to nurture and retain a

workforce as long as possible. Governments at all levels need to play their part in creating an employment realm where middle-aged workers can thrive and suffer no discrimination.

Consider the fact that the age limit on taking civil service examinations is currently 35 years. Why have an age limitation that may exclude talent the country needs?

It should be noted that some provinces, including Yunnan, Guizhou, and Hubei, have raised the age limit for civil service examination candidates to 40, but closer scrutiny suggests that flexibility apply only to vacancies requiring advanced academic degrees.

Some experts suggest that corporate China take its cue from civil service procedures by limiting company recruitment to those 35 years or younger.

It’s obvious that government needs to step in and make changes that ensure more equality for all workers, no matter what their age.