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# **The Care Of Older People In Urban China: Who Is Responsible?**

**By**

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**Supervised by**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of**

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**University of Kent**

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## **Abstract**

As an ageing society going through dramatic economic and political transitions, the care of older people in urban China has increasingly become a source of social anxiety and a topic of policy debate. This study has identified three key actors in the provision of care to older people in urban China, namely the family, the neighbourhood and the state. While the Confucian emphasis on filial piety and intergenerational responsibility has put the family as the primary care provider for older people, the neighbourhood is also conventionally perceived as a safety net for them. In a society that was once dominated by the values of communal reciprocity and collective responsibilities, the state has restricted its support only to those most deprived, and has thus played a limited role in promoting welfare entitlements for older people. Yet, since the 1980s, the transition from a collective socialist economy to a competitive market economy has also transformed societal values on issues such as individuality, family, responsibility, privacy and autonomy, which subsequently changed social expectations of how the care of older people should be best delivered. I argue that in order to understand the changing social expectations and the corresponding responses from different stakeholders, one has to first comprehend the shifting ideas of the rights and responsibilities associated with the care of older people. The changing perspectives towards different types of old-age support were examined, based on 39 qualitative interviews with key stakeholders (older people, academics, government officials and local Residents Committee officers and NGO staff) in two Chinese cities, Beijing and Guangzhou. This research contributes knowledge to social gerontology and social policy field through a broader understanding of the pursuance of a 'good life' by older people in contemporary China. It points to my argument that independence and autonomy in old age, as valued by the interviewees, will not be realised unless there is a fundamental shift in policy. That is to say, policies should recognise and respect the individuality of older people and facilitate their life choices. Most importantly, a balanced welfare mix requires the state to play a stronger role in filling the care provision gap left by the family and the neighbourhood.

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## List of abbreviations

CNCA	China National Committee on Ageing
MCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs
MLSGS	Minimum Living Standard Guarantee Scheme
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPC	National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China
SOEs	State-owned enterprises

## **Chapter one: Challenges of population ageing in urban China**

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*The phone is ringing. Alone in the house, an old man picks it up. It is from his daughter! Raising his tone in a happy voice, he starts the conversation: 'I am ready to go out with friends... very busy these days... Don't worry, I've no problem. I eat well, sleep well... very busy all the time... Never feel bored, with so many friends... Don't worry about me.'* During the conversation, the screen shows him strolling alone in the street or sitting by himself in the shade. *'Your mum? Oh, she's not at home, she's out for dancing... Oh, nothing. Everything's fine, don't worry. You're busy with your work. Just do it well. No need to worry about us. You must be busy, let's stop chatting now.'* In fact, he is now on the way to visit his wife in hospital.

This story is presented in a 1.5-minute video entitled 'Visit your parents more often, don't show your love too late', which was produced by and frequently shown on China Central Television (CCTV), an official state television station with national coverage, when I did my fieldwork in China in mid-2014. The video encapsulates the message that when older people live apart from their children, they have to cope with their life problems alone and yet being reluctant to make their children worry, they hide their difficulties. The care of older people has become a social concern prompting the Chinese government to urge younger people to care more about their parents. This video was first broadcast in January 2013 which apparently became a backdrop for the revised new law coming into force in July 2013, requiring children to visit their parents often. This research seeks to unravel the causes of this phenomenon through understanding the changes in different types of old-age support in China.



## Introduction

Ageing is a global phenomenon which affects countries differently in terms of its speed and its implications for society. The United Nations defines old age as 60 years or above (Desai and Tye, 2009). Population ageing is driven by a demographic transition from high fertility and high mortality to lower fertility and lower mortality rates (Timonen, 2008). This means a continuous increase in the number as well as the proportion of older people to working-age adults and children in a population. The world's population aged 60 or over is predicted to rise from 11.7 % (841 million) in 2013 to 21.1 % (2 billion) of the total population by 2050 (United Nations, 2013). Compared to this global trend, ageing in China has come more rapidly with those aged 60 or over forecast to grow from 12.4% in 2010 to 33% of its population in 2050 (United Nations, 2012). China has become an ageing society since 2000 when those 60 years old or above reached over 10% of its population (China Development Research Foundation, 2014). By 2050, China will remain the country with the largest population aged 80 or over, totalling 90 million and sharing 32% of the world's population of those in the same age group (United Nations, 2013).

The rapid ageing in China is the outcome of the decline of birth rates due to the implementation of the one-child policy since 1978 as well as the drop in mortality rates because of health advancement. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the mortality rate dropped rapidly from 20% in 1949 to 7.6% in 1970 due to improved living conditions and health advancement (China Development Research Foundation, 2014). As a result, the population increased from 600 million in 1954 to 900 million in 1974 (China Development Research Foundation, 2014). Concerned about the capacity to support the huge population size, the government initiated the family planning campaign, *wanxishao*, meaning later marriages, longer birth intervals and fewer children in the early 1970s (Feng, Poston and Wang, 2014). To have a more effective control of the population growth, the one-child policy was implemented in the late 1970s. This policy has different rules in different parts of China or for different groups of people: families in urban areas can only have one child; rural families can have a second child if the first one is a girl; families in Ningxia, Xinjiang, Sichuan, Qinghai or Gansu where there are ethnic minorities living the pastoral life

as well as those ethnic minorities living in the sparsely populated areas can have two children (NPC, 2013). A special birth policy exists in the Tibet Autonomous Region where the urban Tibetans can have two children while the farmers and herdsmen of ethnic minorities who have a small population can have an unlimited number of children (NPC, 2013). Cai Fang, an expert in population economics, noted that the implementation of the one-child policy has disrupted the natural process of demographic transition so that the population ages rapidly when the country was still at a relatively low level of economic development, making it unprepared for the challenges of an ageing society (Cai, F., 2012).

In China, the care of older people has all along been the responsibility of the family based on the Confucian teachings such as filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity (Dixon, 1981; Tao, 2004). The neighbourhood forms another source of support where the norm of collective responsibility to help each other out exists (Dixon, 1981). The state's responsibility is only to take care of those older people who have no family, no means of living and no income, known as the 'Three Nos' (Wong, 1988). Yet, since the market reform in the late 1970s, the transition from a collective socialist economy to a competitive market economy has transformed the social values on issues such as individuality, family responsibility, privacy and autonomy, which have in turn changed the society's expectations of how the care of older people should be delivered. Both the rapid population ageing and the socio-economic challenges brought by the market reform have aroused the society's concern about the sustainability and practicality of relying on informal care support for older people in the transitional economy. Given that older people are growing rapidly in number and are living longer, the ageing issue of 'who should be responsible for the care of older people and what should they be responsible for' is widely reported in the media.

My study sets out to investigate how older people perceive and respond to the changes in old-age support in the transition from the socialist era (1949-1978) stressing collective responsibility to the market economy era (from 1979 onwards). Such changes involve a set of new values facing them, such as a competitive culture, personal responsibility, privacy or pursuit of life enjoyment. Most of the older people under this study had one child and now face limited family support. In order to understand the society's changing expectations and

the corresponding responses from different stakeholders, one must first comprehend the shifting ideas of the rights and responsibilities underlying the individual and collective decisions associated with the care of older people.

More specifically, this research focusses on the care of older people in urban areas. The socio-economic challenges arising from the market reform and the one-child policy have had substantial impact upon the life of the growing population in urban areas. According to the World Bank (2016), China's urbanisation rate has been rapid in the past decades, rising from 20% in 1981 to 54% in 2014. The rate is projected to reach 70% by 2030 with about one billion people living in the cities (World Bank, 2014).

The older people under this study refer to those who are residing in their own homes. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the state expects that about 96% to 97% of the older people will age in their own home with around 3% to 4% receiving residential care. Therefore, the research in this thesis will focus on policy to enable older people to age in place. Understandably, older people need different types of home-care support in their daily life activities when their self-care abilities deteriorate and their emotional or social support diminishes, particularly when they become homebound. In this regard, home-care support can include personal care such as bathing, dressing, eating or toileting, help with the daily routines of household cleaning, shopping, cooking, laundry, household repairs, escort for medical appointments, getting around outdoors as well as management tasks like paying the bills or liaising with a third party (Wicks, 1982; Bulmer, 1987; Wilson, 2000; Chou and Leung, 2008; Timonen, 2008). Moreover, social and emotional support is needed for companionship to prevent loneliness and isolation from the neighbourhood (Wicks, 1982; Tester, 1996; Chen and Silverstein, 2000; Du, 2013). To provide the different types of care, family, neighbours, friends, volunteers or the state service can offer assistance in daily routines or provide emotional support to older people while the task of personal care remains the responsibility of the family, and if close kin are not available, hired care workers or the formal service helpers are the alternatives (Bulmer, 1987; Wilson, 2000; Timonen, 2008). This shows that different sectors have a role to provide the care support to older people and they

cannot be easily substituted for each other. The various types of support above are the focus of this research.

The following sections of this chapter intend to give an overview of the challenges of population ageing. The first section outlines the general implications of population ageing for society, which provides a preliminary background for an understanding of the experience in China. The second section highlights the difference in the ageing experience between the Asian countries and the developed countries. The discussion in the policy response to tackle the ageing issues among some of the East Asian countries which share the same cultural traditions with China will bring out the difficulties China faces in coping with the ageing problem. The difficulties in devising an ageing policy and the impact of demographic and socio-economic challenges to the care of older people will be covered in section three, which is followed by the discussion on the phenomenon of the empty-nest households in the fourth section. Lastly, an outline of each chapter of this thesis will be given.

## **Impact of population ageing**

This section discusses the implication of population ageing for society, which will provide a background context relevant to the understanding of the ageing issue in China.

The international experiences of the implication of ageing reported by the Asian Development Bank (2014) show that ageing can increase or often increases a government's financial responsibility for providing services to meet the growing needs of the ageing population, which is further aggravated by the reduction in the working population with its negative effect on the sustainability of the pension system. Owing to the lengthened life expectancy, there will be an increasing number of older people requiring different kinds of home-care support even though they may not necessarily be suffering from long periods of disabilities (Kinsella, 2000; Timonen, 2008; Desai and Tye, 2009). The rapid growth in the number of those aged 80 or over further exacerbates the ageing problem since this category of older people is likely to suffer from more health impairment, thus creating additional care demands, as pointed out by Kinsella (2000).

Moreover, Wilding (2005) expressed that traditional family support cannot be used as a reference guide to the future care of older people. He explained that the care needs of older people are changing since they are more prone to long-term disabilities such as stroke or dementia while at the same time, social changes also erode the capacity of family care. This implies the need to look into the new alternatives of providing support to older people who are now greater in number and live longer, possibly requiring a longer period of care in an ageing society.

Seemingly, much of the attention is drawn to the alarming consequences that the increasing longevity of the growing older population means older people require a lot of care, which creates pressure on the shrinking younger population (Harper, 2006). Phillipson (2013) noted that while information on the size of the older population and its category, such as the very old or those with certain health conditions, can provide an important basis for policy-making, such categorisation can also lead to the distorted view that people of a certain age are only seen in terms of their limitations and disabilities. In fact, older people live longer today and they can have more opportunities to play a contributory role in the society (Timonen, 2008; Phillipson, 2013). The World Health Organisation's Active Ageing framework outlined the action plans that promote healthy and active ageing which is defined as the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security so as to enhance the quality of life of older people (World Health Organisation, 2002). Timonen (2008) pointed out that many older people especially those who are in their 60s provide support to their children's households, such as by contributing to household finance, managing housework and looking after their grandchildren so as to free the younger people to engage in employment. Moreover, there is also an increasing number of active and healthy older people adopting a new lifestyle and participating in a range of social relationships (Chambers *et al.*, 2009). The participation of older people in voluntary services is also a sign of healthy, active and productive ageing, as seen by Warburton (2015). The exact impact of ageing on society depends on the extent of the changing health-care needs of older people who can get healthier or not, their service expectations, the capacity of their families to offer care to them and the economic resources of the country concerned and the approach it adopts to address the ageing problem (Timonen, 2008).

In short, the ageing population is often seen as a burden to society due to increased spending on pensions and health-care services it entails. Adopting a balanced view towards the ageing issue is crucial in the sense that the diverse needs and the potential contributions of older people should be taken into consideration in policy-making. This is especially important when this study is about old-age support in the transitional urban society where older people may have different views towards their care needs.

## **Ageing in Asia**

This section focusses on the challenges facing the Asian countries by highlighting the differences between the developed countries and the Asian countries in their experience of population ageing. The discussion in the next section on the policy response to tackle the ageing issue in some of the East Asian countries which share the same cultural traditions with China will help bring out the difficulties that China faces in coping with the ageing problem.

While describing the population ageing in the Asian context, Wilding (2005) observed that the term 'Asia' embraces societies which are different in terms of their size, level of economic development and urbanisation, religious or cultural tradition and the ways they have approached the ageing problem. The Asian countries are at different stages of population ageing due to significant differences in the timing and speed of fertility and mortality decline, with a still relatively young population in South Asia while in East Asia, the populations are substantially older (Asian Development Bank, 2012). Although not every Asian country is experiencing ageing to the same degree, the trend of rapid ageing in some of them is a challenge to the governments since there is not sufficient time to accumulate resources or to establish service systems to cope with this crisis which comes within a short period of time (Chan, 2005). Chan and Ma (2015) noted that the accumulation of assets from public pensions or programmes that encourage private savings through insurance schemes, and human resource training for the care service industry, require a long period of time.

Aspalter and Walker (2015) pointed out that it took more than 100 years in both Britain and France for the proportion of those aged 65 or over to move from 7% to 14%, the transition from an ageing population to an aged population. China will take only 25 years to achieve

this (Aspalter and Walker, 2015). As Wilding (2005) noted, in the developed Western countries when the population began to age, a welfare system was already in place which could be expanded further to meet the increasing needs of older people. Currently, Germany, France and the Netherlands rely on the social insurance system to pay for older people's long-term care expenses while the governments of Scandinavian countries play a significant role in financing and delivering the services (Asian Development Bank, 2014). Welfare services for older people are almost non-existent in most of the Asian countries since they have all along relied mainly on family care. England (2005) pointed out that China reached the stage of population ageing before it became a moderately developed country, in contrast to other Asian countries or cities such as South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore or Hong Kong, which had already reached the level of moderate development before ageing took place so that they were in a better financial position to cope with the challenge. This shows that ageing impacts the Asian countries differently, depending largely on the availability of resources to tackle the issue.

As in China, the ageing problem also presents challenges to other East Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea or Taiwan, where the family also plays a significant role in the care of older people. White and Goodman (1998) depicted the role of the family in the East Asian countries as 'welfare orientalism' where family welfare has evolved over the years without significant state intervention. These East Asian countries are subject to the influence of Confucianism which stresses the responsibility of children in the care of their parents (Desai and Tye, 2009). The governments of these countries portray the welfare state as financially unproductive, eroding the family responsibilities and against their traditional values emphasising family responsibility and self-reliance (White and Goodman, 1998; Holliday and Wilding, 2003). Their residual welfare system only provides a safety net to the deprived groups. The limited state provision is justified by the government on the ground that the families fulfil their responsibilities as the source of support for their members, thus requiring no state intervention (Holliday and Wilding, 2003). Therefore, as these East Asian countries experience ageing, the family still bears the key responsibility in the care of older people and the social care system for older people is underdeveloped.

According to the World Bank (2012), Japan became an ageing society in 1970 when those aged 65 or over shared 7% of its total population, and the proportion of older people continued to rise from 12% in 1990, estimated to reach 34% in 2040. In South Korea, the percentage of population aged 65 or above was predicted to rise from 5% in 1990 to 30% in 2040 (World Bank, 2012). A similar sharp rise of population aged 65 or over was forecast in Taiwan from 6.5% in 1991 to about one-third of its total population by 2041 (Executive Yuan, 2012). As discussed above, the ageing population has implications on the government's finance. Social spending as a percentage of GDP in Japan had risen from 11.3% in 1990 to 18.7% in 2007 while the percentage in Korea also witnessed an increase of over 170% from 2.8% in 1990 to 7.6% in 2007 (OECD, 2012).

Foreseeing the increasing care needs of older people and the weakening of the traditional family support, these countries, despite their emphasis on the family as the key support for older people, have formulated long-term care policies for older people in recent decades. There are pragmatic concerns about straining the expensive medical system if there is no alternative care option for the hospitalised older people who cannot be discharged home, and this problem may also reduce female participation in the labour market if the carers, chiefly female, have to stay at home to take care of their aged relatives (Ozawa and Nakayama, 2005). In Japan, the Long-term Care Insurance Law was passed in 1997 and took effect in 2000, representing a greater share of state responsibility and a departure from the assumption about the key role of the family in the care of older people (Ozawa and Nakayama, 2005). In response to its ageing population, the socio-economic changes and political democratisation, South Korea introduced the Universal Long-term Care Insurance in 2008, which signifies the shift of care responsibility from the family to the state and also recognises the welfare rights of the people (Kim and Choi, 2013). In Taiwan, the National Pension on the political agenda for a few decades, was finally implemented in 2008, which provides income protection to those without access to labour insurance, such as the lower income groups, the unemployed and the housewives (Bureau of Labour Insurance, 2012). Furthermore, the Taiwanese government also passed the Long-term Care Services Act in May 2015 which will take effect in 2017 (Executive Yuan, 2015). Nadash and Shih (2013) considered that the increasing democratisation in Taiwan and the high degree of public



support for welfare improvement put pressure on the politicians to enact the long-term care policy.

Apparently, these policy directions are made possible in these three countries since they enjoy a relatively high level of economic development without much regional variation and have a democratic political system in which politicians have to honour their election promises for welfare enhancement, especially in South Korea and Taiwan. As will be further discussed in the next section, this is different from China which is beset with problems such as ageing at a low economic level, great variations across the country and the absence of a democratic system.

## **Challenges facing the care of older people in urban China**

This section highlights the difficulties China encounters in coping with ageing, such as getting old before it gets rich, the existence of diversities across the country with a huge population size, and the lack of a democratic political system to initiate welfare reform. All this hinders the formulation of a strategy to tackle the ageing problem. The discussion on how the demographic challenge and the socio-economic changes has upset the informal care arrangements for older people will be included in this section.

### **The lack of an ageing policy**

Compared with the above-mentioned East Asian countries with an ageing policy in place, China faces the problem of ageing, with a low income level, substantial regional variations, a huge population of 1.3 billion as well as the lack of a democratic political system. These pose considerable difficulty for the development of a strategy to tackle the ageing problem.

One could argue that China is under-prepared to become an ageing society (China Development Foundation, 2014). This can be explained by both structural and financial factors. China, without a developed service system in place for older people, is now facing the problem of 'getting old before getting rich' (Aspalter, 2007; People's Daily, 2010). Most of the OECD countries' GDP per capita reached about US\$10,000 when they became ageing societies, yet, China only attained GDP per capita at around US\$1,000 when it became an ageing society in 2000 (Li, 2014). The government has to tackle the social problems such as

growing inequality and urban poverty arising from the market reform as well as the ageing challenge almost at the same time (Aspalter, 2007).

The geographical nature of China such as its vast territory and substantial variations across the country renders it difficult for the Chinese government to formulate a policy to tackle the ageing problem. Coupled with its huge population size of 1.3 billion, China is the world's third largest country by total area, with 23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 centrally administrated municipalities and 2 special administrative regions (Chan, Ngok and Phillips, 2008). The population of some provinces, such as Henan with 85 million, was even larger than Germany with 81 million (Chan, Ngok and Phillips, 2008). Moreover, about 94% of its population occupies the 42.9% of the land area in south-eastern China which has a higher level of economic development, while the remaining 6% of population inhabits the 57.1% of the land area in the north-western part of the country which is in a relatively poor economic condition (Li, P., 2012). To redress the regional disparity in development, since the late 1990s the government has invested a great amount of economic resources in infrastructure building, energy or environmental projects in the western, north-eastern as well as its central parts by launching the 'western development strategy', 'north-east revival strategy' and 'the rise of central China' respectively (Zheng and Chen, 2007). Yet, the government finds it hard to achieve the policy objectives fully when the market mechanism operates beyond its control (Zheng and Chen, 2007). Apart from the diversity in the level of economic development with regional and local variations, there is also an inter-provincial difference in the ageing level, with the highest concentration in the eastern coastal developed region in contrast to the northern, western and southern remote provinces which are inhabited by ethnic groups who still have high fertility levels (Du and Guo, 2000). Moreover, the existence of the dual welfare systems in urban and rural areas in terms of welfare benefits, health care and pension system for older people (Du and Guo, 2000) adds further challenges to the state in tackling the ageing problem, compared to other East Asian countries. Xu and Chow (2011) argued that because of these diversities, it is not feasible to have uniform service standards for all the provinces to follow but rather, the community service policy for older people should be developed based on the local needs. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, since the market reform in the late 1970s, the devolution of the welfare

responsibility from the central to the local government has led to the uneven or random provision of service when there is no guideline on the basic standard of services to be provided and there is inadequate monitoring of the services from the central government.

The lack of political democracy may explain the state's unresponsiveness towards the needs of its population. Being an effectively one-party state without a democratic political system, the government has no need to appeal to voters for political support while there are also no viable opposition parties, independent civil society or media to bring about bottom-up pressures for welfare change (Peng and Wong, 2010). Thus, the lack of a democracy has made the government less motivated to initiate welfare reform unless the discontent of the people has reached a level which threatens social stability (Zhang and Xu, 2010; Peng and Ding, 2012). The older people, who have gone through the socialist era when almost every aspect of life was under the state's close monitoring, used to be submissive towards the state's rule and were not ready to make demands (Leung, 2005). Even for the current generation of some older people who are more vocal, there seems to be no channel to speak out. The younger people, especially those from the one-child families, are ready to express their views about the difficulties in looking after their aged parents through the media or on the web platform. However, in the absence of a democratic political system, the government is not keen to give the welfare of older people priority, although the latter will take up almost one-fourth of the total population by 2030.

