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# Aging in China

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*This article reports on a description of aging in China, in general, and Shanghai, in particular, with contrasts to the aging taking place in Hong Kong. Focused upon are the consequences of population aging on informal and formal support systems in the present and for the future. The efforts in the two cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong reflect differences in systems but are both influenced by traditional practices of a Chinese society.*

## Introduction

As a country with more than 1.25 billion people, the aging of the population in China has shown several features that are unparalleled in other countries (Minichiello, Chappell, Kendig, & Walker, 1996). Counting those aged 65 years and above, the number of elderly people now stands at around 6 percent of the total population, or 75 million, which already exceeds the population of most European countries. Not only is the number of elderly people in China enormous, it is also expected to increase at a rapid rate. It is commonly held by most Chinese demographers that it will take only 30 years for the elderly population in China to grow from 7 to 14 percent, while it had taken the populations in the United States 70 years and Germany 45 years to undergo the same change. China has therefore little time to prepare for the aging of its population (Kwong & Cai, 1992).

Since about three-quarters of the population in China are still living in the villages, the aging of the Chinese population is also characterized by its uneven distribution. While some of the big cities, like Shanghai, may have more than 10 percent of its population aged 65 years and above, villages in some remote

areas may only have 5 percent or even less. The uneven rate of population aging in different parts of China is not only the result of rural and urban diversity but also caused by the "one child per couple" policy that the Chinese Government has enforced since 1979. On the whole, the policy has been much more vigorously carried out in the cities, resulting in a particularly speedy aging of the urban population (China Research Center on Aging, 1990).

Notwithstanding the fact that China still proclaims itself as a socialist country, its family system remains until today the most important provider of care for the elderly people. Whether or not the Chinese family system can continue its caring role is, therefore, a question that anyone interested in informal support for the elderly would like to ask (Olson, 1993).

As mentioned above, China as a vast country with a huge population is not ready to be treated as a uniform whole. Situations in fact vary so widely between different regions and cities that it will probably be much more fruitful to confine oneself to the examination of a few typical examples to see how population aging has affected elderly care. In this chapter, Shanghai and Hong Kong have been identified as the two cities that would offer the greatest interest to readers who want to know about the impact of population aging in China. Shanghai is chosen because it is the most populous city in China and it has also the highest percentage of elderly people among all the cities. The policies and practices that the Shanghai Government has adopted in regard to its elderly population would therefore serve as examples for other cities to follow. Hong Kong has just ceased to be a British colony and been returned to China on July 1, 1997. Under the "one country, two systems" arrangement, Hong Kong is promised the retention of its capitalist system and style of life for 50 years and is not required to adopt the socialist system practiced in the Mainland. Hong Kong has long developed its strategies to take care of its senior members and one can be sure that its experiences will be invaluable to policy makers responsible for the welfare of the elderly in other Chinese cities (Chow, 1995). On the other hand, while Hong Kong is not compelled to follow the examples in the Mainland, the fact that it is now a part of China opens up a new range of opportunities for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government to re-think its policies regarding the elderly.

In taking Shanghai and Hong Kong as examples, there is no intention here to make a comparison of the two. In many ways, these two Chinese cities are different from one another, because of their divergent paths of development. But increasingly, both Shanghai and Hong Kong are serving as examples for other Chinese cities to consider, with Shanghai exerting a greater influence in the north and Hong Kong making a stronger impact in the south. It is the aim of the Chinese leaders to build up a socialist system in China with Chinese characteristics. In the last assembly of the People's Congress (like the Congress in the United States) held in March 1998, the Chinese leaders openly accepted the necessity of learning from the best of the capitalist system, especially the importance of using the market mechanism. Hence, what ways and means Shanghai and Hong Kong have developed to promote the welfare of their seniors will be treasured, as no distinction will be made between the socialist and capitalist systems. The only shortcoming that will result from choosing two of the largest cities in China for examination is the omission of the rural areas where the majority of the Chinese still live (Wong, 1996). Such an omission is a serious one, but the situation of the villages is so different from the cities that it will not do the former justice if they are only covered briefly.

What is intended in the following is, first, to lay the scene of population aging in Shanghai and Hong Kong. It will then be followed by an examination of the impact it has made on the two societies, with special attention given to the caring functions of the family system and the changing role and status of the elderly people themselves. Mention will then be made of the measures that the two municipal governments have taken in protecting the interests of the elderly and the extent to which they are effective in response to the aging of their population. It is not expected that the above examination will result in any recommendation on the best strategy for China to take in securing for its elderly members the most satisfying life. However, it will certainly help the Chinese Government to understand better its own strengths and weaknesses in devising such policies.

