

# WINDS OF CHANGE: THE INTERESTS OF THE YOUNG AND THE OLD ARE SLOWLY CONVERGING



Wan Lixin

A friend of mine once told me that he would often dine with his son at what is known as an “elderly canteen” these days. They were regular customers, and though they didn’t qualify for the senior discounts, the pair found the food there more economical than many mainstream eateries, and the meals were very tasty and healthy.

Elderly canteens have been set up over the years to offer seniors nutritious meals at prices they can afford. The emergence of younger patrons, sharing facilities and conviviality with an older generation, is a welcome sight.

Businesses, take heed!

The narrowing of the age gap is not limited to elderly canteens, with this trend also being observed in other venues like community colleges and tour groups.

A college student, who accidentally joined a tour group comprised almost exclusively of senior citizens, was heard to remark, “The elderly were quite socially assertive, while I, by comparison, was retiring and timid and in need of being looked after constantly on the tour.”

Even the realm of packaged tours is feeling the effects of this new phenomenon.

Tours designed for the elderly usually are longer and take in more sights. In

the past, that pace was believed unsuited to younger people, who wanted to visit more sights in less time, with particular attention on the conventional must-sees.

Young people who go on tours designed for an older generation generally feel less social pressure to conform, and there’s no fear of lagging behind in the group.

Some sociologists suggest that the appreciation some young people have developed for the lifestyle of the older generation may actually make them more rational consumers, eschewing the popular trend of conspicuous consumption.

I remembered visiting a seniors’ residential complex in Fukuoka, Japan, where management operated a program that invited college students to visit the elderly.

It was a win-win situation. Foreign students who participated in the program got to practice their Japanese and hear interesting stories of long-lived lives, while the seniors were given a rich opportunity to get out of their rooms and mingle with the ideas of the young.

When I discussed this phenomenon with Xiao Jiao, a vocational college student, she said, “The life led by grandparents is slower, simpler and filled with plain-spoken talk.

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Zhu Di

A CASS expert on consumption

becomes intensely competitive, many young people yearn for what they see as the more uncomplicated life of the past.”

In a recent interview with Workers’ Daily newspaper, Zhu Di, an expert on consumption at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, observed, “The

young and the elderly are strongly complementary, and their converging interests in entertainment or travel can enhance their experiences and mutual understanding.”

When I strolled around a cultural park over the weekend, I came across an elderly band of saxophonists playing a familiar tune.

Although their playing was amplified by loudspeakers, the music had competition from an elderly couple a few meters away, who were singing loudly, with abandon and passion.

In the same area, young people were enjoying snacks at a camping site or lying on hammocks, buried on their mobile phones.

Age may separate us demographically, but isn’t it nice to see that it doesn’t necessarily separate us socially?

The rise of e-commerce has had many business people racking their brains to create business scenarios that appeal to the young demographic. But their assumptions may be wrong. Young people really want something more mundane or slow-paced.

— Hellorf