In short, ageing at a low economic level, great regional disparities and the lack of political democracy leading to bureaucratic inertia are the factors facing the Chinese government in coping with the ageing issue. The demographic and socio-economic challenges discussed below further exacerbated the problem of the care support for older people.

### **The demographic factor**

This section discusses how the demographic challenge limits the ability of the family to provide care for older people. The possible impact of the changes in the one-child policy in 2013 and the implementation of the two-child policy in 2015 to address population ageing is also included.

The implementation of the one-child policy in the late 1970s has led to the sharp fall in the crude birth rates from 25.6 in 1990 to 13.1 in 2010, which is predicted to drop further to 9.8 in 2030, as shown in Table 1. The proportion of those 60 or above is expected to increase from 12.4% in 2010 to 33% in 2050, which is the outcome of the increasing life expectancy and the low birth rates (Table 1).

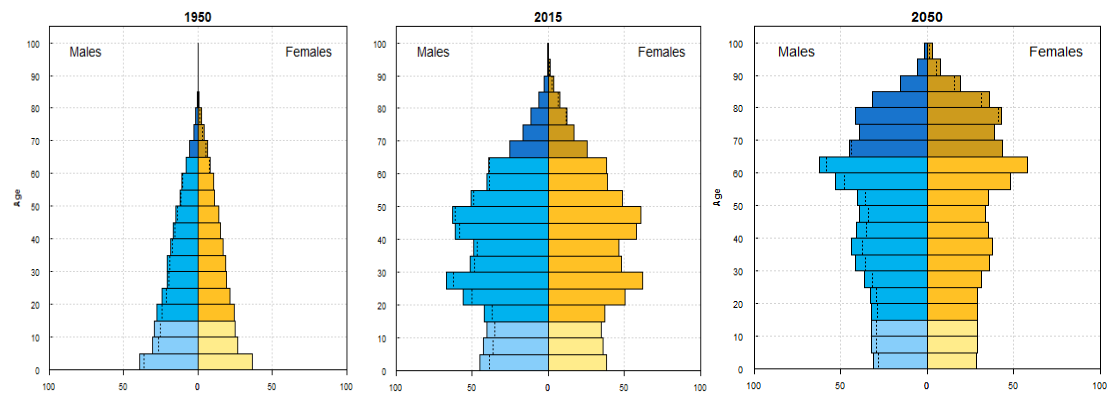
Table 1. Percentage (%) of older people in the total population, crude birth rates and life expectancy by years in China.

Year	Aged 60 or over (%)	Aged 80 or over (%)	Old-age dependency ratio (ratio of the population aged 65 years or over to the population aged 15-64)	Male life expectancy at birth (years)	Female life expectancy at birth (years)	Crude birth rate (per 1000 population)
1990	8.6	0.8	8.9	67.4	70.5	25.6
2010	12.4	1.5	11.4	73.2	75.8	13.1
2030	23.8	2.5	23.8	76.2	78.8	9.8
2050	32.8	6.5	39	78.7	81.3	9.6

(Source: United Nations, 2012)

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the population pyramid with a wider base indicates that the population was relatively young with high birth and mortality rates in 1950. However, in 2015, there is a predominance of young and middle-aged adults with a contraction of the base, which is an indication of ageing. When it reaches 2050, the figure shows a uniform population size across the age groups below 60 whereas the 60-65 group swells, indicating that the size of the older population will be nearly the same as the younger one.

Figure 1. Population pyramids showing the distribution of various age groups in China in 1950, 2015 and 2050 respectively.



(Source: United Nations, 2015)

Longer life expectancy is the great achievement of mankind but the huge number of the aged population also brings challenges to society (China Development Research Foundation, 2014). Referring to Table 1, the life expectancy is 73.2 years for males and 75.8 for females in 2010 while it is forecast to rise to 78.7 for males and 81.3 for females in 2050. The increased life expectancy means a longer period of care is likely to be required. Low fertility rate results in fewer younger people being available to provide care for older people (Izuhara, 2010). There is a possibility that when the children reach the age of 70s or 80s, they possibly need care themselves but still have to look after their parents who may be centenarians.

According to Mr Wang Guangzhou, demographer from Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, there were 145 million children who are the only child in the family in 2010 and their number is predicted to grow to 300 million in 2050 (Netease News, 2015). A great majority of them are living in urban areas where the one-child policy has been strictly enforced. Among the one-child families, there are *shidu* parents who lost their only child due to accident or illness and they are unable to bear another child because of their age, adding to the issue of future old-age support for this group of parents (Feng, Poston and Wang, 2014).

When it comes to the family with a single child, the aged couple will be supported by their only child who has no sibling to share the care responsibility. The horizontal ties to siblings and cousins do not exist while the vertical ties expand from grandparents to grandchild. In

other words, a married couple belonging to the one-child family have to look after four parents, possibly several grandparents, along with their own child (Jiang, 1995; Zhan, 2004). The care responsibility to the older relatives may include home-care assistance, emotional support and financial backing associated with medical expenses (Ge and Shu, 2001; Wang and Xia, 2001; Wu *et al.*, 2005). Although a majority of older people have access to pensions, the amount of which is unlikely to be sufficient to cover the full cost of residential care if they have such need. In such cases, the children have to pool their resources together to help pay or supplement the bill, which will not be possible for the future one-child generation (Zhan *et al.*, 2011). This shows that the smaller family size has a lower capacity to cope with contingencies. As noted by Du and Guo (2000), even though the children are willing to take care of their parents, it is not possible to rely solely on them to take up the responsibility. It brings out the reality of family care when the ageing population is growing while the care network is shrinking. This gives rise to the concern about who will take care of older people in the future.

Although the one-child policy is believed to have weakened the family support for older people, its implications remain to be seen. Since the single children are the focus of the family and are pampered by their parents and grandparents, they are described as little emperors who are unlikely to take up the care responsibility (Feng, Poston and Wang, 2014). On the other hand, being the only child in the family may make these children feel more obliged to take care of their parents since the latter have no other children to rely on (Zhan, 2004). From the perspective of older people, instead of relying on their only child for support, they may have to make plans for their old age. These factors interact to influence the future care of older people, which is likely to be different from the conventional mode of relying wholly on the family.

The low birth rate and the increase in life expectancy also lead to the rising old-age dependency ratio from 11.4 in 2010 to 23.8 in 2030 and 39 in 2050, as forecast in Table 1. The reduction of the labour force resulting in a decrease of productivity and the rise in social costs associated with meeting the pensions, health care and welfare provisions for an increasing older population have become a challenge in an ageing society. To address this

issue, the Chinese government relaxed the one-child policy in November 2013, which allows couples to have two children if one of the parents is an only child (Chance, 2014). The government took a further step to end the one-child policy and began to fully implement the two-child policy nationwide in October 2015, with a view to balancing the population structure and mitigating the challenges of an ageing population (People's Daily, 2015b). As the nature of the population evolution is rather long-term, even if every young Chinese couple takes advantage of the new policy, it will take at least a few decades before the demographic and social impacts can be felt (Chance, 2014). Liang Zhongtang, demographer from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences pointed out that people's behaviour would not follow the government's policy when they were told they could have a second child now (Phillips, 2015). With the pursuit of modern lifestyles and the rising living standard, families have become more pragmatic in making the child-bearing decision so that there is an increasing trend for the couples to choose to have one or even no child (China Development Research Foundation, 2014). In urbanised cities, as seen in Shanghai where about 90% of the women of child-bearing age should be eligible for a second child under the relaxation of the one-child policy in 2013, only 5% applied for the permission since a bigger family means increased living costs and reduced earnings, the reluctance to have a second child is more conspicuous (Gracie, 2015). The birth population dropped by 320,000 in 2015 compared to the 2014 figure which is contrary to the official projection that it would rise after the one-child policy has been relaxed in late 2013 (China News, 2016). The cost involved of having a second child, the pursuit of their personal life goals and the balance between child care and career development are the considerations for the parents to make child-bearing decisions.

In short, the reduction in the family size and the growing number of older people with longer life expectancy have limited the family capacity to look after older people. The evidence above shows that the recent changes introduced in the one-child policy are unlikely to have much effect on boosting the fertility rate.

### **The socio-economic factor**

This section shows how the impact of the market reform on the life arrangements of individuals has weakened the support they give to their older relatives and how the value

changes in the market economy affect the social perception of care provision for older people.

Since the establishment of the Communist regime in 1949, the work unit-based system had been implemented to provide lifetime employment and welfare benefits for the urban workers as well as maintaining social stability (Leung, 2005). The 'Regulations on Labour Insurance of the People's Republic of China' in 1951 and 'Temporary Regulations on Retirement of the Staff and Workers by the State Council' in 1958 provided social security benefits for the majority of urban workers (Du and Guo, 2000). Upon their retirement, the male workers at the age of 60 and female blue-collar and white-collar workers at the age of 50 and 55 respectively received a non-contributory pension which is about 50% to 70% of their wage, depending on the number of years of employment (Whiteford, 2003).

The economic reform in the late 1970s brought improvement in the living standard. However, it also signifies the reduction of the state's commitment to the welfare of workers and increased privatisation of the public services in areas of education, health care and housing (Bartlett and Phillips, 1997; Ikels, 2006; Ngok and Huang, 2014). The introduction of market-oriented activities has transformed the socialist nature of the economy to a market one. Since the mid-1980s, the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have been made responsible for their own profits and losses, which has eventually led to lay-offs and bankruptcies (Leung, 2005). The guarantee of lifetime employment was replaced by the contract worker scheme in 1986 (Duckett and Carrillo, 2011; Leung and Xu, 2015). New employees are hired on contract and both the workers and the employers are required to make contributions to the pension funds (Leung and Xu, 2015). As explained by Chan, Ngok and Phillips (2008), since the government has to rely on market forces to pursue economic growth, market-oriented measures are introduced requiring the contributions from both employers and employees to unemployment, medical, pension and housing schemes. The new system, put in place in the late 1980s, may not affect older people who are still protected by the old system but it affects younger people who have to take more responsibility by making contributions to the social insurance schemes and to strive to secure stable living in the competitive economy which relies heavily on productivity and performance appraisals. The younger people have to work



hard and acquire new skills or qualifications, leaving them less time and energy to provide support or even communicate with their family members (Yuen-Tsang, Ho and Ku, 2000). As noted by Cook (2011), individuals, having earned an increased amount of income in the market economy, are expected to cover the expenses on the benefits formerly provided free through the work unit-based system. The economic burden of younger people has increased since apart from the various insurance schemes, they have to cope with the rising living cost due to privatisation of public services as well as with supporting their parents singly if they are the one-child generation. All these make it harder for younger people today to attend to the needs of their parents in terms of financial contribution and time and effort.

Under the market reform, some of the SOEs are in poor financial conditions which result in the reductions or default on pension payment and delays in the reimbursement of medical expenses for the retirees (Ikels, 2006). The China Urban Labour Survey conducted in five big cities between 1996 and 2001 revealed that 10.6% of retirees experienced pension arrears (Giles, Park and Cai, 2006). If older people have no access to a pension or the pension benefits cannot guarantee a basic living standard, they have to depend on their savings or the family for support (Lai, 2001; Palmer and Deng, 2008). To provide solutions for this situation, the State Council has established a unified nationwide basic pension insurance system for enterprise workers in 1997 (Asian Development Bank, 2013). For those who joined the new pension scheme after 1997, all enterprise workers and their employers have to pay 8% and 20% of the workers' monthly earnings respectively as contributions to individual and social pooling accounts while the civil servants have no need to contribute since their pensions are 100% financed by the state (Leckie, 2012). As population ageing accelerates, the government has to finance the pension obligations in different ways such as when the enterprises cannot fulfil the contribution of 20% of the employees' earnings to their pension accounts (Chen, Eggleston and Li, 2011). In terms of the gross replacement rates, the current average for urban retirees is 78% and there is a difference in the rate between enterprise workers and civil servants, which is 58% and 90% respectively (Leckie, 2012). The employees have to make contributions for at least 15 years before they are eligible for the pension benefits when they reach the statutory retirement age of 50-55 for females and 60 for males (Chen, Eggleston and Li, 2011). According to the National Baseline Survey of

the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) conducted in 2011-2012, the employment rate among the urban workers declined from nearly 80% of those in the age group of 45-49, to 40% of those who are in the 55-59 and 20% for those aged between 60 and 64 (CHARLS Research Team, 2013). The decline in the employment rate among urban workers is the outcome of the statutory retirement age and their access to pensions with coverage rates reaching 83.6% as shown in this survey. The implementation of the Residents' Old-Age Pension Scheme in 2012 for those urban residents who are outside the labour force, especially for those who became unemployed and lost their social security benefits during the restructuring of the SOEs since the market reform, has further improved the pension coverage rates (Leung and Xu, 2015). The survey findings conducted by Renmin University released in April 2016 showed that about 91.25% of the older people in urban areas received pension payments (Ye, 2016).

Moreover, the Minimum Living Standard Guarantee Scheme (MLSGS) has been implemented since 1999 to tackle the urban poverty arising from the market reform (Guan and Xu, 2011). The MLSGS targets those families whose per capita household income is below the locally decided minimum living security line by providing them with a bare subsistence (Peng and Ding, 2012). This source of financial support can also offer a safety net for older people if they do not have other sources of income.

Although there are measures in place to protect the livelihood of older people, the transformation brought by the market reform has, to a certain extent, affected the status of older people in society and brought changes to the practice of family care. During the pre-reform era, the work unit-based system recognised seniority and political loyalty, and yet the market economy rewards economic performance and educational qualification which are often inversely correlated with age (Zhang, 2004). This has led to the gradual decline of the social status and position of the older people. Upon the disintegration of the work unit-based system, younger people could no longer take up their parents' jobs (Sheng and Settles, 2006). On the other hand, with the increasing job opportunities in the private sector, younger people enjoy more freedom to pursue their fortunes in the market economy (Guthrie, 2012). Their life chances are no longer restricted to their hometown. When the population becomes

mobile, the co-residence of the younger and older generations is less feasible, thus inevitably affecting the provision of care to older people by their children.

Such impact of the market reform, coupled with a changing social perspective on independence and individuality, affect the preference of both generations regarding the care arrangements for older people.

The expansion of educational opportunities exposes younger people to different values. To develop the human resources to meet the demands of the market economy, the government expanded the higher education institutions from 1,054 to 1,792 between 1995 and 2005 while the number of students enrolled also rose from 2.9 million to 15.6 million during the same period (Chan, Ngok and Phillips, 2008). The contemporary education puts emphasis on independence, equality and self-fulfilment of an individual (Pimentel, 2005; Fan, 2007). These values are further portrayed as modern and popular by the mass media (Sheng and Settles, 2006). The changes in social values may make younger people less adhered to the filial norms, which may exacerbate the implications of the ageing issue.

Wilson (2000) saw that that even though in a culture which has a tradition of family support for older people, it cannot be assumed that this kind of support can be sustained. The views of younger people towards family responsibility may change over time. As in Taiwan, a Chinese society which shares the same cultural traditions with Mainland China, the percentage of individuals who offered financial support to their parents but not living with them increased from 17.2% in 1995 to 30.6% according to the 2005 Taiwan Social Change Survey, as reported by Wang (2011). Zhan (2004) found that the survey in two cities, Yiyang in Hunan Province and Baoding in Hebei Province, China, conducted on 777 one-child generation students and 110 middle-aged parents from 1997 to 1999, showed that the parents had low expectations of their children to provide them with care in future and few of them expected to live with their children. At the same time, the children in the above survey indicated that they were willing to support their parents, and yet expressed unwillingness to live with them.

Regarding this new preference in living arrangement, Ge and Shu (2001) explained that the younger generation places more emphasis on privacy and prefers to live apart from their

parents. The phenomenon of the fulfilment or partial fulfilment of filial responsibilities through hiring of care workers as informal caregivers becomes common (Chappel, 2008). Yet, this arrangement is determined by the family resources, which in turn increases the random nature of the support for older people (Yuan, 2001). On the other hand, those who are now in their 60s and enjoy the improving living standards brought by the market reform, may also share different values from their own parents regarding family care. Co-residence arrangement, once regarded as a norm to receive care from the children in one's old age, is now undergoing changes (Mao and Chi, 2011). As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, the current interpretation of filial responsibilities, as perceived by the older people in this research has also changed from practical daily support to the children's willingness to provide assistance when needed, to keep phone contacts with them regularly and to have family gatherings on festive occasions.

In short, the market reform has not affected much of the financial entitlements of the current generation of older people who are still under the protection of the 'old system'. However, it witnesses the reduction of the state's welfare responsibility. More emphasis has been put on the personal responsibility of younger people who now have to strive hard in the new economy and to bear the financial contributions to the various insurance schemes, which in turn reduces their ability to attend to the needs of their parents. The increasing population mobility has made it less feasible for the younger and the older generations to stay together, which subsequently affects the provision of care to older people. Moreover, as the society develops, the perception of both generations towards family care also shifts with time. Both younger and older people attach more importance to privacy and autonomy in choosing their own lifestyles rather than choosing to live under the same roof. In societies where older people have financial resources such as pensions, living independently may indicate a sign of economic self-sufficiency and a higher standard of living (United Nations, 2013).

The predominance of the one-child families, increasing population mobility and preference for privacy of both generations have made the co-residence living arrangement impractical. When the empty-nest households become the dominant living arrangement, it implies that older people have to manage their life difficulties alone if their self-care abilities deteriorate.

## The phenomenon of empty-nest households

Empty-nest households refer to those older people who live alone or with their spouse but do not live with their children. Table 2 indicates that the national average family size dropped from 4.41 persons in 1982 to 2.98 in 2013. The family size is even smaller in urban areas.

Table 2. Average family size in China.

Family size (persons) / Year	1982	1990	2000	2010	2013
National	4.41	3.96	3.44	3.10	2.98
Urban area	3.89 (1985)	3.50	3.13	2.88	2.86 (2012)

(Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1996, 2011b, 2013, 2014, 2016)

The China National Committee on Ageing (CNCA) reported that the percentage of empty-nest households in urban China increased from 42% in 2000 to 49.7% in 2009 (China Development Research Foundation, 2014). The figures in big cities were much higher, reaching 70% in 2011 (People's Daily, 2011). Since the empty-nest households have become the main type of living arrangement, there is growing societal concern about the difficulties such households encounter in their daily living (Boermel, 2006). This concern is reflected in the following research studies quoted to show that the older people in such households had a tendency to feel lonelier with more worries about home-care or health issues.

A study conducted in Shanghai, China, indicated that compared with the non-empty-nest households, the older people in empty-nest households were more likely to have worries about their health, availability of home-care support or assistance with travelling to seek medical treatment (Liu, *et al.*, 2013). Another study in Shanghai reported that these older people faced social exclusion risks arising from inadequate social relationships, lack of participation in civic activities, as well as insufficient service provision in the community (Yuan and Ngai, 2012). In a study of the older people in empty-nest households in both urban and rural areas in Sichuan, China, Wang *et al.* (2013) observed that anxiety appeared to be the common problem experienced by the older people in these households.

As the Chinese cultural norms put a strong emphasis on collective family living, older people who live alone often encounter social stigmatisation, resulting in a sense of inferiority and loneliness that probably causes more depressive symptoms (Tong *et al.*, 2011). Paying high regard to family values and the notion of raising children as a protection for one's old age, older people are likely to have a strong degree of emotional dependence on and expectation of their children for care in their old age (Yuan and Ngai, 2012). This cultural perspective may explain the outcome of the above research findings that the older people in empty-nest households have a lower life satisfaction and more worries in their daily life than the non-empty-nest households. Moreover, leading an independent life also means that older people need practical assistance in their daily living when they are unable to care for themselves. Thus, the erosion of the co-residence living arrangement will require more formal services to mitigate the impacts of the socio-economic changes (Meng and Luo, 2008; Cheung and Kwan, 2009; Korinek, Zimmer and Gu, 2011). In response to the empty-nest household phenomenon, Mr Wu Yushao, the deputy director of the CNCA stressed that since the government's capacity to care for empty-nest households was far from adequate, the government, families and NGOs (Non-governmental organisations) should share the responsibility to care for older people, and he encouraged children to live with or near to their parents so as to give the latter better support (People's Daily, 2011). As will be demonstrated in later chapters, despite his goodwill, the above official seemed to have missed the fact that co-residence living arrangement has become increasingly unpopular with both younger and older people. But his remark does reflect that the urgency of seeking a new welfare mix to support older people has become a national concern.

As a whole, the impact of demographic and socio-economic challenges on the care provision for older people in the transitional economy has been further magnified by China's particularities, such as getting old before it gets rich, the variations across the country with a huge population, and the lack of a democratic political system, posing obstacles for the government to devise a strategy to tackle the ageing problem. This calls for a fundamental rethinking of the question: who should be responsible for what in the provision of care to older people in urban China?