#### Aging in Shanghai

The permanent population of Shanghai in mid-1996 was 13,044,300 people. It is not only the biggest city in China but also

one of the few most populous places in the world. Despite the high population density, the majority of the 4,574,858 households in Shanghai in mid-1996 had only a few members, averaging 2.9 persons per household. As mentioned, it is the city in China with the highest percentage of elderly people. In mid-1996, Shanghai had 1,620,550 elderly people aged 65 and above, or 12.5 percent of the total population. The number of elderly people in Shanghai is expected to increase to over 2.5 million in the year 2030, then level off and later decline gradually (Shanghai Aged Population Atlas Editorial Committee, 1997). Hence, in the next 30 years, Shanghai will be faced with a rapidly increasing number of elderly people in its population.

Similar to other big cities with a growing elderly population, those in the upper brackets of 75 years old and above will increase faster in number than those in the lower brackets. In mid-1996, over half, or 1.3 million out of the 2.3 million aged 60 and above, in Shanghai were aged between 60 and 69, while those aged 80 and above numbered around 240,000, or 10.0 percent of the total. However, it is expected that the "old-old" will greatly increase in number. On the whole, the sex ratio among those aged between 60 and 69 was about balanced, but female dominated, about 2 to 1, among those aged 80 and above. In terms of marital status, a much higher percentage of elderly men were reported in 1990 to be married than elderly women, 79.4 percent as against 42.4 percent. The reverse is true for those who were widowed, 55.6 percent of elderly women as against 18.75 percent of elderly men (Gui, 1996).

Traditionally, elderly people are expected to reside with their children, especially the eldest son. However, the "one child per couple" policy alone has made it almost impossible for children to follow this traditional practice, not to mention the increasing internal mobility that often results from rapid economic development (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations, 1996). It is therefore not surprising to find from the last Census conducted in 1992 that more than 13.0 percent of the elderly people in Shanghai were living alone and another one-third were elderly couples living by themselves. Those who lived with children and grandchildren represented about a half, with 16.0 percent living with unmarried children, 7.0 percent

with married children, 20.0 percent with three generations in the household, and 7.0 percent with their grandchildren (Gui, 1996). According to the findings of a survey conducted in the late 1980s in Shanghai on the elderly people's choice of residential preference, over 42.0 percent of those interviewed indicated that the most preferred living arrangement was for an elderly couple to live by themselves, with their married children living in the neighborhood. It should be noted that among the elderly in Shanghai, 78.0 percent of them owned the housing units they were occupying; hence it would only be natural for them to retain their present residence while encouraging their married children to live in another apartment nearby (Gui, 1996).

Since state-run enterprises employed nearly all urban workers in China in the past, the majority of the elderly people living in the cities who had retired from their work were entitled to the support of retirement pensions. The pension certainly formed the most important source of income for a great number of elderly people in Shanghai. According to a survey conducted in 1992, it was found that the major source of income for 36.3 percent of the respondents, who were all aged 60 and above, was retirement pensions. This was followed by assistance provided by the State for 33.1 percent, remunerated income for 14.2 percent, and support from children, relatives or friends for 12.8 percent (Gui, 1996). It should be mentioned at this juncture that a retirement protection system exists in China only in the urban areas and peasants are generally deprived of a similar coverage. Even peasants living in counties at the fringe of Shanghai seldom have retirement pensions and the majority of them have either to work to support themselves or to rely on community support (Wang, 1998). It should be noted, as found in the 1992 survey, that in both the urban and rural parts of Shanghai, very few elderly people (only 12.8 percent in the former and 18.3 percent in the latter) relied on the financial support of their children as their major source of income (Gui, 1996). It appears that on the whole, elderly people in Shanghai are financially quite independent, and unlike the traditional image, they hardly look to their children to provide for them in old age.

Compared to Shanghai, the population in Hong Kong is a bit younger as only about 10.0 percent, or 631,700 out of a total of

6,311,000 people in March 1996, were aged 65 and above (Census and Statistics Department, 1996). However, the extremely low fertility rate, about 12 per 1,000, that Hong Kong has experienced since the early 1990s implies that the rate of population aging will probably be faster in Hong Kong than in Shanghai. A note of caution has, however, to be made in that since January 1995, Hong Kong has been accepting 150 persons per day, or 55,000 persons a year, from the Mainland to settle in Hong Kong as permanent citizens. About half of these new arrivals, as they are called, are children born to Hong Kong permanent residents and since the majority of them are young in age, they will produce the effect of delaying the process of population aging. In fact, migration, both in and out of Hong Kong, has always made population projection a difficult task in the city, as the number is not entirely under the control of the government, both before and after 1997.

### Aging in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, there are more "old-old" in the elderly population than in Shanghai. Those 75 years old and above account for 36.3 percent of the elderly population, with 63.7 percent aged between 65 and 75. In other words, despite the fact that the percentage of the elderly people in the population of Hong Kong is lower than in Shanghai, Hong Kong has more elderly people in the upper brackets. In terms of the sex distribution of the elderly people, Hong Kong is not much different from Shanghai, with 45 percent of those aged 65 and above being male and 55 percent being female. Again, the ratio is more imbalanced toward the female in the upper age brackets. As to the marital status of the elderly, the two cities are surprisingly rather close to one another. Taking the Census data collected in 1991 in Hong Kong, so that they are comparable to those collected at more or less the same time in Shanghai, elderly men who were married accounted for 79.0 percent, with 15.0 percent widowed and 5.0 percent never married. The corresponding figures for elderly women were 41.0 percent, 52.0 percent and 5.0 percent (Bartlett & Phillips, 1995).

One is probably intrigued by the relatively low percentage of widowed men in both Shanghai and Hong Kong, being 18.8 percent and 15.0 percent in the two places, respectively. The explanations that one can give is that in Chinese societies, especially

among the older generations, men tended to marry women who are younger, and more women outlive their husband than vice versa as women generally live longer.

In terms of household compositions, 22.0 percent of the elderly people in Hong Kong, in March 1996, either lived alone or as an elderly couple. Nearly half of the elderly people, 44.1 percent, lived with their children, married or not married. Another 16.7 percent lived in households with three generations and only 9.8 percent were in households with two or more nuclear families. Nearly all studies on living arrangements of the elderly found that the trend was for more and more children to move away from their parents and start their own families, if they can afford to do so. On the other hand, though most of the elderly would still prefer to live with one of the children, especially the eldest son, even after the latter has married, they would not find it too objectionable if they have to live by themselves. In fact, studies have found that an increasing number of the elderly would choose to live away from their children (even when the latter have no objection to live with them), in order to avoid conflicts (Chi & Chow, 1997). However, the above changing trend has to be put in the context that housing units are generally very small in Hong Kong, mainly because of the lack of space, and it would almost be impossible for more than two generations to live in the same household. On the other hand, as property prices are extremely high in Hong Kong, the fact that some children still continue to stay with their parents, even after their marriage, does not necessarily imply that this is their choice. Rather, it may result from their financial inability to start a new home of their own.

Lastly, in terms of financial support, elderly people in Hong Kong are less fortunate than their counterparts in Shanghai. While a labor insurance program, covering old age, had been instituted in China for the majority of urban workers since 1951, legislation regarding the introduction of a retirement protection scheme for all employees was not enacted in Hong Kong until the year of its return to China. Except those working in government service or fortunate enough to be covered by private retirement protection schemes, the majority of the workers who retire now have either to depend on their own savings or the support of other family members. A study of the elderly people conducted in 1997 found



that about two-thirds of them had savings but the amount was generally insufficient for them to maintain a basic living standard (Chow, 1998). In other words, family support still remains a very important source of income for most of the elderly people in Hong Kong. Furthermore, while nearly all elderly people in Shanghai owned their own housing units, about half of the elderly in Hong Kong lived in housing subsidized by the government, with the other half in the private sector, mostly rental.

### Impact of Population Aging

In both Shanghai and Hong Kong, population aging has not been recognized as an area to which the government should pay attention until the 1970s. This is so because in a Chinese society, the leaders would often hold that the support of the elderly should always remain a responsibility of the family, until they are confronted with the stark fact that an increasing number of old people are left unattended to (Zhu & Xu, 1992). In the 1960s, the stand of the Hong Kong Government was that the responsibility of caring for the elderly must fall on the natural family unit (Hong Kong Government, 1965). The Chinese Government has also been very insistent on the notion of family support for the elderly as stated in Article 49 of the 1982 Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) that, "parents have the duty to rear and educate their minor children and children who have come of age have the duty to support and assist their parents." Although the insistence on the notion of family support does not necessarily imply a negation of government responsibility, it often result in a delay of the introduction of formal care measures that might give the impression of taking over informal family support.

Population aging was only recognized, both in Shanghai and Hong Kong, as an area that requires government action when its impact was too glaring to ignore. The first obvious sign of population aging was of course the increasing presence of the elderly people. The number itself does not necessarily cause concern but when more and more elderly people turn to the government for help and support, it becomes obvious that the problems associated with population aging can no longer be easily brushed aside (Leung, 1997). As mentioned, a retirement protection system was

absent in Hong Kong until recently, but the Hong Kong Government has set up since 1971 a Public Assistance scheme for those who are unable to maintain a basic living. Since its introduction in 1971, the majority of those applying for assistance were elderly persons, accounting for about two-thirds, and much higher than the sick and the disabled. At the end of 1997, it was reported that about 110,000 elderly people, or 15 percent of those aged 65 and above, were beneficiaries of the scheme, costing the government an annual expenditure of HK\$ 4,000 million (US\$1 = HK\$7.8). The above sum does not include other residential care and community support services required by the elderly.