## Outline of the thesis

The problem of population ageing in China can be understood through identifying the impact of the demographic and socio-economic challenges that affects the old-age support in urban China. Also, factors like the country growing old before getting rich, the existence of variations across its territories with a huge population and the lack of a democratic political system to initiate welfare reform have contributed to the difficulties in building a strategy to tackle the ageing problem. The purpose of this study is to examine the changing roles of the family, the neighbourhood and the state in the care of older people so as to put forward recommendations on how to respond to the changing care expectations of older people in the transitional economy. Through interviewing different stakeholders namely, older people, government officials, local Residents Committee officers, academics as well as NGO staff, in Beijing and Guangzhou, this study produces a wealth of empirical data to enhance the understanding of this topic from different perspectives so as to shed light on the policy directions for the provision of better support for older people.

The outline of the next six chapters in this thesis is as follows.

Chapter 2 sets out the analytical framework for this study. It discusses the rationale for identifying the family, the neighbourhood and the state as the three key care providers for older people in urban China. Various sources of literature about the changing perception of the rights and responsibilities inherent in these three types of support are reviewed and the knowledge gaps are identified.

Chapter 3 details the research methods and the data collection process of this study. A total of 39 semi-structured interviews were carried out with 23 in Beijing and 16 in Guangzhou. The research samples included 18 older people, 1 government official, 5 local Residents Committees officers, 5 academics and 10 NGO staff. The older people among them provided rich data on how they perceived the changes in different types of old-age support. The government official helped explain the rationale underlying state policy while the local Residents Committee officers gave accounts of the changing roles of different types of old-age support they witnessed at the local level. Interviews with the NGO staff provided

additional information on the service support for older people at the local level and on state-society relationship. The data from the academics provided expert knowledge of demographic ageing, the Chinese welfare system, the service framework for older people and the future direction in ageing policy. This chapter also reflects on the ethical issue involved and the limitations of this research.

Chapter 4 focusses on the role of the family in the care of older people. By comparing the current family support with the traditional one, the findings demonstrate the older people's changing expectation of family care, their rights to family support and filial responsibilities. Instead of relying on their children to shoulder the care responsibility, the older people interviewed quite insisted on having autonomy in their care arrangements. These findings seem to indicate that the current state policy emphasising family responsibility in old-age support may have been misdirected.

Chapter 5 examines the role of the neighbourhood to support older people. It shows how a value shift from collective responsibility to privacy and self-responsibility in the market economy erodes the neighbourhood support for older people. The interview findings provide insight into the ways of mobilising the community resources and the need for connecting the resources with the service-providing organisations to become an effective means of support for older people.

Chapter 6 evaluates the role of the state in providing services for older people. Through discussing different layers of service provision in the community, it identifies reasons for the government's non-responsiveness towards the new care demands of older people as well as the policy failure when implemented at the local level.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter which summarises the key research findings and how they contribute to a broader understanding of the quest for a 'good life' by older people in contemporary China. Facing the declining role of both the family and the neighbourhood in the support of older people, the society expects the state to take a more active role to fill the gaps. From this perspective, policy recommendations are made about how to address the changing expectations about the care of older people. The future research direction is also discussed.



## **Chapter two: Different types of old-age support in urban China**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter explains the reasons for identifying the family, the neighbourhood and the state as the research framework for the study of the care of older people in urban China. Confucian teachings attach great importance to family responsibility in the care of older people, while the long practice of collective responsibility in the neighbourhood in Imperial China as much as in the pre-reform era constitutes another source of support for older people. The state, limiting its responsibility to providing only for the deprived older people, has effectively reinforced the responsibilities of the informal sector for providing care to older people. To understand the changing social expectations about the care of older people, the meanings of the rights and responsibilities underlying the individual and collective decisions in each type of old-age support will be examined in this chapter. Set against the perceived needs of older people in the contemporary Chinese society, the discrepancy between the reality and the expectations regarding these three sources of old-age care support can reveal the various challenges facing the future care of older people and bring to light the knowledge gaps, for the study of which this research is conducted.

### **Research framework – key care providers for older people**

The mixed economy of welfare involves the integration of different sectors such as the formal sector, the informal sector, the voluntary sector and the private sector in welfare provision (Dean, 2002; Powell, 2007). The care of older people always involves several parties. As stated by Victor (2005), to study the care provision for older people, it is necessary to take into consideration both the formal and the informal sectors such as the family, friends or neighbours. To set up the analytical framework for this research, the key players in the provision of welfare for older people have to be identified.

Esping-Andersen (1990) examined the variations in the role of the state, the market and the family in shaping the welfare outcomes in three welfare regimes, namely liberal, conservative and social democratic which he identified. The liberal and conservative regimes place more emphasis on family responsibility with a lower level of state involvement in service provision

than the social democratic regimes such as the Scandinavian countries with a relative higher level of public involvement (Tester, 1996; Larsson, Silverstein and Thorslund, 2005; Lowenstein, 2005). Gough (2008) noted that Esping-Andersen's welfare regime approach offers a powerful framework for analysing the welfare mix - state-market-family - in the advanced capitalist economies of the West. However, he went on to suggest that a fourth actor consisting of the communities, informal groups and NGOs should be added in the developing and the transitional worlds of the South and the East. Holliday (2000) also argued that Esping-Andersen's theory would only be applicable to the welfare states when social policy has a strong role and it would not be relevant to the East Asian countries where social policy is subordinate to economic policy objectives. Jones (1990, 1993) considered that the regime theory is not applicable in the East Asian countries which are described as Confucian welfare states, sharing the features of priority given to economic growth, the dominant role of the family as welfare provider, emphasis on the spirit of mutual help and personal responsibility and the role of state as welfare regulator rather than provider.

Rather than providing welfare for older people, the East Asian governments play an important role in reinforcing the care responsibility of the family (Izuhara, 2010). It was long argued that both the formal and informal service provisions made up the welfare component in the East Asian social policies (Saunders, 2006), where countries like China under the influence of Confucianism emphasise the informal care and a low state role in welfare provision as will be discussed in the latter half of this chapter.

The East Asian countries can be conceptually grouped under the informal security regime with minimum social rights, emphasis on social investment in sectors such as health and education, and the pursuance of economic goals (Gough, 2008). Since the people under this regime cannot have their needs met through the state services, they have to rely on the family and the community for support (Wood, 2008). Davis (2008) applied the welfare regime theory to Bangladesh in South Asia and concluded that NGOs with overseas funding, kinship and community-based organisations make significant contributions to welfare provision. This demonstrates that in the developing or transitional economies, welfare provision is less state-centred and the informal sector has a more significant role to play. In the Chinese

context, the informal sector means the family and the neighbourhood, which have all along played an important part in the welfare of the individuals.

Broadly speaking, the key care providers for older people as discussed above include the family, the neighbourhood, the state, the market and the voluntary sector – mainly the NGOs. The following discussion illustrates that the family, the neighbourhood and the state are the key care providers for older people most relevant to this study. Though the market reform has a substantial impact on the urban life and the market mechanism permeates the society, the role of the market is still small and it largely relies on the state's financial subsidy to provide home-care service for older people. Since the market reform, the NGOs, though being encouraged by the state to establish and provide service, are by no means independent entities when they are still subject to state's scrutiny and depend heavily on state funding for survival. Since the state plays a significant role in shaping the involvement of both the market and the NGOs in home-care service provision for older people, these two sectors will be therefore subsumed under the 'state' section.

## **Welfare mix – the family, the neighbourhood and the state**

### ***Family***

This section starts with explaining the role of the family as a source of support for older people and the situation in Asia is explored as a reflection on the Chinese context. The family is often considered as a source of care for older people in different cultures (Wilson, 2000). The key religious and philosophical texts of Islam, Confucianism, Christianity, Buddhism or Hinduism point to the moral values which expect children to take care of their parents (Wilson, 2000; Hashimoto and Ikels, 2005; Johnson, 2005). Croll (2006) observed that despite their diversities, the Asian countries share a common view that the family has an important part in providing support for its older members. Among the East Asian countries which are under the influence of the Confucian traditions stressing reverence towards older people, the family is regarded as the key welfare provider for its members especially the older people while the state only takes up a subsidiary role in looking after the underprivileged (Holliday and Wilding, 2003; Izuhara, 2010; Li, W.D.H., 2013). In Singapore, interdependence within the family is encouraged by the government, which stresses that the

family is expected to support older people when they need assistance in old age (Mehta and Leng, 2006).

Throughout Chinese history, the family has been viewed as an important social institution which provides support for its members, while the latter have mutual obligations towards one another (Dixon, 1981; Chen, 1996; Guthrie, 2012). Based on the Confucian doctrines emphasising filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity, the responsibilities of the children for the care of their parents have been widely documented in literature (Chen, 1996; Parish and Whyte, 1980; Tao, 2004; Lou and Ng, 2012; Chen and Yang, 2014). The old Chinese proverbs such as *yangerfanglao* (raising children to provide security for one's old age), *xiaoyuqin suodangzhi* (filial piety towards one's parents is what one should hold fast to) or *fumuzai buyuanyou* (the children should not go far away leaving their parents at home when the latter are still alive) convey the social expectation about the care responsibility of the children towards their parents. Moreover, the correlation between the co-residence living arrangement and the well-being of older people in the Chinese families are emphasised, reflecting the reliance of older people on the family for support (Choua, Chow and Chi, 2004; Meng and Luo, 2008; Sereny, 2011). All in all, this demonstrates that the family plays a crucial role in looking after older people.

### ***Neighbourhood***

The aim of this section is to show the importance of the neighbourhood in providing support to older people. Globally, the neighbourhood is widely recognised as an important place in providing social and instrumental support to local older people (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Gray 2009). Research in the Netherlands conducted on over 900 older people aged 70 or above confirmed the importance of obtaining instrumental support through neighbours, and showed that the interdependence among neighbours contributed to the well-being of older people (Cramm, Van Dijk and Nieboer, 2012). Since older people spend most of their time in the neighbourhood, the neighbours and neighbourhood environment would have an impact on the lives of older people who are found to rely more on the local network (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Buffel *et al.*, 2012; Cramm, Van Dijk and Nieboer, 2012; Lager, Van Hoven and Huigen, 2015). Moreover, Phillipson *et al.* (2001) showed that the research in three

urban communities in England illustrated the growing importance of the role of friends and neighbours in the last few decades though the close kin remain to be significant in the lives and networks of older people. Gardner (2011) in her research in Toronto, Canada, also demonstrated that the kin started to play a lesser role in the daily neighbourhood interactions of older people. Neighbours are looked upon as a crucial source of informal support for older people since they are in proximity to each other, making them particularly useful to meet contingencies or offer minor help (Bulmer, 1987; Sharkey, 2007). Understanding the impact of the neighbourhood upon the well-being of older people has an implication for policy-makers in the sense that the context of the daily life experiences of older people in their living area has to be taken into consideration (Young, Russell and Powers, 2004).

The spirit of mutual help and the sense of community had its origins in the traditional Chinese agrarian society where the people were ready to combine their efforts to relieve others' life difficulties in the neighbourhood (Dixon, 1981). The old Chinese proverbs such as *shouwangxiangzhu*, meaning the spirit of mutual help, and *yuanqinburujinlin*, implying the next-door neighbours are more reliable than relatives living far away, show the importance of the support from the neighbourhood. Mobilising informal resources to solve social problems in the neighbourhood has become a key welfare element in the Chinese society (Chan, 1993). Dixon (1981) pointed out that such practice of mutual help was extended into the pre-reform era (1949 – 1978) when the Residents Committee, a self-governing organisation at the local level, rallied the residents to help each other out, especially for older people, when needs arose in the neighbourhood. Also, the neighbourhood network was viewed as a source of social support which could mitigate the social exclusion risks facing the older people in empty-nest households, as demonstrated by the study in Shanghai (Yuan and Ngai, 2012). The above discussion illustrates the significance of the neighbourhood as a source of social and instrumental support for older people who spend most of their time in the locality.

## **State**

This section looks at the role of state policy in the welfare of older people. The state's policy, as viewed by Saraceno and Keck (2010), can draw a line of responsibility between the family

and the state in the care of older people. The state can shape the family's responsibilities in different ways such as by giving incentives to strengthen its care obligations, providing formal services to fill the gaps left by the family or adopting a non-intervention approach to make sure that the care responsibility would not be shifted to the state (Walker, 1982; Bulmer, 1987; Leitner, 2003; Izuhara, 2010). The policy direction can also be shifted over time in accordance with the socio-economic circumstances, demographic changes or political factors (Izuhara, 2010).

White and Goodman (1998) noted that in the East Asian countries, individuals all along draw on resources through informal channels to solve their personal problems. Aspalter (2006) observed that the rights of the people to welfare are based on labour participation in these countries. Adopting a residual welfare approach, the East Asian governments hold a negative attitude towards a high level of welfare for fear that the care responsibility would be shifted to the state (Holliday and Wilding, 2003). The residual welfare approach sees welfare as a safety net only for the left-out and that individuals should rely on their own or family resources (Spicker, 2008).

In Imperial China, the edict of the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911) set out that the lack of family care was the key criterion for the state to provide welfare, and that the widower, widow, orphan and unmarried persons were the deserving categories of receiving support (Wong, 1998). The family and kinship-based relationships were the sources of welfare for individuals in times of need. Instead of offering direct welfare to the people, the role of the state was to provide a peaceful and stable environment so that the family could take up its care role properly (Li, 1999). Even in contemporary China, by emphasising the traditional virtue of filial piety and through legal means to prescribe family responsibility in the care of older people, the government confines its support to the vulnerable categories of older people (Chan 1993; Wong, 1998; Leung and Lam, 2000; Stockman, 2004; Wu *et al.*, 2005).

Owing to the absence of support services in the community, the family has to take up the care responsibility of its older relatives. Therefore, the lack of service provision had in fact defined the family responsibility in the care of older people (Chen, 1996; Zhang 2004; Wu *et al.*, 2005). The significance lies in the state's non-intervention approach in the provision of

welfare for older people, thus making the family take up the care responsibility. However, the state also has the power to shift its policy approach in response to the changes in the society. This is reflected in how it has encouraged both the NGOs and the market in service provision for older people since the market reform in the late 1970s.

During the pre-reform era, the NGOs had no role in welfare provision since the urban workers and their families were looked after by their work units, while the state provided for those outside the system (Chen, 1996; Saunders and Shang, 2001; Leung, 2005). Politically, NGOs were considered as potential rivals to state power and were not allowed to exist (Wong, 1998). Likewise, the market mechanism was also banned since the socialist values emphasised equality and frugality (Dixon, 1981; Wu and Huang, 2007; Duckett and Carrillo, 2011).

Since the market reform in the late 1970s, the state has issued a number of directives or regulations to encourage the market to provide public and welfare services and the establishment of NGOs as a service partner, to meet the rising social problems such as urban poverty and unemployment (Duckett and Carrillo, 2011; Wong and Leung, 2012). The latest directive issued by the State Council is 'Opinions on speeding up the development of old age-related services' in 2013, which encouraged the local government to give more support to both the NGOs and the market to develop a range of home-care services for older people in the community (CNCA, 2013a).

Li (2007) pointed out that despite the state's emphasis on the role of the market in providing services to older people, the private enterprises found it difficult to operate a profitable business in developing services for older people whose consumption power was relatively limited. On the other hand, the state's Service Purchase Scheme and the relaxation of registration requirements have encouraged the establishment of the NGOs to provide service for older people (Leung and Xu, 2015). However, the problems inherent in the NGOs, such as their small scale, lack of adequate resources for development, heavy reliance on state funding for survival and absence of an effective system to monitor their service quality, hamper their effectiveness in performance at this stage (Li, 2007; Wang, 2013; Qian, 2015). Chapter 6 will have an additional discussion on the obstacles facing the NGOs in the service

provision for older people in the community. Though being expected to play an increasing role as service providers for older people, both the NGOs and the market are still in their infancy and require state support in terms of financial incentives and regulations to help them develop into effective service providers.

The above discussion has shown the significance of the three key care providers namely, the family, the neighbourhood and the state in the care of older people. In the Chinese context, the family occupies a central role in the care of older people. Neighbourhood support which is an indigenous practice of individuals helping each other out constitutes another key source of help for older people when needs arise. Though the state has adopted an inactive role in the welfare provision for older people, its importance cannot be overlooked because it can reinforce the responsibilities of other sectors.

## **Rights and responsibilities in the care of older people**

The above discussion shows that the family, the neighbourhood and the state have different roles in supporting older people. The demographic shift and socio-economic challenges discussed in Chapter 1 have upset the old-age support practice which calls into play the search for a new balance in the share of care responsibilities for older people in the Chinese society.

As noted by Pei (2009), since adopting a welfare mix in service provision for older people should be the trend, how to reach the best mix relies on the understanding of the rights and responsibilities of each sector, and especially the role of the state which commands the power to divide the responsibilities among different actors. Spicker (2008) noted that when one has the right to something, one can change the response or behaviour of other people, meaning that rights are rules governing the relationship among people. Dean (2002) stated that rights can also be conditional upon responsibilities. As discussed by Finch (1989), some of the policy principles operate on the condition that one has the responsibility to first make claims upon one's family before having the right to claim state resources. Also, responsibility can be constructed with reference to the collective traditions, moral norms, shared values or the expectations arising from being a member of the community (Dean, 2002).



Yet, understanding the definitions of the rights and responsibilities may not be helpful to unravel the dynamics of old-age support since these terms are contested. An individual's perception of the rights and responsibilities may also shift in response to the socio-economic changes, which are likely to produce a new set of roles, rights and responsibilities among different actors in the care-giving. As Sevenhuijsen (2000) noted, policy-making requires insights into how individuals perceive their responsibilities in actual practice and how they handle conflicting responsibilities. This is especially true in the transitional economy in urban China when new values emerge while simultaneously traditional cultural norms still exert influence upon the lives of the individuals. To understand how social expectations about old-age support have changed and how the Chinese society has responded to such changes, it is necessary to understand the interpretation of the rights and responsibilities underlying individual and collective decisions associated with the care of older people.

Most importantly, there is no literature utilising the concepts of the rights and responsibilities to analyse the care arrangements for older people systematically. Moreover, the literature generally examines different types of old-age support separately without looking into how these three sectors are interconnected. For this reason, this research sets out to investigate this subject to fill the knowledge gaps by utilising the concepts of the rights and responsibilities associated with different types of old-age support. The following sections explore the basis for the rights and responsibilities in the three types of old-age support and discuss how the demographic and socio-economic changes have affected the perception of the rights and responsibilities in the care of older people in urban China today. Then, the identified knowledge gap will be investigated in this research, so as to shed light on how state policy should respond to the social expectations in the care of older people.

## **The family as a source of support for older people**

On the ageing issue, the Chinese media often give the impression that older people living in the multi-generational households have a secure life with concern and love from their children. On the contrary, under contemporary living arrangements, most of them are either living alone or being neglected by their families. The family is seen as important since it is perceived as a source of financial, emotional and homecare support for older people (Yu,

2011). The manifestation of these needs is due to the reduction of income after retirement, physical deterioration as a result of health and age and the shrinkage of the social network of older people as a result of retirement and reduced mobility (Wang and Xia, 2001). This spells out the significance of the family as the insurance for old age, which is also reflected in the old Chinese saying *yangerfanglao* (raising children to provide security for one's old age). In the following, the rights and responsibilities in traditional family care and the concurrent changes in contemporary China will be discussed.

## **Rights and responsibilities in traditional family care**

This section discusses how the Confucian doctrines, stressing filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity as well as mutual reliance of both younger and older generations, establish the rights and responsibilities in family care of older people.

### ***Traditional culture and old-age support***

In China, traditional culture provides the basis for the time-honoured mode of family support for older people, in the sense that the first generation supports a second generation, which in turn provides care to the first one when the former grows old (Tao, 2004). Before discussing how the traditional culture has a part to play in shaping the welfare of older people, the meaning of culture has to be understood first. Van Oorschot, Opielka and Pfau-Effinger (2008) defined culture as the beliefs of a society, which include values, models and knowledge. As noted by Baldock (1999), culture consists of shared beliefs, values and behavioural norms of a community and as such, it cannot be observed directly but can only be comprehended through the behaviour of individuals. Fei (1992) described culture as the accumulation of the collective social experiences transmitted from the past. He said that the social norms in a rural society rest upon rituals and customs which are maintained over generations. According to him, the norms serve to keep a check on the behaviour of individuals to make sure that they fulfil their social responsibilities. Stockman (2004) noted that Confucianism is always taken as being synonymous with traditional Chinese culture. The doctrines of Confucius (551 – 497 BC), though having been influenced by other streams of thoughts such as Buddhism and Daoism, have remained a social and philosophical influence since Imperial China as early as 221 BC (Stockman, 2004). Therefore, this study

focuses upon the Confucian teachings as the dominant thought in shaping the traditional belief of people in relation to the care of older people.

Confucian doctrines emphasise social responsibility and view a family-centred structure as the pillar of the society, where an individual's primary duty is to the family, then to society and finally to the state (Guthrie, 2012). Jones (1993) noted that Confucianism consists of sets of common precepts, values or prohibitions which call for the individual's responsibility to take care of vulnerable members in the family and the community without relying on the state. She further pointed out that every individual has roles and responsibilities to fulfil, while rights or entitlements can only be earned through one's performance, position or seniority in the group. The regulation of relationship between individuals and their families is realised through filial piety and respect for older people (Guthrie, 2012). Children are taught to respect and obey older people and are socialised within the family where they learn the meaning of filial piety, humanity and reciprocity in daily living so as to maintain the peaceful family relationship (Parish and Whyte, 1980; Stockman, 2004). It goes without saying that traditional culture turns the filial responsibility into a social practice of the younger generation, which conveys an expectation that children have to take care of their parents in their old age (Lou and Ng, 2012). Therefore, looking after one's parents can also be viewed as a natural responsibility.