More or less the same concern about financial outlay has brought a heightened awareness of population aging to the Shanghai Government. As one of the cities in China with the longest history of industrial and commercial development, Shanghai has probably the highest percentage of workers who are retiring from work, as against those still working. As mentioned, a labor insurance program has been introduced in China since the early 1950s and in 1996, 1.89 million retired workers in Shanghai were receiving their pensions, causing an outlay of 10.3 billion Yuan (US\$1 = 8.3 Yuan). This is no doubt a very heavy burden on the enterprises which are now contributing a sum equivalent to around 30 percent of the wage bill towards the labor insurance program, mostly to be spent on retirement protection. The growing burden of financing retirement pensions had largely been ignored when enterprises were heavily subsidized by the state. However, with the economic reform introduced since 1984 in the cities, requiring enterprises to make their books meet, outlays on retirement pensions has become not only an unbearable burden but also an impediment to the enterprises' efforts to save up as much capital as possible for re-investment purposes (Li, 1997). This has resulted in the introduction of a series of measures since the early 1990s to lessen the financial burden of the enterprises by spreading the contributions to a broader basis.

The impact of population aging is also felt in a weakening of the caring role of the families. Contrary to popular belief, the size of the average Chinese family has never been very large since only the rich families can afford to have a large house spacious enough for several generations to live together. For the ordinary

people, the traditional practice has been for the elderly parents to live with one of their children, mostly the eldest son. However, the idea of filial piety also obliges other children, although they are not living with their elderly parents, to provide the latter with support and care (Chow, 1994). In other words, the concept of family support among the Chinese is not restricted to those living with one's elderly parents, although co-residence would make the performance of the caring roles easier. In fact, studies on family support in Shanghai found that married daughters are often the most important carers, although they are usually living away from their elderly parents (Gui, 1996).

As population aging in both Shanghai and Hong Kong is not simply the result of longer life expectancies but also due to a drastic drop in the fertility rate, it means that fewer children will be around in future to provide care. This change is particularly significant in Shanghai where the "one child per couple" policy has been most vigorously enforced. Indeed, government officials in Shanghai have repeatedly emphasized the importance of providing the elderly with adequate care and support so that young couples would not feel insecure about their own old age for having only one child. One can even venture to say that in supporting the elderly, the government officials in Shanghai have been motivated more by the mandate to enforce the "one child per couple" policy than an interest to promote the welfare of the elderly. Compared with their counterparts in Shanghai, government officials in Hong Kong have never been bothered by such kind of mandate. However, the drop in the fertility rate in Hong Kong, which is the result of a host of social and economic factors, produces the same result in that the elderly can no longer depend on other family members as their major source of support.

The decreasing importance of family support in both Shanghai and Hong Kong does not imply that family members, especially the children, are not prepared to help when the elderly are in need of assistance and care. The actual fact is that there are simply not so many family members to give help. Other sources of support, coming either from the community or the state, are therefore necessary to supplement where the family system is lacking.

So far, population aging has been perceived rather negatively in that the elderly are mainly regarded as objects requiring care and support. However, studies in both Shanghai and Hong Kong revealed that over 90 percent of their elderly remain healthy and are capable of self-care (Lam, 1997). In other words, apart from a small number of elderly people who are in need of assistance, the rest are not only able to look after themselves but also capable of rendering their service to other people. A vast pool of potential volunteers is thus found available in both cities. They are particularly invaluable because more and more women, who used to be the main source of volunteers, are now coming out to work and make their own careers. Furthermore, since formal health and welfare services for the elderly, as discussed later, have only been developed in both Shanghai and Hong Kong in recent years and are usually inadequate in supply, it is imperative for "elderly people to assist the elderly." The contributions that elderly people might make as volunteers should also be considered in the context of the society in the Mainland where neighbors are grouped into support networks. Elderly people as members of the community could therefore easily offer their service to those in the same neighborhood who require assistance. The situation in Hong Kong is substantially different as neighbors are often unknown to each other and families also move houses frequently. However, since social centers for the elderly have been established in almost every neighborhood in Hong Kong, elderly people who are able and prepared to render volunteer service could now be easily mobilized to do so.

To summarize, the impact of population aging in Shanghai and Hong Kong have produced similar effects in that more public resources are now allocated for the care and support of the elderly. With fewer members to provide care within the household, the role of the family as carers of the elderly has become less significant. However, the increasing number of healthy elderly means that more volunteer service can now come from this group and their contributions are too important to be ignored.

#### Policies Regarding the Aged in Hong Kong and Shanghai

In caring for elderly people, both the family and the community have long been perceived to be of primary importance.

Their importance lies in the fact that within these two institutions the elderly are most ready to establish their social relationships. In both Shanghai and Hong Kong, where social relationships are perceived as having fundamental significance under the influence of the Chinese culture, elderly people always feel more comfortable to receive help from the family and the community when they are in need (Ikels, 1992). Hence, it is not surprising to find that policies developed in Shanghai and Hong Kong on care of the elderly have put both the family and the community in the forefront as the most important care agents.

Since a policy on care of the elderly has been developed earlier in Hong Kong than in Shanghai, it will be examined here first. The principle that has guided the care of the elderly in Hong Kong since the early 1970s is known as "the care in the community" approach. The approach was first proposed in a report, published in 1973, of a governmental Working Party and was stated to mean that "services should be aimed at enabling the elderly to remain as long as possible as members of the community at large, either living by themselves or with members of their family, rather than at providing the elderly with care in residential institutions outside the community to which they are accustomed" (Working Party on the Future Needs of the Elderly, 1973, p. 15). The "care in the community" approach proposed in 1973 has since been reaffirmed in subsequent policy papers issued by the Hong Kong Government on care of the elderly. In the most recent report on care for the elderly, the "care in the community" approach was slightly changed to "aging in place," to mean that "appropriate support should be provided for older persons and their families to allow old people to grow old in their home environment with minimal disruption" (Working Party on Care for the Elderly, 1994, p. 48). Whether it is "care in the community" or "aging in place," the question that needs to be asked is: to what extent is the approach successful in enabling the elderly to live a satisfactory life? Is the approach most fitted to the situation of the Hong Kong society where, as mentioned above, the population is aging fast and the structure of the family is changing rapidly?

Conceptually, few objections can be raised against the "care in the community" approach, especially in Hong Kong where the family system is actually shouldering most of the burden in

taking care of the elderly in need of attention. However, evidence increasingly shows that the various assumptions made by the Working Party in 1973 are not necessarily correct. First, a policy paper published by the Government in 1977 on the development of social services for the elderly clearly stated that the "care in the community" approach could only succeed when the community was a caring one. Recent research has found that the roles and functions of the elderly, both within the family and in the community, have been so much weakened that the self respect of the elderly is now called into question (Chow, 1997). Secondly, the "care" that can be provided in and by the community has only been assumed but never clearly defined. Some take it to refer to the services provided in the community in support of the elderly, while others have in mind the assistance offered by relatives, friends and neighbors. The past development of services for the elderly has indicated that services are usually in short supply and they can only meet the needs of those in desperate need. The assistance offered by relatives, friends and neighbors is also known to be limited (Ngan, 1990). In other words, the unclear definition of care means that elderly people living in the community have often to do without the support they require, whether from the family, relatives, neighbors, or services provided by public welfare organizations. Thirdly, the "community" is also an ill-defined term. While it refers, in most cases, to communities where elderly people live, a geographical location does not necessarily entitle one to the membership of a set of social networks from which the elderly people could obtain help and assistance.

What one can conclude from the above discussion about the situation in Hong Kong is that while the "care in the community" approach has been a laudable one, it is far from being an effective policy in safeguarding the interests of the elderly. The major shortcoming of the approach is that it has assumed too much, especially regarding the obligations of the Chinese in taking care of their elderly members. The changes that the Hong Kong society has undergone, especially in terms of the continuous and substantial migration, both into and out of Hong Kong, indicate that the community can no longer be assumed to be a caring one. The care that can be provided by the family, relatives and neighbors, even if it still exists, is also dwindling both in scale and scope.

And the "community" in Hong Kong, taken here to mean a set of social relationships offering help and mutual-support, has also been found to be almost non-existent. In other words, if the "care in the community" approach is to actually perform what it intends to achieve, that is, to enable the elderly to live in the community for as long as possible, then a re-thinking of the policy objective is a must and the only way to stop it from being empty words.

It has been mentioned that services provided to support the elderly have always been in short supply. The health and welfare services provided for the elderly can roughly be divided into two types: residential care and community support services. Residential care services range from those that offer only minimal personal care to others that are fully integrated with the general hospital service. In fact, of the total number of patients requiring hospitalization in Hong Kong, around 40 percent are elderly persons. It must be noted that the residential care services for the elderly in Hong Kong are heavily subsidized by the government, with the recipients paying only a nominal fee, and they are usually provided at a very high standard. Their relatively high costs imply that they are usually insufficient to meet the demand, compelling those who could not wait to seek admission into the private nursing homes that are not only inferior in standard but also often charging exorbitant fees. The major shortcoming of the residential care services for the elderly in Hong Kong is thus a matter of uneven distribution, with a limited pool of quality services not necessarily serving those with the least means or the greatest need.

Compared to the residential care services, community support services are generally more sufficient in supply and ranging widely from general day center services, like meals and laundry, to the more sophisticated geriatric outreach support. Studies have, however, shown that although elderly people living in the community can obtain some kind of assistance from the community support services provided by the public welfare and health organizations, family members still form the most important source of help (Chow, 1994). Support to carers is thus important to ensure that they would not cease to play their caring roles but continue their contributions. To summarize, what one can say about the residential care and community support services for

the elderly in Hong Kong is that they are usually provided at a very high standard, albeit generally scarce in supply, with the large part of the costs covered by public revenue.