### ***Filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity***

The old Chinese proverb *baixingxiaoweixian* (filial piety is the most important of all virtues) demonstrates the importance of filial piety in family relations. Filial piety is viewed as the foundation of the intergenerational relationships (Sheng and Settles, 2006). The children's gratitude towards their parents is manifested in their return for the self-sacrifice the parents have made for them in life (Liu, 1998; Tao 2004; Fan, 2007). According to *Xiaojing* (the Classic of Filial Piety) compiled probably around the third or second century B.C., the parents gave their children life and nothing was greater than this, which called for the children's absolute devotion or even the sacrifice of their lives for their parents, as also portrayed in the classic fables 'Twenty-four Cases of Filial Piety' (Kutcher, 1999). The historical texts portraying the importance of filial piety in daily life and the attitude towards

unfilial behaviour as the worst crime permeated Chinese history (Holzman, 1998). Moreover, the natural reaction to a parent's death would be the intense feeling of loss with deep sorrow (Hsu, 1971b; Kutcher, 1999). In Imperial China, it was a serious offence for an official not to declare the death of a parent and return home to mourn for the statutory period of at least two years (Baker, 1979). It means that the respect to parents had to be continued after their death, showing that strict observance of filial norms had been deeply embedded in the lives of the people at that time.

Fei (1992) noted that according to Confucius, filial piety helps foster the peace of mind. He explained that the children, who are familiar with their parents' personalities and preferences through daily contact, should try to please them by putting their minds at ease. How the younger generation is expected to fulfil their filial responsibility is explained by Yuan (2001) and Laidlaw *et al.* (2010). This includes residing with one's parents, showing them love and respect, ensuring their happiness, providing them with care especially when they are sick and strictly observing the commemorative rites after their death.

Based on this traditional perspective, the basis of the rights and responsibilities in family relations is established when one observes filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity. When the parents have carried out their duty to raise their children, this responsibility forms the basis of their claim of the right to family care in their old age. Once the children grow up, they have to fulfil the responsibility to provide care to their parents in return for the latter's love and affection to raise them (Stafford, 2000). This feedback loop will continue for generations.

### ***Interdependence in family relations***

The Confucian doctrines depict the multi-generational household as an ideal living arrangement since it facilitates the sharing of resources, care and support among family members (Guthrie, 2012). Family members can derive emotional, social and economic support from the multi-generational households (Dixon, 1981). Five generations living together under one family head was considered as ideal and having a big family was also an indication of success and wealth in the agrarian societies (Baker, 1979; Stockman, 2004).

The existence of multi-generational household also had its practical reason: to pool labour resources during busy farm periods (Baker, 1979).

In rural societies, the self-sufficient agricultural economy and the patriarchal-feudal system were conducive to sustaining the filial norms (Sheng and Settles, 2006). Having a strong kinship network and being the head of the household controlling the family resources, older people enjoyed influence and superior status and could command respect in the local community. Moreover, the life pattern in rural societies was very stable, where each generation had a similar life cycle as the previous one, meaning that the experiences of the older generation were relevant to the younger people, as described by Fei (1992). Under such circumstances, older people enjoyed an influential status in the family because of their possession of wealth and wisdom in life.

Limited work opportunity in the agricultural society made younger people rely on the family for support. Yu (2011) pointed out that if younger people did not fulfil the responsibility for the care of their older parents, they risked the loss of access to family resources. He, in addition, noted that care responsibility was not heavy on the children since there were other family members sharing the duty in those days. In other words, the mutual dependence of the two generations further reinforced their rights and responsibilities in family care. Older people enjoyed the right of respect and care from younger people since they provided for the maintenance of younger people in the multigenerational households. In return, the younger generation owed the care responsibility to their older relatives.

The above discussion shows that the rights and responsibilities in the family care of older people have been laid down, based on the Confucian doctrines of filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity. The reliance of younger people on the family for subsistence further strengthened the concept of family care since they understood their obligations in return to take care of their parents in their old age. Older people, commanding family resources and supporting younger people, could have a claim to family care when they turned old. This care-giving mode functioned well in the stable rural society where there was mutual dependence between both generations and observance of cultural norms. However,

since society developed and the production mode changed, there has been social concern for how to maintain the family ethics so that it can continue looking after older people.

## **Changing family support in contemporary China**

Hermalin and Yang (2004) noted that there are two key views concerning the extent of the family responsibility in supporting older people in contemporary Asian societies. The changes going on in the wider society in the East and Southeast Asia have weakened the respect and support for older people embedded in traditional values, thus having a negative impact upon their well-being. On the contrary, the longstanding cultural values still persist and the family continues to play a significant role in the welfare of older people. This is reflected in the following section which identifies the different views towards family responsibility in the care of older people.

Given the importance of the family in the Chinese society, it is unlikely that the ongoing demographic and socio-economic challenges will lead to the erosion of filial responsibilities entirely (Yue and Ng, 1999). Qian (2015) pointed out that family retains its importance in the care of older people in the transitional society where traditional norms still co-exist with the newly emerging values. Shi (2013) noted that although the modernisation theory predicts that role of the family and the status of older people would be undermined by modernisation and industrialisation, the Chinese family core values remain intact to a certain extent. She quoted the findings of the survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in five Chinese cities in 2008, which shows that though the co-residence of both generations was less common, a majority of younger people still maintained frequent contact with their parents and rendered assistance to the latter in times of need, serving as the practical and emotional support to older people.

Several studies also demonstrate the importance of the family in the well-being of older people. The survey 'Support Systems for the Elderly' conducted by the China Research Centre on Aging in 1992 showed that those urban older people living in the multi-generational households were more likely to report being happy and they, though being financially independent, still considered emotional support from their children as important

(Pei and Pillai, 1999). In a study of those aged 65 or over in Beijing in 1994, the outcome indicated that life satisfaction and sense of achievement of older people came from the harmonious family relationship (Zhang and Yu, 1998). The older people in the national survey 'Aged Population in Urban and Rural China in 2000' still held the typical image of the filial children, in which the latter could provide them with home-care and financial support, make an effort to maintain a good family relationship and live with them after marriage (Mao and Chi, 2011). Perceiving children as being filial was related to a lower chance of reporting poor health among the widowed older people in the urban areas (Li, Y. *et al.*, 2011).

In Chinese culture, older people regard that being supported by one's children brings 'face' to them and serves to raise their social status (Chan, 2005). They consider themselves to be blessed if being looked after by their children in their old age. Having 'face' is very important in Chinese culture as the society functions on the basis of one's relationship with others (Huang and Wu, 2012). Moreover, a co-residence living arrangement gives older people a sense of pride as they can show to others that their children have filial respect for them. Whether or not older people are living with their children has a special meaning in the Chinese context. It is traditionally not desirable for older people to live alone (Lou and Ng, 2012) and co-residence with the married children, usually the eldest son, is expected (Sereny, 2011). The traditional family norms of filial piety and co-residence living arrangement are still perceived as important elements in the older people's life satisfaction.

Wilson (2000) observed that sudden illness usually leads to a change in the living arrangement of older people, such as moving to reside with their children or receiving residential care. The findings from the Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Surveys (CLHLS) 1998–2005 revealed that there was a significant rise in co-residence following widowhood and deterioration in the health of older people (Zimmer and Korinek, 2010; Korinek, Zimmer and Gu, 2011). In addition, Serenty (2011) used the 2005 Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (CLHLS) findings to study the living arrangement concordance of older people and found that among those who were living independently, 18.2% preferred to live with their children. They showed this preference mainly for fear of facing poor health without their children around. This may indicate that older people with

poorer health are more likely to rely on the family. From the practical point of view, the lack of formal service may limit the choices of older people who have to look upon the family for support. The continuation of family responsibility is not only shaped by the cultural norm but also reflects the reality of the limited service provision (Zhang, 2004; Timonen, 2008).

The above research evidence signifies that family care still contributes to the well-being of older people by giving them emotional support, a sense of pride and practical assistance. This leads to the call by some academics for the strengthening of family ethics so that family can function effectively to support older people. Liu (1998) held the view that since family ethics is based on the Confucian values which are likely to be eroded over time, legislation and public education are essential to maintain the family obligations. In this regard, Fan (2007) drew attention to the moral desirability of family responsibility in the care of older people and policies should aim at restoring and reinforcing the family ethics facing the gradual decline of family capacity. He further suggested that the right policy direction should be on supporting the family functions rather than providing welfare support to older people to seek alternative means of care. The policy makers should recognise the importance of the traditional Chinese culture and the family role in old-age support, and adequate assistance should be given to strengthen the functioning of the family system (Glass, Gao and Luo, 2013). All these views support the desirability of family care which should be strengthened by the social policy.

The perceived benefits of family care for the welfare of older people are recognisable, given its long traditional culture. Living with one's parents or providing them with care is conventionally taken as an expression of filial piety. However, one cannot ignore the other explanations for this. Research findings by Lee and Kwok (2005) showed that when the older people commanded greater economic resources, they would receive better support from their children in Hong Kong, a Chinese society sharing the same cultural values with China. Receiving an inheritance is also one of the reasons for the children to look after their parents (Lin and Yi, 2013). Moreover, because of financial constraints, newly married couples may choose to live with their parents who can also provide the younger with child-care assistance (Chan, 2005). The 1993 study in Tianjin and Shanghai by Logan and colleagues (1998)



revealed that limited state support and shortage of housing supply were the reasons for the co-residence arrangement even though most of the older people and their children did not prefer such an arrangement. When housing was a constraint on the individuals' choice in the 1980s, younger people had to stay with their parents (Meng and Luo, 2008). Therefore, the level of co-residence may not be a good indicator of the survival of the traditional form of family care.

Under the demographic and socio-economic challenges as discussed in Chapter 1, there is widespread concern about the resilience of filial piety that it can no longer survive in a modernised society (Cheung and Kwan, 2009). The increasing population mobility since the market reform is a factor rendering the co-residence of the two generations less feasible. The rapid economic growth in the urban areas and the relaxation of the *hukou*, a household registration system introduced in 1958 to restrict the population movement between the city and the countryside, prompted the rural-urban migration to the developed eastern coastal cities (Ren, 2013). The total number of migrants grew from 6.57 million in 1982 to 221.4 million in 2010 and the proportion of the migrant population to the total population has also risen from 0.65% to 16.53% over the same period (Lu and Xia, 2016). While rural-urban migration remains the dominant migration flow, urban-urban migration on the other hand has gained importance and formed a sizable component accounting for about 37% of the migration figures as shown in the 2010 Census (Zhu, Xiao and Lin, 2015). In the study of the residential mobility in Guangzhou, Li and Wang (2003) pointed out that the mobility rate was below 1% in the early 1980s but it reached almost 10% in 1998. This study illustrated that a higher educational level was related to a higher probability of residential mobility and job advancement was a key factor triggering such mobility. The high level of housing construction was also the underlying cause for the increasing residential mobility in Beijing with an average mobility rate of 4.3% per annum over the period of 1980 to 2000 (Li, 2002). Another driving force behind migration of young adults is the increasing educational opportunities when most of the higher educational institutions are located in the developed urban areas (Smith, Strauss and Zhao, 2014). Because of the growing affluence, China becomes the country sending the largest number of students overseas, among whom some may not return upon the completion of their studies (Xiang, 2015). The number of Chinese

students studying abroad has increased tremendously from 38,989 in 2000 to 523,700 in 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). Between 2000 and 2015, there were 3,707,145 Chinese students leaving for overseas education while only 2,104,074 returned home (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). The increasing geographical mobility for whatever reasons means that the two generations are less likely to live under the same roof and a greater geographical dispersion of family members as a result.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the expansion of educational opportunities has exposed younger people to different values such as privacy, independence and the quest for self-fulfilment. Coupled with the new urban lifestyle which will be elaborated in later sections, a growing trend of individualism has emerged in the Chinese cities, as reflected by the statistical data on the increasing mean age of marriage, crude divorce rate, proportion of the never-married person and one-person household. The proportion of the never-married person to the population aged 15 or above increased from 19% in 2002 to 22.5% in 2014 in urban cities (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011a, 2015). Also, the national mean age of marriage also rose from 23.8 years in 1990 to 26.5 years in 2010 for males while for females, it went up from 22.1 years to 24.7 years over the same period (United Nations, 2010). In big cities like Shanghai, the figure was much higher with the mean marriage age, being 34 years for males and 31.6 for females in 2013 (Sina News, 2014). Moreover, the crude divorce rate also increased from 0.96% in 2000 to 2.8% in 2015 while it even reached 3.8% in Beijing in 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). It is not surprising to see that the proportion of the one-person household has risen from 7.8% in 2004 to 13.1% in 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2005, 2016). In big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, the figures reached 21.6% and 21.3% respectively in 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). This trend has an impact on the capacity of the family to look after older people and on the social expectations of the delivery of care to older people when there is a prevalence of lone households.

The survey conducted by Zhan (2004) in two Chinese cities mentioned in Chapter 1 indicated that both generations were not expected to live together, though the younger generation still showed willingness to support their parents. Whyte (2005) noted that

research in Baoding, a Chinese city, indicated that as early as in the 1990s, there was a trend for both generations to live separately, with the children rendering assistance to their parents when needed. This trend is also reflected by the statistical data. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2012), the proportion of single older person aged 65 or over living alone rose from 12.3% in 2002 to 17.8% in 2011. Those households with two older persons aged 65 or over also saw a rising trend from 13.3% in 2002 to 16.6% in 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2012). The proportion of the one-generation household increased from 28.4% in 2000 to 41.6% in 2014 as well (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2001, 2015).

Unger (1993) pointed out that living in close proximity to parents' home is a possible substitute for living together. He believed that the Chinese family is a strong social unit, and that even though parents and children are not living together, the latter would still pay frequent visits and render help to their parents when necessary. It was also echoed by Zimmer and Korinek (2010) that the children, who live close to their parents, are able to provide them with financial resources and help with the necessary household tasks. Chen and Silverstein (2000) described this as the 'network family' whereby the married adult children live near rather than co-residing with their parents. Referring to the National Baseline Survey of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) conducted in 2011-2012, Lei *et al.* (2015) found that among the 2,932 urban older people aged 60 or over, 8.7% of them lived alone, 38.5% lived with their spouse and 40.3% lived with one or more children. Of those 59.7% not living with their children, 32.3% had one or more adult children in the same neighbourhood and 16.2% in the same city. This study has shown that living close to the parents enables the children to support them while both generations can at the same time maintain their privacy in living arrangement. This also illustrates what Gubhaju and Eng (2011) stressed: the importance of understanding how families evolve, such as in their alternative living or care arrangements, in response to the social changes in the Asian societies.

Bian, Logan and Bian (1998) indicated that the children's frequent contacts or help given to their parents sometimes do not mean that the latter require them. There are occasions when

the younger generation performs such acts out of formality to show filial piety instead of responding to their parents' real needs. The perceived family responsibility is sometimes mingled with other intentions such as to offset pressure from other kin that the younger people need to demonstrate filial piety (Finch, 1989). Sheng and Settles (2006) explained that Chinese families maintain interdependence and mutual obligation through the symbolic occasions although there is no specific need for care. Yet, older people reported to have better life satisfactions when they maintained regular contacts with their children, as demonstrated in a study by Liu (2015) based on the CHARLS data (2011-2012). This study indicated that this generation of older people puts more emphasis on the emotional support rather than material provisions by their children.

In response to the changing socio-economic and demographic environment, Hermalin and Yang (2004) illustrated that the younger old in Taiwan have redefined their preferences and expectations of their future old-age care. Rather than making spontaneous assumptions about family responsibility, they would make a realistic assessment of the emerging social norms and constraints facing the younger generations and consider other practical care alternatives. Saunders (2006) reported the findings of the Sample Survey of the Aged Population in China in 2000 concerning the preferred forms of preparation for old age. The young-old (aged 60-69) favoured social insurance programmes and saving for old age more than the old-old (aged 80 or above). On the other hand, there was a higher proportion of the old-old category in favour of family support than the young-old. This reflects that those young-old are more prepared to make plans for themselves.

A study using qualitative in-depth interviews conducted on older people living alone in Hong Kong showed that most of the interviewees built on resilience against distress and loneliness by engaging in different social activities and establishing their social networks (Lou and Ng, 2012). Here, the interviewees indicated that the avoidance of family conflicts and the reluctance to give care responsibility to their children were the reasons for maintaining a separate household. Chan and Lee (2006) showed that the older people, in both Beijing and Hong Kong, tended to have more life satisfaction when their social network was available for help in times of crisis. These findings demonstrate what Sheng and Settles (2006)

mentioned about the increasing consciousness of independence and the weakening of expectations of reciprocity which are the two main factors affecting the perception of older people towards family care in urban China.

Chan (2005) noted that understanding other factors such as the social support network of older people is also important instead of focussing on living arrangements as an indicator of older people's well-being. Older people may find that friends of their age group from similar social backgrounds can be a source of psychological support, which is important to their social integration in later life (Bulmer, 1987; Wilson, 2000). Timonen (2008) explained that in most cases, older people lead an independent life out of their own choice rather than being left out by their children, and thus living alone should not be taken as equivalent to isolation. Since the economic reform, the improved financial status of older people has enabled them to act on their preferences, which in turn influences their perceptions towards family responsibility. Such independence has been made easier by new technology such as washing machines, microwave ovens and other household electrical appliances (Feng *et al.*, 2013). Larsson, Silverstein and Thorslund (2005) also noted that the digital communications technology can supplement the home-care services by allowing a third party to monitor the health status and medication of older persons at a far distance away and at a lower cost. These can relieve the foreseeable difficulties when one leads an independent living. However, older people still need home-care support when their self-care abilities deteriorate.

Facing the declining family support, older people have considered diversified care options. Older people's attitudes towards institutional care have also shifted from seeing it as a stigma to viewing it as a privilege since they consider it as a gesture of their children's filial piety when they are willing to pay for the expensive home fees (Zhan, Feng and Luo, 2008). Hence, the perception of older people towards family responsibility is determined by the interplay of the demographic factor, their desired living arrangements under improved financial conditions as well as the adherence to cultural norms (Zeng, 2007). It should be noted that no matter how desirable family care is, older people, especially those who require a high level of home-care assistance, can no longer rely solely on family responsibility, and

more state intervention is needed (Cheung, Kwan and Ng, 2006; Chen, 2009; Mu, 2009; Pei, 2009).

As a summary of this section, given the long tradition of family care in Chinese culture, the family still assumes an important role in the well-being of older people. Against this background, the discussion also shows the changing preference of the younger and older generations in living arrangements. Maintaining a separate household as well as expanding their social network seem to be the strategies older people have adopted in the face of the weakened family support.

### **Changing rights and responsibilities in family care**

The family is often a key source of pride and happiness for older people. The notions of filial piety and intergenerational support have established the rights and responsibilities in the family care of older people. Such family ethics are further reinforced by the mutual dependence of both generations. With the market reform and the implementation of the one-child policy in the late 1970s, the demographic and socio-economic challenges have changed the practice of filial responsibilities and the adaptation strategies adopted by both the younger and the older generations have been witnessed. The family role in the Chinese society is undoubtedly important given its long history, but the impact of socio-economic and demographic factors have weakened its capacity to support older people's living. In the transitional society where the new and traditional values co-exist, older people value autonomy and yet family care is still their reminiscence. How do they respond to this paradox and how does it affect their perception of the rights and responsibilities in family care? What are the implications for social policy? This research sets out to investigate these questions to provide insight into how the policy should respond to the new expectations towards family care.

### **The neighbourhood as a source of support for older people**

This section begins with a description of the practice of the spirit of mutual help in the traditional society which has been further reinforced by the work unit-based system of the pre-reform era. The challenges brought by the market reform in the late 1970s, the

government's strategy to strengthen the neighbourhood network as well as the evolving roles of the Residents Committee in the support of older people are also analysed.

Before the discussion, the terms 'neighbourhood' and 'community' require some explanation. In the literature written in English on this topic, 'neighbourhood' is often used interchangeably with 'community' without a clear distinction between, for instance, the 'work unit-based neighbourhood' and the 'work unit-based community'. But the term 'neighbourhood' is used more often in the literature. Chen (2012) explained that few Chinese people knew the meaning of community since their lives have all along revolved around their work units during the pre-reform era and would not pay attention to its administrative division. In this regard, Jankowiak (2008) observed that Chinese people used to mean neighbourhood in a narrow sense by referring to specific relationships and might refer to a few households adjacent to their homes or neighbours living on the same floor. Since the economic reform, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) in 1994 officially defined 'community' by giving its administrative meaning as the geographical boundary that the Residents Committee serves (Chen, 1996; Bray, 2006; Xu, Perkins and Chow, 2010). In order to differentiate the terms 'neighbourhood' and 'community' in this thesis, 'neighbourhood' will be used when referring to a geographical area where social relationship or identity exists. The term 'community' will be used to refer to the (smallest) administrative unit called micro-district where services are provided, and there are usually over ten of them under each sub-district. There is one Residents Committee in each micro-district.