Compared to Hong Kong, the Chinese Government has been less consistent in its population policies. In the first twenty years after the establishment of the new government in 1949, China had stressed the benefits to be reaped from a large population; but the policy has been reverted since the end of the 1970s to restrict each couple to one child. This has made population aging in China very erratic. Despite the uneven pace of population aging, it has to be acknowledged that all along the Chinese Government has shown a keen interest in the well-being of its elderly population and it has always been a mandate written in the Constitution, except in the hey-day of the Cultural Revolution when all traditions were regarded as counter-revolutionary, that grown-up children should provide their elderly parents with the necessary assistance.

China's interest in population aging has only begun in the early 1980s. In 1982, China participated for the first time in an international conference on aging by sending a delegation to attend the World Assembly on Aging held in Vienna. Subsequently a National Committee on Aging was set up in Beijing to be responsible for the promotion and coordination of educational, health and welfare activities for the elderly. Similar committees were also set up at the municipal level in most of the big cities in China, such as the Committee on Issues of the Elderly established in 1984 in Shanghai (renamed the Shanghai Committee on the Elderly in 1995). The National Committee on Aging is a quasi-governmental organization working closely and in a way under the auspices of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, which is the ministry in China in charge of social welfare. The local committees on aging also work under the guidance of the Civil Affairs Bureaus in the cities to promote the welfare of the elderly.

During the 1980s, the National Committee on Aging, together with the municipal committees, focussed their work on organizing various projects and programs to encourage the elderly to be active members of the community. The vice-chairman of the National Committee on Aging once spelt out in a speech made in 1986 in a seminar held in Beijing that in response to population



aging, the policy measures of the Chinese Government were: to make everyone realize the importance and urgency of the issue of population aging, to put into effect laws and regulations to protect the interests of the elderly, to develop various types of programs for the elderly, to recognize the contributions of the elderly in society, and to establish organizational networks to serve the elderly (Wei, 1987). In a way, the Chinese policy on the elderly, as spelt out above, is broader than the "care in the community" approach adopted in Hong Kong because while China can make it a legal and primary responsibility of the children to support their elderly parents, supplemented by services provided by the government, Hong Kong can only resort to moral persuasion, and take up whatever is left undone by the children by providing the elderly with the necessary public support and care.

Other than enforcing the relevant laws and regulations to protect the interests of the elderly, the Chinese policy on the elderly has, on the whole, laid a greater emphasis on the active participation of the elderly in community activities or, as described in Shanghai, "the release of the remaining heat and light" of the elderly. The active participation of elderly people in community activities in China has been made possible by the special kind of local administration that exists there. In China, residents' committees are organized at the street level in the cities to promote mutual help among the residents. It is also at this level that the government provides its people with the most essential services. Elderly people requiring support, especially those with no families to give them help, can thus get the appropriate assistance from the residents' committees (Leung & Nann, 1995). On the other hand, as mentioned before, since elderly people are themselves members of the local communities, with some holding offices in the residents' committees, they can also render their service to other people living in the district through the work of the committees, such as helping in controlling traffic, assisting frail and disabled members in the community, and offering advice and help to mothers with new born babies.

Mention should also be made of the community service centers that have since 1987 been established in nearly all cities in China at the street level to render services to the residents (Chan, 1993). Almost without exception, community service centers are

run by the residents' committees, with guidance from the appropriate Civil Affairs Bureaus. The services provided by these centers vary greatly, depending on the resources available in each district, but usually include such as nursery, canteen, interest classes for different age groups, reading room, meals delivery, health education programs, clinics and accompanying service. It is obvious that most of these services are of special relevance to the elderly people and form an important source of help to enable them to live in the community. The former director of the China Research Center on Aging once reported in 1995 that so far as the promotion of the welfare of the elderly people is concerned, services provided at the street level for the elderly people could be grouped as follows: to provide care for the lonely elderly, such as homes for the elderly set up in the districts; to protect the health of the elderly, such as the organization of district health centers; to increase the employment opportunities of the elderly, such as the existence of local employment exchange centers; to enhance their cultural life, such as the setting up of schools for the elderly; to enrich their social life, such as the establishment of recreational centers for the elderly; and to protect the legal rights of the elderly, such as the setting up of legal advice counters at the street level (Hong, 1996). It was reported that with the rapid development of services for the elderly at the street level, enterprises that have in the past provided services for their own retired workers are now finding it more convenient to entrust this responsibility to the residents' committees by paying the appropriate fees.

With the provision of services at the district level to meet the needs of the elderly, the central government has found it possible to concentrate its efforts on issuing general directives, culminating in the passing of the Law on Protecting the Rights of the Elderly in 1995, and in ensuring the provision of a basic living for the retired workers through the enactment of appropriate social security measures (Palmer, 1995). The development of the retirement protection system will not be a subject of discussion here but it suffices to point out that most retired workers in the cities in China, including of course Shanghai, are provided with retirement pensions, equivalent to about 60 to 80 percent of their salaries before retirement. It has to be pointed out that up to now, only workers in the cities are protected by social security

measures and contributory insurance schemes for old age have only been introduced for peasants in the villages since the early 1990s. Elderly people in the cities can thus be regarded as a privileged group, who usually do not have to worry about their basic living.