## **Traditional neighbourhood support**

Traditionally, the members of the kinship network lived near and rendered support to one another when needs arose (Xu and Chow, 2011). Apart from providing assistance to its kin group, the love for one's parents, according to Confucius, should also be extended to other older people without blood relationship (China Development Research Foundation, 2012). This shows that one's care and concern should be extended to all those who are experiencing life difficulties. As mentioned earlier, there are old Chinese proverbs such as *shouwangxiangzhu*, showing the importance of mutual help in a neighbourhood and *yuanqinburujinlin*, indicating that the next-door neighbours are more reliable than relatives

living far away. The spirit of mutual help emphasises the responsibility of individuals to take care of the disadvantaged members in the neighbourhood. The existence of this kind of mutual help at the local level is related to the Confucian doctrines stressing self-reliance rather than dependence on the state to solve personal problems, unless one has no family support (Jones, 1993). According to Wong (1998), the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood has been formed due to generations of residence in the vicinity and the mutual exchange of labour during the busy farming seasons in the agrarian societies. Since the people had lived for generations in the same village, neighbours were often considered as one's family members who had known each other well. As noted by Luova (2011), there was a long Chinese tradition of small-scale non-institutionalised neighbourhood support, where many families lived together in the walled courtyard compounds and interacted frequently and were ready to help each other out when in need. Therefore, the sense of collective responsibility with the readiness to help each other out existed when residents lived in the same neighbourhood for a long time and were familiar with each other. In other words, the care of older people is seen as not much a problem if mutual assistance is readily available in the neighbourhood. It can be interpreted that the main basis for the spirit of mutual help is the absence of welfare support which requires residents to pull through in difficulty together. One feels the obligation to help others and also expects to receive help when needed, and this mutual expectation and obligations have, in turn, established the rights and responsibilities in the neighbourhood.

### **Basis for the rights and responsibilities in the neighbourhood in pre-reform China**

This section explains how the work unit-based system reinforced the rights and responsibilities in the neighbourhood during the socialist era. As described in Chapter 1, the work unit-based system was established during the pre-reform era where urban workers had access to welfare benefits. Ren (2013) explained that this system triggered an influx of rural population to the urban areas, making the state introduce the *hukou* system in 1958 to control the population movement between cities and countryside. Under the work unit-based system, people were assigned jobs and residence while the *hukou* system restricted the



movement of the population, which in turn promoted neighbourhood stability (Ikels, 1993). This was conducive to the development of a sense of belonging among residents in the neighbourhood.

According to Lu (2006), the work unit-based system integrated the workplace, residence and welfare facilities in the neighbourhood, meaning that a wide range of activities were undertaken at a place where residents stayed. As Wong (1988) observed, work units, having got involved heavily in the lives of their employees, could help them find a spouse, issue the couple a letter for marriage registration, determine their number of births, find a nursery, school place or job for their children, assist in wedding and funeral arrangements or mediate in family disputes. Since the comprehensive services provided by work units covered almost every aspect of life, there was no need for the residents to seek support outside their own neighbourhood (Heberer and Gobel, 2011). The neighbourhoods were enclosed by physical walls and fences with the installation of security gates to monitor the flow of people, which helped maintain the law and order in the neighbourhood (Lu, 2006; Ren, 2013). This provided a safe environment which encouraged residents to move around and interact with others, and this was conducive to cultivating a sense of identity among residents in the closely-knit neighbourhood. As Jankowiak (2008) noted, the socialist values, such as collective efforts, social obligations and an egalitarian lifestyle with minimum gaps in income, were stressed during this period. The residents were bound together by these values and they also felt easily connected with each other because of their homogenous background.

For the purpose of ideological education, political mobilisation and control, the state established the neighbourhood administrative system consisting of the Street Office and the Residents Committee (Leung, 1990; Saich, 2008). The Street Office carries the functions of urban service management and serves as a bridge between the government and the local residents (Leung, 1990). Under the Street Office (the office of the sub-district), there is a Residents Committee in each neighbourhood which has the responsibility to look after the welfare needs of those who were outside the work unit-based system, including older people, unemployed, housewives, or disabled persons (Lu, 2006). The Residents Committee is

looked upon as a source of support for older people when they have life problems. According to the Regulation on the Organisation of the Urban Residents Committee in 1954, the nature of the Residents Committee was defined as a self-governing organisation at the local level (NPC, 1980). Under this ordinance, each Residents Committee was responsible for 100 to 600 households, under which a residents' group was formed for every 15 to 40 households. Each Residents Committee would have 7 to 17 members who were the representatives from the residents' groups. Through these groups, the residents were called up to assist the needy persons in the neighbourhood and most importantly, to check on each other's behaviour in the socialist era (Chen, 1996).

Under the work unit-based system as well as being organised into the residents' groups, the residents had a relatively high level of interaction in their daily routines and were aware of almost all the happenings in the neighbourhood such as who needed assistance. The individual's life revolved around others and this served as their moral bond to observe collective responsibility. Since the welfare of a majority of residents was taken care of by their work units, the basis for the existence of the rights and responsibilities in the neighbourhood was different from the days when there was absence of welfare so that residents had to call up the resources to help each other out in times of need. Instead, the rights and responsibilities were reinforced by the state's work-unit based system and the neighbourhood administrative system to take care of the disadvantaged in the neighbourhood.

## **Changing neighbourhood support since the market reform**

### ***New challenges and socio-political response***

This section describes how the impact of the market reform has changed life in the neighbourhood as well as the state's response to the diminished neighbourhood support. As noted in Chapter 1, since the mid-1980s, the gradual phasing out of the work unit-based system due to the replacement of lifetime employment by the contract worker system, bankruptcy of the state-owned enterprises, massive lay-offs and the emergence of job opportunities in the private sector, led to increased population mobility when people left their

neighbourhood to seek their fortune elsewhere. Upon the disintegration of the work unit-based system that used to hold the residents together, the state lost its influence over the life arrangements of individuals and their place of residence (Dai, 2008; Heberer and Gobel, 2011). The younger generation no longer has to accept the jobs assigned by the state and they can compete for jobs through different channels in the market economy (Whyte, 2010). The individuals have no need to ask permission from their work units to get married, attend university or travel as they did during the socialist era (Ren, 2013). They enjoy more freedom to choose their lifestyles.

The housing reform, the private property market boom and the urban redevelopment projects have created a different scenario of the urban neighbourhood life. As highlighted in an earlier section, increasing housing supply and changes of career were some of the factors behind the increasing residential mobility. Moreover, affected by the redevelopment projects in the Chinese cities, a substantial number of people have been resettled in the suburban housing blocks developed since 1985 (Li, 2004). After the housing reform in 1998, residents were allowed to sell their flats in the housing market, transfer them to their children or sublet them, which prompted further residential mobility (Chen, J., 2009). These new developments further transformed the social landscape of the neighbourhood from homogeneity of residents belonging to the same work unit to heterogeneity, with people coming from diverse backgrounds (Gui, Ma and Mühlhahn, 2009; Heberer and Gobel, 2011). When residents come from mixed backgrounds and do not know each other, this does not give rise to neighbourly bonds like those built up over the years in work unit-based neighbourhoods (Lu, 2006). The study of Hohhut, capital of Inner Mongolia by Jankowiak (2008) revealed that the neighbourly relationship tended to be more intimate in homogenous working class neighbourhood than those in diversified and higher status areas. In the study of mutuality in Guangzhou, Chan (1993) observed that urban growth and high residential mobility affect the social cohesion among the residents in the neighbourhood. Those who move into a diversified neighbourhood have no commonality and this makes them less motivated to establish relationship with each other (Jankowiak, 2008). This was also elaborated by Dai (2008) that the widening inequality in an increasingly stratified society makes people share less commonality in life experience. The residents find less need or purpose to communicate

with each other. The lack of the essential components of building a sense of belonging to the community, such as long periods of residence in a stable neighbourhood and high levels of interaction among the residents, renders it more difficult to foster the spirit of mutual help and collective responsibility today.

Owing to the growing individualism in the Chinese society, people are more concerned about protecting their privacy and do not have much interest in the well-being of other people (Luova, 2011). When the society becomes richer and people having different occupations, socio-economic status, or place of origin, live in the same neighbourhood, individuals value their privacy, contrary to the emphasis on collective interest in the past (Dai, 2008). Moreover, they either spend their time on work and social life outside their neighbourhood or in their self-contained accommodation units, and collective living is thus basically non-existent, as noted by Read (2000). The massive construction of shopping malls and the emergence of new leisure pursuits such as art shows, movies or sports events have fundamentally changed the way urban dwellers spend their time (Wu and Gaubatz, 2013). The values such as obedience to authority and collective responsibility emphasised during the pre-reform era have gradually faded away. Individuals attach more importance to personal achievement, enjoyment of leisure, personal responsibility and privacy. The disintegration of the work unit-based system and the process of urbanisation have changed the neighbourhood social interaction from collective responsibility to one characterised by distance and respect for privacy (Jankowiak, 2008). The rights and responsibilities that neighbouring residents can provide with the expectation of mutual help are primarily absent when there is a lack of familiarity among residents and a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood. To a certain extent, the research findings in the next paragraph can illustrate that the conventional neighbourhood support is no longer a reliable and effective means of help when needs arise.

Forrest and Yip (2007) conducted a study in three types of neighbourhoods: old neighbourhoods, work unit-based neighbourhoods and a newly developed neighbourhood with high-rise apartments, in Guangzhou in 2003 to explore how market reform transformed the patterns of local social interaction. This study revealed that only 33%, 21% and 15% of

the residents from old neighbourhoods, work unit-based neighbourhoods and the newly developed neighbourhoods respectively indicated that they helped a neighbour in some way over the past six months, while only a minority from all these neighbourhoods regarded neighbours as a potential source of assistance in case of emergency. This shows that the frequency of neighbourly help remains low even in the old neighbourhoods. Another research on neighbourly relationship was done by the China Youth Daily in 2011 (People's Daily [overseas version], 2011). This study found that 81% of the 4,509 interviewees expressed that neighbourly relationship had become more aloof compared with the situation ten years ago. 41% of them indicated that they did not know their neighbours well and among them, 12.7% said that they did not know their neighbours at all. The findings of the above study also showed that should they encounter life problems, only 18.5% would seek help from their neighbours first. These two studies show that to a certain extent, the old Chinese proverb, 'the next-door neighbours are more reliable than relatives living far away' becomes less applicable in the present-day neighbourly life. To most people, the present-day neighbours are practically strangers. When residents are not familiar with one another and their focus of life is no longer in the neighbourhood, there seems to be no basis for the existence of neighbourly rights and responsibilities. Relying on personal responsibility to solve one's problem is valued and emphasised in the market economy, and it has replaced the collective responsibility as a means of help.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the neighbourhood constitutes an important source of social and instrumental support for older people. Understandably, the growing number of older people in empty-nest households means more support in daily routines is likely needed and the presence of neighbourly help can be a supplementary source of support. Based on the 2011 baseline survey of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) drawing samples from 1,225 older people aged 60 or over from 148 urban communities, the leisure amenities in the neighbourhood enable older people to meet neighbours, establish their social network or derive social support which is conducive to reducing the depressive symptoms (Liu, Li and Zhang, 2016). In this regard, Yip, Leung and Huang (2013) noted that facing the neighbourhood changes, it is necessary to strengthen or create a new network as a source of support for older people. To respond to

the consequences of a rapidly ageing society, the government in 2005 issued the 'Opinions on promoting the development of community-based voluntary services in response to new situations', emphasising the role of volunteers in meeting the increasing service demands from the ageing population (Xu and Chow, 2011). In 2014, the Chinese Voluntary Service Joint Association initiated a nationwide volunteer programme on *linlishouwang* (neighbourly watch and mutual help) to raise concerns about the marginalised population in the neighbourhood, and the older people in empty-nest households is one of the target groups (People's Daily, 2014b). To strengthen the residents' identification with their neighbourhood, the local government widely publicised special emblems, flags or slogans like 'The neighbourhood is our family' and 'The family depends on everyone' in the neighbourhood (Heberer and Gobel, 2011). Nevertheless, the promotion of the self-sacrificing volunteer spirit seems to have failed to notice the changes in urban life that make neighbourly responsibility or the spirit of mutual help hard to maintain. Thus, how effective this strategy to mobilise the community resources to support older people is to be seen since the urban neighbourhood has undergone tremendous changes that are not conducive to sustaining this long practice of mutual help.

Other than the concern about the effectiveness of reviving the spirit of mutual help in the neighbourhood, one has to know if older people still value the neighbourly relationship as a source of help, given that neighbourhood is no longer the focus of life for most of the residents, even for older people. The previous section also shows that older people turn to be more independent in their living arrangement and expand their social network outside the family sphere. Little is known about how they perceive the neighbours' help in their daily life, which requires exploration so as to gain an understanding on how to support them better.

### ***Evolving roles of the Residents Committee as a local organisation***

As mentioned earlier, the Residents Committee, a residents-led local-level organisation, all along has involved the deployment of community resources to help the needy, mainly those who were outside the work units-based system. This section explains the reasons for the declining capacity of the Residents Committee to meet the growing needs of older people in the neighbourhood since the market reform.

The Law on the organisation of the Urban Residents Committees of 1989 still stipulates that the Residents Committee is a 'self-managed, self-educated, self-serviced and self-monitored organisation' (NPC, 1989). In reality, the Residents Committee, with its staff paid by the government, is supervised by the Street Office, which is under the district government and hence has to fulfil the work assigned by the Street Office (Chen, J., 2009; Xinhua News, 2010). The nature of the Residents Committee has evolved from a residents-led organisation to become a part of the government machinery.

Since the economic reform, there has been devolution of welfare responsibilities from the central to the local government, which will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter. In the absence of charitable or social organisations to take up the welfare function left by the work units, the government finds both the Street Office and Residents Committee convenient channels to take up the welfare role at the local level (Chan, 1993; Chen, 1996). The Residents Committee has been expected to play an increasing role to coordinate the service delivery at the local level, such as assessing the residents' service needs, organising volunteers to provide services to those who cannot afford payment, determining the kinds of services to be provided or how the services be delivered (Xu and Jones, 2004). As noted by Read (2000), the Residents Committee has to take up many duties passed down from the higher level, such as carrying out surveys, collecting fees of various sorts, monitoring environmental hygiene or organising fire prevention campaign. As a result of the increasing workloads and responsibilities, less attention can be given specifically to the needs of older people.

Various studies confirmed that the Residents Committees were overstretched by their increasing work duties and a number of operations had to rely on the goodwill of individuals. The local Residents Committee officers in Shanghai spoke about their work difficulties such as heavy workloads, lack of financial resources, insufficient skills or knowledge to meet the diversified needs of the residents (Ho and Ng, 2007). The Residents Committee in-charge in Tianjin, a highly urbanised Chinese city, remarked that the Committee had a duty to look after older people but her office didn't have the resources to establish a service team to serve them (Li, 2010). She went on saying that apart from serving older people, her office

still had to take care of other categories of residents, such as the social assistance recipients or those with employment issues. As noted by Lu (2006), research conducted with residents in Beijing in 2005 revealed that the Residents Committee had to rely on the residents to volunteer to help discharge their duties such as patrolling the neighbourhood.

Whether the Residents Committee can mobilise volunteers depends on its ability to build up a network in the neighbourhood so that its staff can draw upon their support when required. The communal living in the old neighbourhoods provided the opportunity for the staff to meet and communicate with the residents. Read (2000) noted that with high-rise buildings, frequent turnover of tenants as well as the popularity of home entertainment which keeps people indoors, life in new neighbourhoods does not favour contacts among each other, which greatly reduces the opportunity for face-to-face interactions between the staff and the residents. After the housing reform, more and more residents have become homeowners who form the homeowners' association to protect property related matters (Gui, Ma and Mühlhahn, 2009). When the houses or flats are sold to private owners, the former work units relinquish control of their property maintenance team which subsequently becomes an independent property management company (Chen, J., 2009). These two emergent organisations that are responsible for handling infrastructural improvement or protecting the rights of property owners, take over some of the duties of the Residents Committee which used to coordinate or supervise such neighbourhood affairs (Heberer and Gobel, 2011; Gui and Ma, 2014). This reduces the chance of the Residents Committee coming into contact and getting familiar with residents who are possibly the source of volunteers.

Undoubtedly, the above discussion reveals that facing increasing work duties and limited resources, it is harder for the Residents Committee to meet the growing needs of older people by relying mostly on volunteers to support their work. Despite its having a welfare role to look after older people, there is not much literature coverage on how the Residents Committee fulfils its responsibility to provide home-care support to older people and how their role is perceived in the neighbourhood in reality. This requires exploration.



## **Changing rights and responsibilities in neighbourhood support**

Neighbourhood support is a long practice in the Chinese society. Individuals have the readiness to help each other out in times of difficulties, which is, to a certain extent, a response to the lack of welfare support. The generations of long residence in the same locality in a stable society have promoted the concept of the rights and responsibilities in neighbourhood support. The work unit-based system and the mobilising function of the Residents Committee further strengthened the practice of collective responsibility in the neighbourhood during the socialist era. Since the market reform, the diversified neighbourhood with residents from mixed backgrounds, increasing life activities done outside one's neighbourhood, priority given to the values such as personal success, self-responsibility, leisure enjoyment and privacy are the factors accounting for the fading away of the rights and responsibilities in the neighbourhood. The attention of individuals is centred more on their personal sphere of life rather than involvement in the lives of others and concern for collective well-being. The older people, in some way, also show that their life orientation is adhered to new values of the market economy and their social network has also shifted away from their neighbourhood.

Seeing the decline of the spirit of mutual support, the government has attempted to revive and promote neighbourhood mutual help in the hope that it can remain as a source of support for older people. Yet, it seems to have missed the fact that it is hard to rely on the goodwill or initiative of individuals to help each other out. Moreover, the Residents Committees have been unrealistically looked upon as an agent to look after the needs of older people in the neighbourhood when they are overloaded with a wide range of duties.

The above review has revealed the dilemma and problems in the existing neighbourhood support for older people, which require further study in the following aspects. Firstly, there is a gap of knowledge in how older people perceive the changing neighbourly relationship in relation to their everyday life. Secondly, how community resources can be mobilised effectively remains underexplored.

## **The state as a source of support for older people**

This section examines the changing role of the state in the transition from the socialist era to the market economy era in urban China. Since the market reform, transformation from the state being almost the sole welfare provider for urban workers in the pre-reform era to the emphasis on shared responsibility among different parties including the family, the state, the community and the market signifies the increasing personal and family responsibility in the care of older people. The state's policy response through legislative means and the development of service provision in the community will also be discussed.

How a society organises its social welfare is influenced by its historical and cultural circumstances. The features of a welfare system reflect its choice of values and institutional arrangements, which are rooted in the structure of a society (Wong, 1998). Baldock (1999) asserted that culture has an impact on the emergence and development of its social welfare system. He continued to say that social policies reflect the societal values in deciding which group of people deserves state assistance. The strategies of welfare policies are generally selected according to the conventional understanding of the norms, such as the society's understanding of family responsibility (Spicker, 2008). In the Chinese context, as laid down by the Confucian doctrines, family dependence rather than state reliance is a preferred way to solve one's personal problems (Dixon, 1981). The government steps in only after an individual exhausts all means of solution and the assistance is given on a discretionary basis and in a stigmatising manner in order to discourage reliance on welfare (Wong, 1998). She further pointed out that there was a general lack of awareness of welfare rights among the people since welfare was not relevant to the majority of them (Wong, 1998). Instead of providing welfare to the people, the role of the state is to provide an environment where the family can function properly (Li, 1999). The Confucian doctrines have become a convenient excuse for the state to limit its welfare role by stressing the family's responsibility (Walker and Wong, 2005). This traditional concept of welfare responsibility is important in the sense that it continues to exert an influence on welfare development in contemporary China

## **State's welfare responsibility during the pre-reform era**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the welfare system operated through the work unit-based system. The measures included full employment, income equalisation with wages kept at a low level, controlled pricing, occupational benefits, medical services, housing and other subsidies (Li, 1999; Mok and Liu, 1999). The work unit-based system was constructed in accordance with the socialist ideology which emphasised equality by reducing disparities in the living standards and the consumption levels of the urban population (Wu and Huang, 2007). Full employment policy was implemented to encourage individuals to be self-reliant and to make contribution to the country (Dixon, 1981). The right to welfare services was based on labour participation (Gu, 2001). Since the government provided financial backup to these work units, it meant the government, in fact, provided almost cradle-to-grave welfare benefits to their workers (Li, 1999; Tang and Ngan, 2001; Chau and Yu, 2005). The state provision of a comprehensive range of services shared family responsibility substantially (Zhang and Xu, 2010).

Under the social contract forged between the state and urban workers, the latter provided support to the state in exchange for lifetime employment, privileged status and welfare benefits (Selden and You, 1997; Gu, 2001). Individuals learnt to be submissive and compliant to state rule in return for a guaranteed livelihood (Leung, 2005). In other words, the work unit-based system was a political asset that promised social and political stability (Saunders and Shang, 2001; Leung, 2005; Guthrie, 2012). Walker and Wong (2005) remarked that the key features under the work unit-based system such as full employment, free or cheap education, low-cost health services, pension or heavily subsidised food were comparable to those of the Western welfare state. State support limited only to the 'Three Nos' has to be understood in two key frameworks: the socialist work unit-based system as a source of social provision for the employed, and the family and neighbourhood under the Confucian ideals as the social support system (Deacon, Holliday and Wong, 2001). Both the traditional values and the socialist ideologies with emphasis on work ethic, spirit of mutual help, self-reliance, collectivism and frugality were the features of the welfare support during this period (Dixon, 1981).