Despite the fact that a Committee on Issues of Aging, as mentioned above, has been set up in Shanghai as early as in 1984, it appears that little has been done in the 1980s to anticipate the impact of population aging. All the important committees on aging were established in the 1990s, such as the Shanghai Joint Conference of Workers on Aging set up in 1991, the Shanghai Fund on Aging in 1992, the Shanghai Research Center on Aging and the Shanghai Social Insurance Bureau, both in 1993. It is obvious that the issues arising from population aging have only caught the attention of the Shanghai Government when Shanghai, as the biggest city in China, was given the green light to develop into a modern city in the early 1990s. Before that, in protecting the interests of the elderly living in the city, the Shanghai Government had done no more than followed the central directives, such as revising the labor insurance regulations. With the establishment of the committees and organizations on aging in recent years, the Shanghai Government appeared to have adopted a much more dynamic approach in tackling the issues of population aging.

As mentioned, the provision of services in support of the elderly is usually at the street level and the Shanghai Government has relied heavily on the social networks existing among the residents committees to provide the necessary services (Cai, Song, Luo, & Jiang, 1994). It was reported that at the end of 1996, over 300 homes for the elderly were set up in Shanghai, usually run by the residents' committees themselves, with each home accommodating about 20 to 30 elderly persons. On top of that, 4,540 centers were organized to provide the elderly with the appropriate cultural and recreational activities. Other than these, it was known that about 4,600 elderly persons, living in the rural areas at the periphery of Shanghai, were assisted in their basic living (Shanghai Aged Population Atlas Editorial Committee, 1997). There is no doubt that the emphasis on mutual support among the residents themselves in Shanghai is partly due to the lack of governmental funding; local communities have therefore

to mobilize their own resources. This has produced the effect of making the communities more aware of not only the needs of the elderly members but also the importance of preserving, as far as possible, the existing social networks. However, it should not be taken to imply that all communities in Shanghai are "caring" ones. The Shanghai Government has also perceived the importance of providing more support for the needy, especially as Shanghai is fast developing into a modern city with the accompanying characteristics such as the dwindling functions of the family system. However, as long as the social networks among the residents still exist and are functioning well, it is only natural for the Shanghai Government to make use of them to play a major role in providing the necessary support for the needy ones, especially elderly people who are held in high regard in the Chinese society.

#### Strategies of Tackling the Impact of Population Aging

The demographic data of Shanghai and Hong Kong indicate that both societies are aging fast. While the gap in economic performance between the two cities is still very wide, with Shanghai lagging behind Hong Kong, there are many similarities in their social structure. It is noteworthy that about half to two-thirds of the elderly in both cities are still residing with their family members, usually their children, with the latter also forming one of their major sources of income support. The retired workers in Shanghai are probably more fortunate since a retirement pension has existed in China for urban workers since the early 1950s. In Hong Kong, except those who are working in governmental service or in well-established companies, retired workers have either to rely on their past savings or the support of their children, if the latter are willing and financially able. This explains why a greater percentage of the elderly in Hong Kong have to turn to public assistance for a basic living, whereas in Shanghai poor elderly people are fewer in number.

The impact of population aging on the expenditures on care for the elderly in the two cities has also been found to be different. In Shanghai, since income protection for retired workers is basically a responsibility of the enterprises employing the workers, the concern has been one of ensuring adequate protection

while not scarifying the competitiveness of the enterprises. The discussion in Hong Kong is centered on how to concentrate public expenditure on the most needy elderly while introducing income protection schemes to ensure that elderly people in the long run would be more self-reliant. Notwithstanding the variations between Shanghai and Hong Kong in their methods of protecting the income security needs of the elderly, it should be noted that population aging in both cities has so far not resulted in too excessive a level of public expenditure on their care. In a way, it is fortunate that the family system has so far played an important role in providing the elderly in both cities with the necessary support and care (Davis & Harrell, 1993). It is difficult to predict at this point whether family support will continue in Shanghai and Hong Kong, and thus the containment of public expenditure on care for the elderly, but as long as respect for the elderly remains a dominant feature of the Chinese society, children should still feel obliged to take care of their elderly parents.

So far as strategies to take care of the elderly is concerned, it is interesting to find that notwithstanding the differences in the socio-economic structure between Shanghai and Hong Kong, one being socialist and the other capitalist, the two cities are in fact very similar in their ways of caring for the aged. The "care in the community" approach adopted in Hong Kong has resulted in the elderly people remaining in the community for as long as possible, to be taken care of by their families when they are in need, while the role of the government is confined to one of providing care for those who must depend on public support. The emphasis of the Shanghai Government is also on encouraging the elderly to live in the community, and as it is clearly written in the Chinese Constitution that children must support their aged parents, such strategy is closely in line with the country's spirit.