Under the work unit-based system, the welfare of older people was well provided for. They had access to pension, housing and medical care upon retirement. As the housing units were allocated according to the length of service in the work unit, older employees were given priority to receive bigger units which enabled them to live with their children and their families (Wong, 1998). The job replacement policy allowing children to take up their parents' jobs after the latter's retirement and the restriction of residential mobility under the *hukou* system helped maintain family stability (Wong, 1998). Sheng and Settles (2006) remarked that these institutional arrangements had reinforced family cohesiveness which also accorded older people with a superior status in the family. After their retirement, older people were still looked after by their work units. They were encouraged to participate in the recreational activities of their former work units and to contribute in political workshops as advisers, assist in neighbourhood patrol, mediate in disputes among the residents or be involved in the Residents Committee's administration (Dixon, 1981). Most importantly, if the retired older people encountered home-care problems, their former work units would draw resources from the neighbourhood to support them (Dixon, 1981).

In short, the access to welfare depended on one's work participation and the state shouldered a high welfare responsibility during the socialist era. The welfare of older people was either taken care of by their work unit or the Residents Committee should they have any need.

### **Changing welfare role of the state since economic reform**

The shift of the welfare approach since the economic reform, especially with the emphasis on personal responsibility and the involvement of multiple sectors in sharing the welfare responsibilities, are discussed in this section.

The sustainability of the work unit-based system with location of welfare responsibility in the work units themselves, lifetime employment, low occupational mobility and high level of entitlements to non-contributory benefits had been called into question (Selden and You, 1997; White, 1998). This was further aggravated by population ageing which led to a rapid increase in welfare expenditure on pensions and medical care (Gu, 2001). These made the government believe that economic reform was required to develop the economy and restore

the people's confidence in the Communist Party (Mok and Liu, 1999). The economic reform was formally endorsed in the Third Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress under the new leadership of Deng Xiaoping in 1978, signifying the transformation from a planned economy into a market-oriented economy (Wong, 1998). To pursue economic growth, the government advocated the principles of 'efficiency first; equity second' and 'letting some people get rich first' in order to promote work enthusiasm and to stimulate production (Mok and Liu, 1999; Ngok and Huang, 2014). At the start of the market reform, the Chinese leader Deng stressed that 'letting some people get rich first' should be allowed initially before 'everyone getting rich together' as the ultimate goal and by that time, the whole population can share the economic benefits and get rich together (Chen, J., 2009).

To get rid of the dependency culture of 'all eating from the same bowl' during the socialist era, the government reiterated that maintaining a high level of welfare would encourage dependence and weaken the competitive economic power, which meant that the state should limit the expectation of the people towards welfare provision (Zheng, 2013). Moreover, the message that China should not become a welfare state has been repeatedly stressed for fear that welfare provision would become a financial burden on the government, hamper economic growth, erode the family function and create disincentives to work (Saich, 2008; Zhang and Xu, 2010). Welfare should be expanded only if there is economic growth (Li and Fang, 2014). The stress on personal responsibility for one's welfare is compatible with the market economy ideology which emphasises efficiency and self-reliance instead of reliance on the state (Zhang and Xu, 2010). The logic of the Chinese welfare reform is similar to those in the East Asian developmental welfare states, where welfare programmes are used to support the economic goals and seek political legitimacy, with the state deciding on who the beneficiaries are rather than on the basis of the greatest personal need (Kwon, 2005).

Under the market reform, the work unit-based system has been phased out through measures such as replacement of lifetime employment by the contract worker system, and the implementation of bankruptcy law and laws on lay-offs or termination of contracts (Leung, 2005). This represents a shift from a socialist model of state responsibility for welfare to a model in which quality and quantity of welfare entitlement are determined by the

performance of individuals and enterprises (Li, 1999; Saunders and Shang, 2001). It means that the amount of welfare benefits depends on how much an individual earns and how much profit the enterprise generates. The current resource allocation is based on personal efforts rather than one's needs, and efficiency receives priority over equality (Leung, 2005). Baehler and Bersharov (2013) saw that the transition from the socialist era to the market economy era has witnessed a shift of responsibility from the state to shared responsibility by the state, the employer and the employee in providing welfare benefits for workers. Apparently, the values of equality, egalitarianism and collectivism of the pre-reform era were replaced by the new emphasis on wealth accumulation and personal responsibility (White, 1998). The focus on economic growth has relegated welfare development to a subsidiary role but the economic gains are not put into welfare shared by the general population (Pei, 2009). Instead of extending its welfare role, the state limits its responsibility to mainly looking after the deprived groups while the family is still looked upon as the key source of social protection for its members (Zhang and Xu, 2010).

Since the late 1980s, the Chinese government adopted a policy approach of 'small government and big society', aiming at encouraging non-state funding and provision in the welfare services (Lei and Walker, 2013). This approach reflects that the state embraces the neo-liberal approach of stressing the importance of the market and minimise the role of the state in welfare (Wong, 2001; Chan, Ngok and Phillips, 2008). Under this policy direction, the MCA adopted the policy of 'socialisation of social welfare', which meant a shift from a welfare model predominantly provided and funded by the state to one that relied on multiple sources funded by the government and money from donations and fees and charges, while at the same time the provision should involve the family, the community, the NGOs, the state and the market (Xu and Chow, 2011; Wong and Leung, 2012).

As noted earlier, the work units were responsible for welfare service delivery, rendering the NGOs or the market no role in welfare responsibility (Leung, 2005). In the early years of market reform, the NGOs were seen as organisations opposed to the government and a challenge to the state authority (Gao and Xia, 2016). The first document relating to the regulation of NGOs issued by the State Council in 1988 has used the dual registration

requirement to tighten its establishment (Ma, 2016). Wong (2016) explained that the MCA requires each NGO to find a government unit to act as sponsor before it can proceed to register with the MCA. He further explained that except for those NGOs with government connection, it was very difficult for the NGOs to seek a sponsoring body which is willing to undertake the political risk that may be involved.

The key driving force behind the NGO development is the emergence of the social problems caused by the breakdown of the state's work-unit based system (Wong, 2016). To cope with the social problems arising from the market reform, the government enacted a regulation which allowed the non-state sector to provide non-profit-making social services in 1998 (Wong and Leung, 2012). Since then, the government changed its direction by encouraging the establishment of NGOs to provide services to meet the social needs arising in the transitional economy (White, 1998). The NGOs are perceived as the collaborators in the provision of social services (Gao and Xia, 2016). Another important policy development is the government's procurement of social services from the NGOs which has transformed the system of the social service delivery (Ma, 2016). Through such a measure, the role of the state has changed from a service provider in the socialist era to a funder, facilitator or monitoring body in the market economy era (Leung and Xu, 2015). The MCA has enacted several regulations including 'Notice on the promotion of the development of non-governmental social work organisations' (2009), 'Opinions on speeding up the development of services for older people' (2012) and the 'Guiding opinion on the Government Purchase of Social Work Services' (2012) (Leung and Xu, 2015). In March 2013, the National People's Congress meetings announced new national regulations allowing for direct registration of NGOs (Teets and Jagusztyn, 2016). All these measures have encouraged the setting up of the NGOs to obtain the state's funding contract.

According to the various official documents, namely 'Regulations for the registration and management of social organisations' and 'Temporary regulation for the registration and management of NGNCEs (Non-government and non-commercial enterprises)' in 1998 and 'Regulations on the management of Foundations' in 2004, the term NGO includes all organisations and institutions which are outside the state system and are non-profit-making

(Ma, 2006). Ren (2013) noted that there are mainly three types of NGOs in terms of its organisational origin. It includes the government-operated NGOs (GONGOs) which are sponsored by the government and work as extensions of the state, those set up by the local people which are not directly affiliated with any state organisation and those founded by the service recipients themselves such as migrant workers. The NGOs in this thesis mean those organisations which are established and registered with the MCA to obtain the service funding contract to provide services for older people in the locality.

Apart from encouraging the NGOs in service provision for older people, the State Council issued the directive on the 'Opinions on speeding up the development of old-age care services' in 2013 encouraging the local government to give more support to the market to develop a range of home-care services for older people in the community (CNCA, 2013a). Concerning the support given to the private sector, it is mainly through providing subsidies to enterprises so that they can render services such as laundry, hair-cutting or household cleaning to the older people or disabled adults at a lower cost (Wong and Leung, 2012). Also, the local government provides preferential policies such as allocation of land and premises, reduction of utility charges or tax incentives to encourage the private sector to operate the residential service for older people (Leung and Xu, 2015).

Since the economic reform, the financial conditions of the people have improved, which has led to a demand for a better quality and a diversified form of service, and this brings about the emergence of the market in service provision, such as private residential homes for older people (Wong, 1998; Chen, 2003). Relying on market resources for the provision of welfare services would mean that a certain section of the people would be excluded if they cannot afford the fees. The slogan of 'letting some people get rich first', as advocated by Deng Xiaoping, might end up with 'letting the poor remain poor' for a longer time (Wong, 1998; Mok and Liu, 1999). The ability to pay has become a new selection criterion for service entitlements. If there is an increasing privatisation of the social services, older people are likely to be in a more vulnerable position since they now live longer and may need a longer period of paid services for the home-care support or residential care. During the pre-reform era, whenever older people encountered life problems, they approached their work units for



help. Since the market reform, older people can still receive pensions or health insurance benefits from their former employers but no longer obtain other kinds of support as in the past (Du, 2013). Rather, older people's personal responsibility to plan for old age has been stressed (Chen, J., 2009).

Concerning the older people's readiness to use market services, Mr Wu Yushao, Deputy Director of the CNCA noted that there existed a wide variation of the acceptance level among older people to resort to services in the market to meet their home-care needs (Chen, 2014). He pointed out that in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai with high level of economic development, only about 45% of the older people indicated their acceptance of the market services, while in Chengdu, the major city in western China, only 24% preferred this means (Chen, 2014). Moreover, a nationwide survey of private residential homes in 2015 revealed that only 9% of them could earn profit, 40% could break even and 51% were in deficit for a long period of time (Xinhua News, 2015b). There is a possibility that some of these private homes will cease operation sooner or later if the business continues to incur losses. Those enterprises operating top-grade residential services might be in a better position to generate profit, but a majority of older people can hardly afford them, as opined by Leung and Xu (2015). Though the market reform has brought a rise in the living standard of the population, there are still a certain proportion of older people who find difficulty in affording the market service on a long-term basis (Qian, 2015).

Apart from the changing mix of welfare responsibility, the economic reform also altered the distribution of power between the central and the local government in service planning and welfare responsibility (White, 1998). Guan and Xu (2011) noted that prior to the economic reform, the central government was responsible for planning almost all social policies, which were then implemented locally. At present, although the local government cannot refuse the implementation of state policy, it has been given greater autonomy to adapt the policies to suit the local situations, such as on the timing, scope, levels of benefits and the allocation of budget (Guan and Xu, 2011). Although this brings flexibility to the design of the services to meet the local needs, the central government finds it difficult to monitor the implementation at the local level (White, 1998). The provincial and district governments have retreated from

their welfare responsibilities while the local government has to take up a greater welfare role (Xu and Chow, 2006). However, as there is no regulation concerning the financial commitment of the central government to the local government which has to shoulder the welfare expenditure, some local governments are not enthusiastic to implement the welfare programmes until they receive financial commitment from the central government to the project concerned (Guan and Xu, 2011). Moreover, the performance of the local government is also measured by its economic growth which makes it reluctant to direct resources to the social service development (Ngok, 2016). In order to raise money for welfare development, the local government has to generate income through various means such as selling welfare lotteries, appealing for donations, charging fees on social services and developing profit-making businesses to support the welfare activities (Mok and Liu, 1999). As a result, whether or not the local government would deliver the service has to depend on its financial capacity as well as the enthusiasm of the local officers. This explains the variations in the quality and quantity of welfare services provided in different communities, sub-districts or even districts in the same city (Leung and Wong, 2002). As noted by Leung and Xu (2015), the government has been known for having idealistic policy directions, but failures in the policy implementation have led to unsatisfactory outcome. This has the implication that the service provision has become more random in nature. Whether older people can receive the services relies on the economic performance of the district or sub-district they reside in.

Since the economic reform, the state believed that economic growth is the ultimate solution to poverty and inequality which are the necessary evils in a transitional economy (Zhang and Xu, 2010). Having no well-organised or comprehensive policies for tackling the negative social consequences brought by the market reform, those who have suffered loss in the process, such as the laid-off workers, have resorted to protest to express their grievances (Ngok, 2014). It is only when the growing disparity in wealth and income becomes almost uncontrollable and threatens social stability that the government recognises economic growth cannot solve all the social problems (Zhang and Xu, 2010; Heberer and Gobel, 2011). The number of collective actions such as petitions, protests, demonstrations or riots reached 57,000 in 2005, a tenfold increase in ten years' time (Li, B., 2012). Under the new generation of political leadership led by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao in 2003, slogans like 'putting people

first', 'harmonious society' and 'service-oriented government' were the catchwords and the government took a step forward in social policy development (Ngok, 2014). The new welfare programmes included the extension of the social assistance scheme to rural areas, provision of urban social insurance schemes for migrant workers, and the enhancement of other social insurance schemes such as pensions, unemployment benefits and medical insurance for retirees and workers from those state-owned enterprises which are mostly affected by the economic reform (Ngok, 2014).

The underlying purpose of the welfare expansion is to seek political and social stability rather than improving the well-being of the population. This is to say that providing welfare is considered a political strategy to alleviate the discontent of the people and to seek legitimacy for the authoritarian government. Li, B. (2012) noted that the most immediate social policy response followed the protestors with the loudest public outcries. In other words, those groups who are thought to be a threat to social stability are given more attention by having measures to pacify them. Even if some older people become more vocal but perceived to have no threat to the government, their growing needs, though widely reported in the media, are not given enough attention.

Although the market reform was initially economic, it has changed the balance of the state-society welfare responsibility (Wong, 2001). The welfare development in the market economy era bears characteristics such as priority of economic efficiency over social equality, delegation of welfare responsibility from the central to the local level without adequate financial commitment, emphasis on personal responsibility and sharing of welfare responsibilities among different sectors. As will be discussed in the section below, there is, in some way, an extension of the state's welfare responsibility through the service provisions in the community. Yet, the family is still expected to play a key responsibility for the care of older people.

## ***State policy framing the division of responsibility in the care of older people***

This section includes a discussion of the legal means to prescribe the family responsibilities for the care of older people, and the development of the community-based policy to meet their home-care needs, which reflect that the emphasis on family responsibility is still the policy orientation of the state.

### **Legal responsibility in family care**

As discussed in the previous sections, based on the Chinese family ethics, older people have the right to family care in their old age. Rights, to have value, must be legally enforceable, as asserted by Dean (2002). They are a juristic concept, meaning the legitimacy of its claim has to be backed by state legislation (Talyor-Gooby, 2012). Related to this, the assertion of legal rights by older people to family support can be dated back to Imperial China. There was law to preserve filial piety which was regarded as a fundamental ethical and social norm (Yan, 2003). Parents without the need to present any evidence could ask the local government to prosecute their son who ignored filial piety since the belief that 'no parents in the world were wrong' was upheld as the guiding principle of the legal system (Yan, 2003). This shows that the rights and responsibilities in family care, in fact, have also legal foundations throughout Chinese history.

Believing that formal welfare provision would erode the family function leading to the shift of care responsibility to itself, the state confined its welfare support mainly to the 'Three Nos' and relied on legal means to enforce family responsibility to take care of older people (Leung, 2005; Wu *et al.*, 2005). Numerous laws have been passed in the last few decades including the Criminal Law (1979, 2011), the Marriage Law (1950, 1980, 2011) and the Inheritance Law (1985), which all stipulated that the family has a legal responsibility for the welfare of older people (Leung and Xu, 2015).

The key legislation is the 'Welfare Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Older People' which was enacted in 1996, specifying the responsibility of different sectors including the family, the state and the community in the care of older people, but with a strong emphasis on family responsibility to provide for their older relatives (CNCA, 2013b). Despite

the demographic and socio-economic changes in the past few decades, the principle of family responsibility in the care of older people is still upheld by the state, as reflected in the revision of this welfare law in July 2013 requiring the adult children to visit their parents regularly (BBC News, 2012). The law revision, to a certain extent, reflects that the ageing issue has become the concern of the state, which has to step in to convey the message of the children's legal responsibility in supporting one's parents. Since the inception of this policy, it has aroused the debate on how it can offer protection to older people when socio-economic and demographic changes have weakened the family capacity to support them and the state's control over the individuals' life has reduced compared to the socialist era.

### **Community-based policy for older people**

The rapid growth of the ageing population and the decline of family capacity to look after older people have been the reasons given by the state to develop community services to address their home-care needs since the early 2000s. An examination of the key community-based policies in the following section will give a better picture of the extent it has improved the home-care service support for older people.

#### **2001-2005: 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan**

There is no mention of the welfare relating to older people until the 9<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (1996 – 2000) which called for the establishment of old-age insurance as well as the development of social welfare and social relief for the needy at different levels (People's Daily, 1995). In the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2001-2005), the state highlighted for the first time the concept of 'ageing at one's own home' with the support of community facilities (CCTV news, 2000). Based on this national plan, the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan on Ageing Service Development has been formulated which emphasised the development of community facilities so as to help older people age in their own homes. The joint efforts of the family, the community and the government in supporting older people have been accorded importance while older people's personal responsibility to plan for their old age has also been stressed (Xinhua News, 2001).

During this period, the MCA launched the Star Light Project in early 2000 and established around 32,000 community-based facilities nationwide aiming at providing services for older people, including meal delivery, household cleaning, personal care, escort services,

emotional support or day-care service (Leung and Wong, 2002; Leung and Xu, 2015). However, it was up to the local governments to decide on the type or the duration of the service to be delivered as well as on the level of fees charged (Wong and Leung, 2012). Many of these service centres were either closed down, remained merely as venues for older people to play mah-jong, or were utilised as the NGO offices when the local government could no longer finance the running costs, as I was told during my research in Beijing and Guangzhou. The Star Light Project well illustrated that even though the development of community services has been written in the policy, service continuity is not guaranteed due to lack of sufficient financial backup and service monitoring at the local level. Generally speaking, the provision of community services has been loaded with problems such as lacking standardisation and being loosely organised or underutilised (Leung, 2005; Wu *et al.*, 2005).

#### **2006-2010: 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan**

In the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2006-2010), the state urged that a policy should be formulated to tackle the rapidly ageing problem (China News, 2005). The 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan on Ageing Service Development, apart from stressing the care responsibility of the family, also announced that more support would be given to the special categories of older people such as the 'Three Nos', those on social assistance or with disabilities, those in advanced aged or in the empty-nest households (China News, 2006). Under this development plan, 'Home care as the basis, community service as the support, and residential care as the supplement' becomes the guiding principle of service development for older people. During this period, the government issued a directive on the 'Opinions on the full implementation of home-care service for older people' in 2008 (MCA, 2008). This directive provides a community service framework including home-care services, rehabilitative care and emotional support to meet the needs of older people. The principle of accessibility to community service has been pointed out. Family responsibility remains the focus in this policy document.

Based on the principle of 'home care as the basis, community service as the support, and residential care as the supplement', Shanghai, the first Chinese city to experience ageing in 1979, announced in 2007 that it would pioneer the '9073' service framework for developing

services for older people, based on the population projection on the proportion of older people in need of residential care or community-based support (Xinhua News, 2007). Ms Zhang Shuping, the Shanghai Ministry of Civil Affairs Official, explained the population projection estimating that approximately 90% of the older people could be supported by their family, 7% needed extra support to cope with their home-care problems through the home-care or day-care services while the remaining 3% will receive residential care (Xinhua News, 2007). It means that 97% of the older people are expected to age in their own homes with support either from the family or community services. The Shanghai pioneering experience provides a blueprint for other provinces or cities in the years to follow.

### **2010-2015: 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan**

'Home care as the basis, community service as the support, and residential care service as the supplement' remains as the key policy direction for aged services in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2010-2015) (China News, 2010). Improving the community service facilities for older people and harnessing the potential of older people to serve as volunteers are on the agenda. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan on Ageing Service Development (2010-2015), it was indicated that the community support services such as day-care centres, whole day respite care service and social centres will be included in the future planning of a 'community' so that the services can be easily accessible by older people (China News, 2011). Mobilising 10% of the older population to serve as volunteers, supporting special categories of older people through the state's service purchase scheme, encouraging the two generations to live together or near to each other and emphasising the traditional virtue of filial piety are the major features in this plan. A directive on the 'Opinions on speeding up the development of old-age care services' was issued by the government in September 2013 (CNCA, 2013a). The main focus of this directive is to encourage the NGOs and the private sector to provide a range of home-based or community-based services in the community.

During this period, more cities and provinces pledged to adopt the 9073 or the 9064 framework (90% of older people rely on personal or family resources, extra home-care support services given to 6-7% of older people while 3-4% will receive residential service) according to the Shanghai experience mentioned above, to develop services for older people.

Some of the cities or provinces adopting the 9073 framework are Tianjin, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia or Changchun while those cities or provinces opting for the 9064 framework include Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Nanjing, Hangzhou or Qingdao (CNCA, 2016). Whichever model these cities or provinces have adopted seems to aim at the allocation of resources based on the projection of the needs of older people.

The community-based support policy represents the first attempt of the state to extend its responsibility in providing home-care support for older people. Nevertheless, the family is still looked upon to bear the ultimate responsibility for the welfare of the majority of them. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in the State Council meeting in August, 2013 explicitly conveyed the message of the need to turn to society rather than the government as the major service provider for older people, while the state's responsibility is mainly for supporting those 'Three Nos' or those older people with functional disabilities, and there should be an increasing role of the market for those who can pay (Xinhua News, 2013a). Apparently, conflicting policy goals exist since the policies have been formulated on the basis of the declining capacity of the family function and growing needs in an ageing society. Yet, the policy has repeatedly stressed the family's responsibility in the care of older people. That is to say, ageing in place means that a majority of the older people have to rely either on their personal or family resources. The issue is about the right balance of responsibility among the family, older people's personal responsibility and the state.

### **State's responsibility in the care of older people**

Dean (2008) explained that welfare rights are always contestable with variations among different welfare regimes, ranging from regarding them as safety nets, as compensation for those who are affected by economic growth, to the view that they are granted as universal rights to all citizens. The welfare rights concept has to take into account that social rights of citizenship are shaped through the exercise of political and civil rights to back up its enforcement (Marshall, 1981; Dean, 2008). During the golden era of welfare state, there is a broad consensus on the collective responsibilities for human welfare which has been later questioned by the New Right, which saw the right of social citizenship as undermining the responsibility of citizens to get full employment and to fulfil their family responsibility to look



after its members, calling for more stringent criteria for access to social services (Dean, 2008; O'Connor and Robinson, 2008). Any imbalance of the rights and responsibilities tends to impose a cost on society since too many rights will lead to duty-deficit while right-deficit may result in the lack of basic protection (Wong and Wong, 2004).

In the Chinese context, with substantial economic growth in recent decades, the state has been looked upon by the people as having the capacity to take up a greater role to deal with the ageing issue when the demographic and socio-economic challenges have weakened the informal sectors to look after older people. The market reform in the late 1970s has led to the redistribution of costs and benefit among different groups in the society, leading to the unequal sharing of them. Titmuss (1974) saw state welfare as a means of compensation to individuals or families who are affected by economic growth and therefore, welfare policies are mechanisms to extend altruism beyond the family. In addition to this, Chen and Yang (2014) commented that the Chinese one-child policy has undermined the foundations of family ethics by coercively limiting the family size, and that more welfare support should be given to those older people who have only one child and need help in their old age.

The state held fast to the principle that welfare development should not be expanded without constraint and should be in accordance with its economic development (Li and Fang, 2014). Though China has become the second largest economy in 2012, the promise of the Chinese leader of 'letting everyone get rich together' as an ultimate goal of the market reform has yet to be realised. Older people have devoted their lifetime to accumulate the country's wealth and are unsure if their pensions are enough for their long-term care, and at the same time, they are aware that some successful entrepreneurs or the young millionaires are enjoying the fruits of the economic growth and leading a lavish life (Chen, J., 2009). It seems that the country is not facing the problem of 'growing old before it gets rich' across the board, but the problem of a certain sector of the population growing old without getting rich. In this regard, the state should do something to ensure a more equal sharing of the economic prosperity (Chen, J., 2009; Mu, 2009).

The perception of the state's responsibility to look after older people has been reflected in a study with the older people in residential homes in Beijing. The residents there considered

that the state should cover their residential home fees as a gesture to recognise their past contributions and their efforts to bring up their children to serve the country (Zhai and Qiu, 2007). The market reform has transformed the state-society relationship, with the market forces determining the distribution of resources according to one's ability and efforts and bringing to the changes in the division of welfare responsibility between the state and the individuals (Cook, 2011; Shi, 2012). Individuals have to take up more responsibility for their own welfare and the well-being of their family members as well.

In an attitude survey conducted in Shanghai in 1996 on the public's impression towards the economic reform and social welfare development, nearly 90% of the people considered that the living standard has improved a lot since the market reform (Wong and Lee, 2001). However, over 92% of the interviewees in the above survey still thought that the state should guarantee a basic income for everyone while over 68% disagreed that retirement was a personal issue that one had to plan ahead. These findings indicate that the improvement in living standard does not lead to the belief that they have to shoulder greater personal welfare responsibility. This may reflect that individuals in the new economy face increasing risks and challenges and worry that even with better income and higher living standard, they may not be able to cope with increased spendings.

As discussed in Chapter 1, since the market reform, younger people, though earning a higher income, have been facing increasing economic burden, like having to make contributions to social insurances associated with pensions, health care and housing, struggling with rising living costs due to the privatisation of the public services. Theoretically, the rapid economic growth under the market reform has led to the overall rising living standard (Whyte, 2010). The majority of older people have pensions and should be responsible for their own welfare, while the family should also have the responsibility to look after their aged relatives, instead of seeing the old-age support as the state responsibility. Should younger people pay for more to shoulder the collective responsibility to support the older generation? This is a question about intergenerational fairness.

On the other hand, older people are also facing uncertainty in future care despite seemingly having pensions as a stable source of income, when the function of the family and the

neighbourhood declines and there is an absence of adequate service support in the community. This will become a pressing issue since the ageing population continues to grow fast with more and more older people entering an advanced age and living in empty-nest households. Moreover, in the transitional economy where new values prevail, older people also have new preferences in lifestyles. Their perception of the rights and responsibilities towards various types of old-age support may change over time, which requires new policy directions to keep pace with their changing needs.

When the state economy has improved a great deal, should the state endorse collective intervention to enhance the livelihood of older people who have contributed to the country in the past, and to mitigate the socio-economic impacts on the care support for older people? On the other hand, given the improved financial conditions, how do the present-day older generation see their own and the state's responsibility for old-age support? Having a better understanding of these aspects can give insight into the search for a new balance of responsibility among the state, the family, the neighbourhood and the older people themselves in old-age support.

## **Summary**

The chapter outlines the reasons for choosing the family-neighbourhood-state as the research framework for this study. In the Chinese context, Confucian teachings place great importance on family responsibility for old-age care while the long practice of collective responsibility in the neighbourhood forms another key source of help for older people. The state, confining its responsibility for providing mostly for the deprived older people, has effectively reinforced the responsibilities of the informal sector for providing care to the majority of the older people. Though the state has adopted an inactive role in the welfare provision for older people, its significance lies in having the power to define the responsibilities of other sectors.

The various literature points out the changes in the role of the family, the neighbourhood and the state in old-age care under the impact of the socio-economic and demographic challenges. The new values emerge and simultaneously traditional cultural norms still exert

influence upon the lives of individuals in the transitional society. The review of literature uncovers the conflicts and dilemmas: older people's adherence to family values while also longing for autonomy in life arrangement; state's recognition of its responsibility in extending service support for older people while overtly emphasising the family's obligation, and the state's efforts to promote mutual help in the neighbourhood when the life focus of individuals is no longer in the neighbourhood. Such dilemmas require further investigation.

To understand how social expectations about old-age support have changed and how the Chinese society has responded to such changes, the interpretation of the rights and responsibilities underlying the individual and collective decisions associated with old-age care have to be understood. As such, this research sets out to investigate this topic by giving voice to the older people in two Chinese cities – Beijing and Guangzhou with views being supplemented by other relevant stakeholders such as government officials, academics, local Residents Committee Officers and NGO operators are included in this research for a wide range of views to give a more comprehensive picture of the issue.

## Chapter three: Research methodology

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### Introduction

This research explores the evolving roles of the family, the neighbourhood and the state through understanding the changing interpretations of the rights and responsibilities in the care of older people in urban China. Three research questions were set to examine this topic and a qualitative approach was used, based on semi-structured interviews. The questions were:

- 1) In what ways have the inter-connected roles of the family, the neighbourhood and the state in support of older people changed following the market reform?
- 2) How do the older people interviewed perceive the gap between their expectation and the reality of care provision?
- 3) How do the older people interviewed interpret the rights and responsibilities associated with receiving care from the family, the neighbourhood and the state? What are the implications for a good policy framework?

The fieldwork took place in two Chinese cities: Beijing and Guangzhou. As I will later explain in this chapter, the diversity of the socio-economic backgrounds of these two cities and complementary views from various stakeholders including older people, government officials, local Residents Committee officers, academics and NGO staff have provided a rich dataset which could shed light on the changing roles of different types of old-age support in urban China.

In this chapter, the research design section covers the rationale for choosing the qualitative approach and for the selection of research sites and interview samples. The section on the research process includes accessing the interview targets, conducting the semi-structured interviews and the data analysis. The section on ethical considerations identifies what steps were taken to protect the interests of the research subjects. The last section is an examination of the limits of this research.

## **Research design**

### **Choice of research approach**

Since this study concerns the understanding of the perceptions of different stakeholders on the changing role of the family, the neighbourhood and the state in the care of older people, the qualitative approach is employed for three reasons. Firstly, information on how the rights and responsibilities underlying the different types of old-age support are interpreted is relatively scant. The meanings of the rights and responsibilities are also open to interpretation by different persons and change over time. This is especially true in China where socio-economic changes under the market reform since the late 1970s have impacted the life of people tremendously in the last few decades. The societal views towards old-age care may also shift with time, which affects the interpretations of the rights and responsibilities. It was also noted by Hakim (1987) that a qualitative approach is appropriate for investigating a social phenomenon when the knowledge is little.

Secondly, this study is concerned about understanding the views or perceptions of the stakeholders towards different types of old-age support, which involves subjective interpretation and therefore a qualitative approach is suitable. As Hakim (1987) explained, a qualitative approach offers a rich account of individuals' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, meanings or interpretations regarding the researched phenomenon. Moreover, the inquiry under the qualitative approach is value-laden since it depends on how individuals assign meanings to their experiences and how they understand the social world and make sense of their lives (King and Horrocks, 2010; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Creswell, 2013). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the voice of the silent groups, like older people who used to be submissive to authoritarian rule, is not given adequate attention by the state. Even for those who are more vocal, there seems to be no channel to express their views in the community. Therefore, the use of a qualitative approach in this study can provide them with a chance to express their individual opinions on a topic relating to their welfare. The views of older people were complemented by the opinions of other stakeholders including academics, government officials, local Residents Committee officers, or the NGO staff who might hold different views or understanding towards this research topic. The interpretative nature of this

approach can therefore enhance the understanding of how different stakeholders give meanings to their experiences regarding the care of older people and how the lives of older people are connected to the family, the neighbourhood and the state.

Lastly, the qualitative approach is preferred to the quantitative approach in this study. Since different individuals may give different interpretations and meanings to similar facts and events (King and Horrocks, 2010), grouping all of them in statistical figures by using the quantitative approach would conceal the unique meaning underlying the individual answers because the experiences and perceptions of life events cannot be recorded (Neuman, 2011; Creswell, 2013). Moreover, since the quantitative approach uses the pre-formulated scales to study phenomena and trends, the meanings behind the answers cannot be explored or fully understood (Bryman, 2012). As shown in the literature review, a majority of existing studies on the care support of older people are based on quantitative methods and older people's views or experiences may not be adequately researched. This study aims at exploring the changing perceptions of the rights and responsibilities underlying the old-age support and the reasons behind them. The quantitative approach may not show the details of the respondents' personal experience, feeling and rationale for their response, thus making it not appropriate for this research.

I used the qualitative semi-structured interview for data collection in this research. As it is assumed that individuals have unique knowledge about the social world and can thus have their own perspectives towards how they relate their experiences to the phenomenon under study, the use of in-depth interviews provides an opportunity to facilitate the sharing of their experiences (Lewis, 2003; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Miller and Glassner (2011) pointed out that it can also provide insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of their experiences. This point is particularly pertinent to this study since culture has a role to shape the views of the interviewees on the role of the family, the neighbourhood and the state in old-age support. In order to explore thoroughly the factors underlying the responses such as reasons, beliefs, or views, the construct of the interview needs to be flexible and interactive in nature (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). Using a semi-structured interview mode allows flexibility by giving the interviewees an opportunity to talk about

something that are personally significant to them, which the researcher may not have thought of (Burgess, 1984; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). The interview guide can provide a framework for the researcher to carry out the inquiry and pursue specific extemporaneous topics raised by the interviewees instead of having a set of questions that are to be asked in a particular order (Bryman, 2012).

## **Choice of research site**

Research sites were selected for this study based on two considerations. Firstly, since this research focusses on how the demographic shift and the socio-economic changes in urban China have impacts on different types of support for older people, the sites should be highly urbanised so that the effect of urbanisation on the life of the people would be more conspicuous. Secondly, the city should have a high percentage of older population which has the need to cope with the ageing problem. This could offer wider perspectives for understanding how society responds to the ageing issue in the local context. In the following, the rationales for choosing the research sites to conduct this research are discussed in detail.

Shanghai was the first research site I considered though not finally chosen. It was the first city to experience ageing in China in 1979 when those aged 65 or over reached 7.2% of the total population (Shanghai Research Centre on Ageing, 2012). It is a highly urbanised city which ranks the first in urban population in China (Ren, 2013). To better understand this potential research site and to develop the research contacts, I paid an initial visit to Shanghai in November, 2013. My background as a Chinese person from Hong Kong which shares a different system from Mainland China especially in the freedom of speech and the press to criticise government policies brought challenges when I tried to establish the research contacts in China. An academic from Shanghai explained to me that it was rather difficult for an 'outsider' to conduct research in China without an affiliation to a local institution or organisation. I was told that since I came from Hong Kong and studied in an overseas university, the local government might suspect my motive of collecting first-hand data on the care of older people in China. They might perceive that I would focus on the plight of older people living in poverty and then publish such findings overseas, which would embarrass the Chinese government. The local officials would get into trouble if they endorsed my research.



This reflects that the background of a researcher can be a sensitive factor in a country where politics has permeated the everyday life of the people.

I later made several attempts by sending emails and letters to the agencies providing services to older people and the sub-district offices in Shanghai and also approached relevant academics or organisations in Hong Kong to help establish research contacts. However, after nearly three months of work exhausting all the means to pursue research contacts in Shanghai, I decided to consider other cities as my research sites and this would be discussed in later sections.

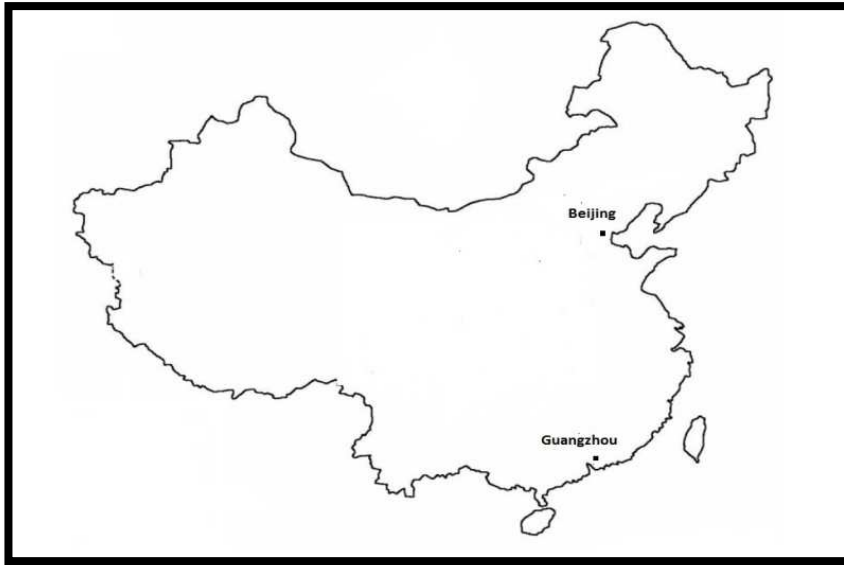
Although Shanghai did not work out as the planned research site, my pre-trip visit did provide some background context for my research. The meeting with the academics of relevant disciplines in Shanghai enhanced my understanding of the care of older people in the local context as well as the ways to initiate research contacts. As a preliminary understanding of the social life of the local older people, observation was carried out in five parks, some of which were near the residential blocks while some were tourist spots where I spent around two to three hours in each of them. In those tourist spots, most of the older people came as tourists with their family members such as the spouse, adult children or grandchildren and they seemed to be travelling from other parts of rural China. The scenario was quite different in those parks situated close to the residential areas. A majority of the older people, in their 70s or 80s, were neither active nor mobile. They were observed to be staying in the parks for hours in the cold without much conversation with other people. Despite this, it appeared that they still preferred to stay in the open areas since they were at least keeping company with other people around, which reduced their feelings of isolation at home. Such lonely images seemed to be a big contrast to the traditional portrayal of older people who occupied a central role in the multigenerational households where they were surrounded by a big family. This gave me a good starting point to think about this phenomenon and the factors giving rise to it, especially with regard to the family's role in their care and their social network. Such observations did provide valuable insights when I prepared the interview questions.

Apart from the observation in the parks, I tried to initiate casual conversation with some older people such as asking them about the transportation routes or their social life in general during my stay in Shanghai. The older people only gave simple response politely or short answers but were not willing to speak further. The outcome was the same after approaching different groups of older people. This gave me the impression that they might have reservations about talking with a stranger, and were not ready to share their opinions about their personal life in interviews. Such information provided me hints on figuring out the ways to overcome the barriers prior to the data collection process.

### ***Beijing and Guangzhou***

Having obtained an affiliated status as an overseas research student in Peking University has contributed to the smooth process in fieldwork of gaining access to different stakeholders in both Beijing and Guangzhou. These two cities were chosen as my research sites (Fig. 2). Both of them are highly urbanised cities, with Beijing having the second largest and Guangzhou the third largest urban population (Ren, 2013). With an ageing population, both cities are also suitable for examining how the socio-economic changes have an impact on different types of old-age support. The differences in the orientation of these two cities, with Beijing being a conservative political city and Guangzhou as a market-oriented one, added diversity to the data, which contributed to the understanding of the research topic from a wider perspective. The government ministries are situated in Beijing which gave me opportunities to interview officials in charge of the ageing policy. Moreover, the key universities with research expertise in gerontology and the Chinese welfare system are also in the capital city. To study the role of neighbourhood networks as a source of support for older people, Beijing, being a historical city, allows me to understand this aspect better. On the other hand, the rapid redevelopment projects to make room for its fast-growing economic activities could also throw light on how they affected neighbourhood support for older people. In Guangzhou with a capitalist economy, the impact of the socio-economic changes is more conspicuous, therefore, more perspectives of the older people can be drawn to see how they experience the changes in old-age care.

Figure 2. Map of China.



## Beijing

Beijing, the national capital of China, was selected as the research site since it is worthwhile to examine how the intertwining effect of the traditional culture of a historical city and the modern culture under the ongoing socio-economic changes had an impact on the lives of older people. The government ministries, party organisations and key state enterprises are located in the capital city (Li and Wu, 2010). Because of its strategic position, the city is subjected to close scrutiny by the state in terms of its political, economic and social life (Li, 2003). In this situation, the local government might adopt a conservative and less innovative orientation in policy-making, with a tendency to adhere to the policy decisions of the central government.

Concerning its administrative division, there are 14 districts, 147 sub-districts and over 2,900 micro-districts (Beijing Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs, 2014). Regarding its demography, Beijing became an ageing society in the 1990s when those aged 60 or over totalling 1.7 million, made up more than 12.5% of its total population (Zhai and Qiu, 2007). Furthermore, according to the Beijing Committee on Ageing (2011), those who were 60 or over reached 1.92 million, occupying 15.2% of its total population in 2004. It rose to 2.93 million which accounted for 22% of the total population in 2014 (Beijing Municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs, 2014). There is almost a 100% increase in the total number of older people aged 60 or over

in ten years' time. Since it has faced the ageing problem for about two decades and with a rapid increase of about 100% in the total number of older people in the recent decade, it is worthwhile to see what strategies the local government has adopted to meet the challenge of its ageing population.

## **Guangzhou**

The second research site was Guangzhou which is the provincial capital of Guangdong, located at the Pearl Delta in South China in proximity to Hong Kong. During the initial period of market reform in the early 1980s, Guangzhou was among the first batch of cities to open up to the outside world for economic activities such as foreign investment, real estate development and economic joint ventures (Mok and Huang, 2014). Since the market approach has dominated the life of the people in this fast-growing capitalist city, the impact of socio-economic changes on old-age support would be more pronounced (Li and Wu, 2010). Administratively, there are 11 districts, 136 sub-districts and over 1500 micro-districts in Guangzhou (People's Daily, 2014a; Guangzhou Statistical Bureau, 2015). According to the Guangzhou Statistical Bureau (2015), the population aged 60 or over was 870,000, accounting for 9% of the total population in 2006. In 2010, it rose to 1.24 million, representing 10% of the city's population. Though the extent of demographic ageing in Guangzhou is not as great as in Beijing, the trend shows that the total number of older people aged 60 or over has a rapid rise of 43% in 4 years' time. This puts a strain on the local government to provide for the needs of older people.

### **Collection of information on the profiles of Beijing and Guangzhou**

Background information about the administrative organisation of both Beijing and Guangzhou including districts, sub-districts and micro-districts and relevant policies relating to the local service provision for older people were obtained by accessing different sources of data such as research reports, official documents, statistics, magazines or newspapers. Some agency reports and relevant booklets about the welfare of older people have been collected during my visits to the NGOs, which is a good source of information for understanding the services provided in the community. Such information enhanced my

understanding of the cities and their districts/sub-districts where from which the interviewees came so that I could tune in to their lives more easily during the interviews.

Instead of observing the social life of the older people in the parks as I did in Shanghai, I took community walks in the neighbourhoods of both Beijing and Guangzhou, which provided me with a sense of the real life of older people. By walking into the areas where they lived, I was able to know better how they spent their daytime, how the one or two-storey houses looked like, how the physical design of the buildings facilitated the communication among residents and types of service facilities available for older people. During the community walk, attention was also paid to slogan banners, posters or notices which conveyed messages such as crime prevention, closed circuit television (CCTV) system in operation, paying attention to home security, or upholding traditional virtues such as filial piety and the spirit of mutual help in the neighbourhood. These provided me with information on the issues that the local government attached importance to and were a good source of background knowledge when I prepared the interviews. Part of this observation was used as my research data.