Although both Shanghai and Hong Kong have emphasized the importance of enabling the elderly to remain in the community, it should be pointed out that due to the differences in the social networks that exist at the district level, Shanghai is in a better position to accomplish this objective than Hong Kong (Hu, 1987). As residents' committees have long existed in Shanghai to assume the responsibility for local affairs at the district level,

they can easily organize cultural and recreational activities for the elderly and operate homes for those needing care. Such kind of social networking is generally absent in Hong Kong as the government is less reliant on the residents to run their own affairs. Hence, the development of public community support services becomes the only way to achieve the objective of the "care in the community" policy in Hong Kong, whereas in Shanghai greater initiative is left to the residents themselves, resulting in much more variations in the kinds of care provided for the elderly. The variations in care for the elderly is seen most clearly in the range of activities and services provided by the community service centers in each district of Shanghai. While some centers may provide the most sophisticated form of health and welfare support for the elderly, some may be satisfied with nothing but a meeting place where the elderly may assemble. In other words, though communities in both Shanghai and Hong Kong appear to be similar, at least on the surface, they in fact vary greatly in their functions in promoting the welfare of the elderly, depending most importantly on the kinds of social networks that actually exist.

The last point that needs to be discussed is the impact of population aging on the role played by the elderly themselves both within the family and in society. References have already been made to some research findings indicating that the role and status of the elderly in both Shanghai and Hong Kong are declining, to such an extent that one wonders whether the tradition of respecting the old among the Chinese is still maintained. The falling status of the elderly in Hong Kong is attributed to the rapid social and economic development that Hong Kong has undergone in recent years, making the experiences of the elderly less treasured than before. The respected position of the elderly in Shanghai has also been very much eroded during the days of the Cultural Revolution when all traditions were regarded as counter-revolutionary. However, the retirement pension to which most elderly people in Shanghai are entitled implies that financially they are less vulnerable than their counterparts in Hong Kong, and are thus better able to retain their independent status both within the family and in society. But it is no longer possible for the elderly in both Shanghai and Hong Kong to rely on the tradition of respecting the old to command the respect of others; they must

redefine their role and discover anew their position both within the family and in society.

In establishing their new role and status, elderly people in Shanghai are again offered more opportunities than their counterparts in Hong Kong. The heavy reliance on public support in Hong Kong means that the elderly there are often regarded as no more than recipients of formal services. On the other hand, the emphasis in Shanghai, partly because of the lack of resources, is to encourage the elderly to participate, as much as possible, in community activities. In this way, elderly people in Shanghai can also be said to have been empowered to promote their own welfare, whereas in Hong Kong, elderly people appear to be more passive. One cannot say for sure whether this empowerment of the elderly in Shanghai has anything to do with the socialist economy that exists in the Mainland, but it is obvious that before 1997, the Colonial Government in Hong Kong had perceived its role towards the elderly as no more than meeting the needs of the most needy.

### Conclusion

In one article, one cannot do justice to the impact of population aging for such a big country as China, though discussions have already been confined to the situation in only two cities, namely Shanghai and Hong Kong. However, the above examination has revealed several interesting points. First, notwithstanding the differences in the socialist or capitalist system adopted, it appears that the two cities have both to tackle the problems arising from rapid population aging. Furthermore, the ways adopted by the two governments in Shanghai and Hong Kong to promote the welfare of the elderly in fact differ little from not only one another but also those implemented in other developing economies with fast aging populations.

Secondly, though both cities are very much influenced by the traditional practices of a Chinese society, they are not immune from the effects of urbanization and modernization; and in caring for the elderly, the governments must recognize the declining role played by the family system and devise their caring strategies accordingly. The above examination reveals that it is certainly

not an easy task for the governments in both Shanghai and Hong Kong to strike a balance between accepting, on the one hand, the need for increasing governmental intervention in providing care for the elderly and retaining, on the other, as far as possible the traditional roles of the family and community in supporting their elderly members.

Thirdly, despite the fact that elderly people are still held in high respect, at least as a value, among the Chinese, it appears that the pressure of a modern society has prevented the younger members, however willing they are, from fulfilling their filial duties, especially in providing the elderly with the personal care they require. In other words, the Chinese elderly in both socialist Shanghai and capitalist Hong Kong must strive to re-establish their new roles, not relying so much on the traditional concept of filial piety, but as independent members of the family and society, with their distinct rights and responsibilities. It does not imply that the elderly in China can no longer make use of the existing social networks in protecting their own welfare but, similar to the experiences of other countries with aging populations, the elderly would only be ensured a reasonable level of care when their interests, abilities and rights as members of society are fully recognized. The special characteristics of the Chinese society, especially its emphasis on respecting the old, can only be treated as an asset, but not a substitute, for the measures that the governments can employ in furthering the welfare of the elderly.

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