## **Sampling strategies**

This section explains the strategies for the selection of older people, being the key category of samples and the expert informants including government officials, local Residents Committee officers, academics and NGO staff.

### ***Older people***

Sample selection involves deciding which population is the most relevant to the research questions and able to provide the richest information (Creswell, 2013; Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). Older people formed the key category of the sample. They could provide information on how they view different types of support, their own perceived needs and their expectations regarding old-age support. Their views on the basis and pattern of old-age support of the past generation, such as on why and how younger people provided support to their parents, would enhance the understanding of how older people were supported in the past. Comparing the traditional and current forms of family care-giving from their perspectives could add information to the factors underlying the transition to the existing situation.

The older people in this study refer to those who were 60 or above, retired, having children but living in empty-nest households and without apparent cognitive impairment. Since it is rather difficult to identify the population that meets the criteria set out for the research targets and from which a random sample can be drawn, probability sampling is rarely used in qualitative study (Burgess, 1984; Gobo, 2004; Bryman, 2012). Instead, the non-probability purposive sampling for qualitative research is often employed such that the samples are chosen deliberately to fit with the research objective (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003; Creswell, 2013), and this strategy is adopted in this research. Having no connection with older people in the local context, I had to rely on the NGO staff and local Residents Committee officers to refer the older people to participate in my study. As described in Chapter 1, the older people in the empty-nest households, which are growing in number, faced social discrimination in the Chinese culture as well as difficulties in negotiating their daily routines. Therefore, the older people in empty-nest households were originally the targets of this research. However, I was told by the staff concerned that it was difficult for them to identify those who met all my selection criteria. Therefore, I extended the scope of my sample selection to include the non-empty-nest households.

With reference to Table 3, 12 older people out of the 18 interviewed, representing about 67% of them, were staying in empty-nest households. This percentage was approaching the figure of 70% reported in bigger cities, as mentioned in Chapter 1. The data from both empty-nest and non-empty-nest households could add perspectives to see whether the difference in living arrangements would affect their perception towards family support and their future home-care arrangement.

Table 3. Distribution of the interviewed older people belonging to the empty-nest households and non-empty-nest households in Beijing and Guangzhou.

Age range / Types of households	Beijing		Guangzhou	
	Empty-nest	Non-empty-nest	Empty-nest	Non-empty-nest
60 - 69	1	1	8	2
70 - 79	0	3	2	0
80 or over	1	0	0	0
Total	2	4	10	2

To increase the diversity of data, the older people belonging to different age ranges such as 60s, 70s and 80s were added to my sample. The older people, being brought up in different periods, would have different life experiences and could give diverse viewpoints about care-giving. Despite my intention, two-thirds of the older people were in the age range of 60-69, as indicated in Table 4. The relatively high concentration of this age group could be explained by their being active in the community so that they could be reached by the local Residents Committee officers or NGO staff who introduced them to me.

Table 4. Age range and sex composition of the older people interviewed in Beijing and Guangzhou.

Age range / Sex	Beijing		Guangzhou		Total number by age range
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
60 - 69	2	0	8	2	12
70 - 79	3	0	1	1	5
80 or over	1	0	0	0	1
Total	6	0	9	3	18

Gathering the views of those older people aged between 60 and 69 was significant in two aspects. Firstly, the views of this younger group of older people were likely to represent the

perspectives of the future generations of older people. Secondly, their expressed needs for care support and their expectations for service provision would arise in the next one or two decades and this could provide hints for policy directions.

Out of the 18 older people interviewed, three were male. I was told by Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre in Guangzhou, that the overall participation of males in centre activities was relatively low since most of the programme activities such as dancing or drawing seemed to be more attractive to females. He added that the older males usually preferred outdoor activities such as doing physical exercises, swimming or playing chess in the parks and therefore, they were less known to the organisations. During my research in both cities, the centres were always packed with older women and this gave me the impression that the males perceived that these venues were for females. This possibly made them less motivated to participate in the programmes there. This gender-biased sample might indicate the possibility that the views of the males might not be well-represented in this research.

In addition to the age range, older people from three types of neighbourhoods were targeted. The first type was the old neighbourhood with one or two-storey houses situated along the lanes or having a big courtyard where the residents could chat with one another easily whenever they opened their doors. The work unit-based neighbourhood with several-storey buildings was the second type where the workers belonging to the same work unit were arranged to stay in the same place. The third type was the high-rise residential buildings which were mostly newly developed after the market reform in the late 1970s. It would be relevant to explore from the perspectives of older people in these three types of neighbourhoods how the characteristics of each one affected the level of support for older people.

Moreover, in order to obtain a diversified sample of older people, I tried not to get all samples from one district or one neighbourhood in either city. In Beijing, six older people were drawn from four neighbourhoods belonging to three districts. In Guangzhou, the twelve older people were from different neighbourhoods under three districts which were named *laochengqu* (old districts with a relatively high percentage of older people). Apart from the locational diversity,



the eighteen older people came from different occupational backgrounds before retirement. They were the factory worker, administrative staff, transport worker, newspaper editor, insurance broker, secondary school teacher, university professor, information technology specialist or housewife. Since the focus of this research was not on the views of a homogenous group of older people such as belonging to a specific age cohort, profession or a particular neighbourhood, it aimed at collecting the views from a wide range of older people about their perceptions towards the changes in different types of care support. The diversified sample of this research could therefore generate rich data for a deeper understanding of the topic.

Furthermore, the life experiences of urban residents were different from the rural population in terms of socio-economic development, welfare entitlement and impact of the one-child policy. In order to minimise these factors in shaping the views of older people, only those older people who were brought up in the urban areas were included in the sample. All the six older people interviewed in Beijing were brought up there. Among the twelve older people interviewed in Guangzhou, 8 of them were native to the city while the remaining four were either from other cities and settled there 30 years ago or from other cities but came here to look after their grandchildren in recent years. This purposive sampling aimed at confining the research targets to those older people who have undergone their life experiences in urban areas. This is important since the aim is to explore how older people, in transition from the pre-reform era when the work unit-based system was implemented in the urban areas to the market economy era, perceived and responded to the changes.

### ***Expert informants***

Apart from older people, stakeholders such as government officials, local Resident Committee officers, academics and NGO staff were also included in the sample. Having views from government officials enabled me to understand the rationale of the state policy on service provision for older people in the community. Interviews with local Residents Committee officers in charge of the older people's welfare made available information on three aspects: the capacity of the family to take care of older people, the functions of the current neighbourhood as a source of support for older people and the service support for

them at the local level. Moreover, interviews with NGO staff facilitated my understanding of the role of these organisations in providing support to older people at the local level and the agencies' relationship with the government. The data from academics covering specific areas of knowledge such as demographic ageing, the Chinese welfare system or future direction for ageing policy were useful as additional information on this topic.

Through internet search, academics with expertise in gerontology or the Chinese welfare system, and NGOs providing services for older people in the community were identified. Government officials from the MCA or the CNCA relating to the ageing policy were included in this study. The local Residents Committee officers from three types of neighbourhood were targeted to explore the difference in the level of support for older people. Apart from using the non-probability purposive sampling, the strategy of snowballing was used for locating the expert informants. As noted by King and Horrocks (2010), the snowballing strategy is employed when the initial few interviewees are relied on to recommend other potential stakeholders who are relevant to contribute information and data to the topic under study. In this research, the snowballing strategy was adopted in recruiting the expert informants who were asked to make recommendations on the potential interviewees that were relevant to my research.

### ***Profile of interviewees***

As noted by Robson (2002), the sample size should be determined by saturation which occurs when additional cases give little or no further new information. In this study, interviews with older people continued until they generated no new insight for the research questions. For the other categories of interviewees such as NGO staff, academics, government officials or local Residents Committee officers, the interviews carried on until all sources of contact were exhausted.

In this research, 39 interviews were conducted with different categories of interviewees in Beijing and Guangzhou, as shown in Table 5. The profile of the 39 interviewees is presented in Table 6.

Table 5. Categories of interviewees in Beijing and Guangzhou.

Category of interviewees / City		Beijing	Guangzhou	Total number by category
Older people		6	12	18
Expert Informants	Government officials	1	0	1
	Local Residents Committee officers	4	1	5
	Academics	5	0	5
	NGO staff	7	3	10
Total number by city		23	16	39

Table 6. Profile of interviewees in Beijing and Guangzhou.

*Beijing*

Category : Older people (6)					
Surname	Sex/ Age	Occupation	Monthly Pension (Yuan)	Family members and living arrangement	District
Lu	F/84	Ex-University Professor	6,000	Living with spouse, with two children living apart, one is married	Chaoyang
Hu	F/74	Ex-state owned enterprise worker	2,000	A widow, living in a 3-generation household including son, daughter-in-law and grandchild	Chaoyang
Chen	F/70	Ex-primary school teacher	4,000	A widow, living in a 3-generation household including son, daughter-in-law and grandchild	Chaoyang
Du	F/61	Ex-worker	3,000	Living with spouse, having one married child living apart	Changping
Bai	F/60	Ex-worker	3,000	Living with spouse and one unmarried child; having another married child living apart	Changping

Zhou	F/77	Ex-factory worker	2,000	Living in a 3-generation household including spouse, son, daughter-in-law and grandchild	Dongcheng
Category : Official and local Residents Committee officers (5)					
Surname		Post		Organisation	
*Mr		Official		National advisory body on ageing policy	
Ms Zuo		Local officer		Residents Committee in Dongcheng District	
Mr Zheng		In-charge		Residents Committee in Dongcheng District	
Ms Li		Local officer		Residents Committee in Changping District	
Ms Wang		Local officer		Residents Committee in Xicheng District	
Category: Academics (5)					
Surname		University			
Professor Pei		Tsinghua University Gerontology Centre			
Professor Liu		Peking University Health Science Centre Department of Humanities			
*Professor		Peking University			
*Professor		Renmin University			
Professor Sun		China Youth University of Political Studies School of Social Work			
Category : NGOs (7)					
Surname		Position		Organisation	
Ms Yang		Director		Beijing Cuncaochunhui Elderly Mental Health Service	
*Ms Chen		Office-in-charge		A social work organisation in Shijingshan District	
Mr Bian		Director		Qilerong Mental Health Service Centre	
Mr Fang		Director		Shifangyuan Elderly Hospice and Mind Care Centre	
*Mr Zhan		Project-in-charge		An organisation providing one-to-one emotional support to older people	
*Mr Ma		Social worker		A social work organisation in Chaoyang District	
Mr Liu		Chairman		Wenchang Community Older People's Association	

Guangzhou

Category : Older people (12)					
Surname	Sex/ Age	Occupation	Monthly Pension (Yuan)	Family members and living arrangement	District
Wang	M/77	Ex-transport worker	3,000	Living with spouse, five married children (one of them deceased) living apart	Liwan
Guo	F/61	Ex-welding worker	3,000	Living with spouse, one married son living apart	Liwan
Guo	M/68	Ex- insurance broker	3,400	Living with spouse, one married daughter and emigrated to Canada	Haizhu
Feng	F/72	Ex-worker	Unwilling to disclose	Living with spouse, two married sons living apart	Haizhu
Liu	F/61	Ex-worker	3,100	Living with spouse, one married daughter living apart	Haizhu
Chen	F/60	Ex-worker	3,200	Living with spouse, one son living apart	Haizhu
Fan	M/64	Ex- newspaper editor	4,000	Living with spouse, one married child living apart	Yuexiu
Tang	F/62	Ex-worker	2,000	Living with spouse in Wuhan, moving to Guangzhou to help look after her grandchild for her daughter	Yuexiu
Fu	F/60	Ex-worker	2,100	A widow, one married daughter living in Zhejiang	Yuexiu
Liang	F/65	Ex- administrative staff	2,000	Living with spouse, one married son living apart	Yuexiu
Ouyang	F/60	Ex- information technology staff	4,000	Living with spouse in Hunan, came to Guangzhou a few years ago to look after her grandson for her daughter	Yuexiu
Ceng	F/60	Housewife	Nil	Living with spouse, two daughters living apart (one married and one studying in Germany)	Yuexiu

Category : NGOs (3)		
Surname	Post	Organisation
Mr Li	Deputy Director	Kaixin Social Work Services Centre
*Ms Wu	Deputy Director	A social work organisation in Liwan District
*Ms Zhang	Team-leader of Elderly Service	An Elderly Integrated Services Centre in Haizhu District
Category: local Residents Committee officer (1)		
Surname	Post	Organisation
Ms Hong	Local officer	Residents Committee in Yuexiu District

(Remarks: \* remain anonymous)

## Research process

The research was conducted in Beijing in May and June, 2014 and in Guangzhou in July and October, 2014. The duration of each interview was between 45 minutes and two hours. Interviews with academics, government official, NGO staff or local Residents Committee officers took place in their offices. Interviews with the older people were mainly conducted in the service centres of the NGOs, offices of the Residents Committees, coffee shops or their homes. If interviews took place in the public areas, I arranged a quiet corner to protect their privacy so that the older people were able to talk freely. The following section covers the access to different categories of interview targets, the conduct of semi-structured interviews and data analysis.

## Accessing the interviewees

I approached the potential interviewees by using my affiliated status as an overseas student which facilitated my access to both the older people and expert informants. I contacted the academics with expertise in gerontology or the Chinese welfare system as well as the NGOs providing services for older people in Beijing. Since both government officials and local Residents Committee officers would not receive any interviews from a person whose background they did not know, I sought assistance from other persons to help make the connection. After having interviews with the academics and the NGO staff, I was referred to

the relevant government official, local Residents Committee officers, other academics and NGO staff. Through the help of the NGO staff and my personal connection with a Beijing local resident, I finally gained access to the local Residents Committee officers in four neighbourhoods belonging to three types, namely, the old neighbourhood with one or two-storey houses, redeveloped neighbourhood with about seven-storey buildings and newly developed one with high-rise buildings in the city fringe.

A government official in charge of the ageing policy was contacted through an academic. When the interview with the official was about to start, he spoke out his reservation about receiving the interview since he had no knowledge of my background. He further said that unlike the other categories of interviewees who could express whatever opinions they liked, he, as a representative of the government, had to exercise caution in receiving the interviews from a person he did not know. He explained the proper channel of arranging an interview was through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, which usually took a few months' time. After much deliberation, he finally agreed to receive the interview on the condition that his identity had to remain hidden and the conversation could not be taped. The interview was focussed on the rationale of the service policy for older people. During the process, he was willing to share his viewpoint and discussed the drawback of the policy.

Regarding the older people, I did not have any means to gain access to them personally. They were also referred to me by the NGO staff and the local Residents Committee officers. Though I aimed at recruiting them from districts with the highest percentage of older people, this goal could not be realised in Beijing since the older people usually came from the districts where the NGOs or Residents Committees were situated. When the research was conducted in Guangzhou, fortunately, through the connection of an agency in Hong Kong with Guangzhou, I gained access to three NGOs situated in three districts known as *laochengqu* (old districts) with a higher proportion of older people among the 11 districts in Guangzhou (Guangzhou Statistical Bureau, 2015).

Since the local Resident Committee officers or the NGO staff from both Guangzhou and Beijing usually referred those older people whom they were familiar with, a sampling bias

might exist. This group of older people were more active or outgoing since they often used the community facilities and made themselves known to the organisations. It was noted by Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) that organisations may select those service users who are verbal, active or have more stories to tell. It meant that I could only collect the views from a particular section of the society. Bias was likely introduced in the samples since a certain section of the population was excluded if they did not have contact with the staff of these organisations. King, Keohane and Verba (1994) explained that since selection criteria are often made on a subjective basis, there are opportunities that bias exists in the sample selection process if there is no conscious attempt to forestall it. In order to avoid this pitfall, I went with the social workers, who had a full register of older people living in the neighbourhood, to reach out to those who were not active in the community in both Beijing and Guangzhou through home visits.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

Since the interview focus was different for different categories of interviewees, the interviewees were broadly grouped under two categories: 1) older people and 2) expert informants, namely, academics, NGO staff, government officials and local Residents Committee officers, and two sets of semi-structured interview guides were prepared for this study (Appendix 1).

The official language of China was Mandarin which was used in most of the interviews conducted in Beijing and Guangzhou. I also used Cantonese, my mother tongue, to conduct a few interviews in Guangzhou. There exist differences in vocabulary meaning between Mandarin and Cantonese such as the way to address older people or residential homes for older people. During the interviews, I paid attention to this so as to avoid miscommunication with the interviewees.

Before the interviews started, I acknowledged the anxiety the older people might have about the research purpose or the reasons for choosing them as the targets. One of the older people asked if I was collecting the data for the media in Hong Kong. As discussed earlier, politics has permeated the everyday life of the people, which made them sceptical about the



background and intention of those who were unknown to them. This was further reflected by their giving their surnames rather than the full names, possibly for fear that they might be identified by the government. Understandably, if the older people had doubts, they might not tell the truth or they might have reservations to give genuine answers since they were not sure how I would use their data. To address this concern, I tried to engage in casual conversation with them, telling them how I generated interest in this research topic. Moreover, talking something about the ageing problem in China appealed to their support for this research since it was easier to link this to their well-being. Therefore, having a time to chat with the interviewees before the interview was necessary to gain their trust and establish rapport with them. This helped them get relaxed and provided them a chance to understand the research purpose and ask back for the details of the study to allay their worries.

Consent was sought from the interviewees for audio-taping to make sure that a complete record of the interviews was made. This was also noted by Patton (2002) that the interviews should be recorded since they are the true representation of the perspectives of the interviewees. While analysing the data, I could review what the interviewees said instead of relying only on my written notes. When an interviewee refused to give consent to audio-taping, I then took notes as comprehensively as possible and organised the data immediately after the interview to make sure that the data were not lost with time. Some interviewees in this study had concerns over the handling of the taped conversation. There were a total of five interviewees who expressed unwillingness to have the conversation taped. Among them, one was the government official mentioned before while the other four were the older people who finally agreed to give consent upon my explanations of the rationale of audio-taping. I came across an older person who refused to give consent to audio-taping for fear of putting himself or his family in trouble if the information was leaked to the Chinese government even though explanation about how the data would be handled was given. Hence in this case, when the interview started, I tried to focus the conversation on his personal views about the care of older people in the rural societies. During the process, I was aware that concentration in note-taking might interfere with active listening and the interaction with the interviewee, as raised by Patton (2002), and tried to pay attention to the

conversation and also note the interviewee's tone of voice and body language. He did say a lot in a relaxed manner and shared his personal opinions without reservation. Seeing that, I asked him again 10 minutes later if he was willing to have the conversation taped. Since he was aware that my questions were more or less based on his personal experience or views towards the care of older people, which involved no sensitive issues or confidential information, he ultimately agreed to have the conversation taped. In the subsequent interviews, I tried to spend about 20–30 minutes to engage in casual chats to create a relaxing atmosphere and get familiar with the interviewees, such as about their use of leisure time, travel experience, or their daily routines before getting into the details of the research topic. This engagement method seemed to work well and I encountered no further problem in obtaining consent for audio-taping in the subsequent interviews.

During the interviews, I jotted down the key points which helped me organise my thoughts and raise questions to clarify the situation when necessary. The interviewees' special body language and their tone of voice which might reflect their emphasis on a certain conversation segment were noted down also. As a practice, the interview normally started with the collection of the factual demographic or socio-economic data such as age, family composition, former occupation or amount of pension. However, I felt that at the beginning of the interview, the older people were still reserved. I therefore decided that these personal data should be collected in the middle half or approaching the end of the interview, depending upon my assessment of the situation. In fact, most of the older people started to open themselves up about 15 minutes later and were ready to disclose their personal details, amount of the savings they had or their difficult relationship with family members. After rapport was established, the older people became very vocal about their viewpoints. Some of them repeatedly reminded me to note down their views on enhancing the support services for older people in their neighbourhood. One of the older people left after the interview and returned a while later, reminding me again to convey their message of the importance of improving the community services so that they could age in their own home. They gave me the impression that they were eager to have their voices heard when there were very few channels to talk about issues relating to their welfare.

After each interview, I reviewed the field notes and listened to the tapes immediately so as to check if there was any ambiguity requiring clarification. I would take note of them when there was doubt, which was important for future data analysis. Also, some adjustments were made to sharpen the focus of the subsequent interviews. Reflection was done continuously to check if the interview findings met with the research focus. As mentioned by Sarantakos (2005), basic data analysis during the data collection stage would guide research in the right direction and provide a better coverage of the research topic. Equally important, when reviewing the tapes, I was aware that improvement in interviewing skills was needed, such as by asking fewer questions and talking less with more active listening to what the interviewees liked to say further. There were a few episodes of my abruptly interrupting the conversation of the interviewees in order to ask the prepared questions.

### **Data analysis**

I transcribed all the interviews. In order to capture the essence of the language used in interviews, the data transcripts were written in Chinese. Nonverbal cues such as pauses or laughter were also noted. These cues helped me understand more of the underlying meaning of their conversation. One older person expressed her satisfaction with a laugh when her daughter did not support her idea of residential care while the other one laughed sarcastically when talking about the lavish spending habits of younger persons on themselves rather than on older people. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) viewed data transcribing as an interactive process which can allow researchers to immerse in the data through deep listening, analysis and interpretation at the same time. Upon finishing the first draft of the transcripts, I listened to the tapes for a second time to ensure its accuracy. Then, the transcripts were translated into English. After this, I read the transcripts several times to become familiar with the entire dataset and see how the data were connected to one another.

The thematic analysis approach was chosen to capture and interpret the meaning of the data through identifying the themes. I have developed codes such as family support, one-child policy, living arrangement, filial responsibility, autonomy or mutual support which were identified when I read through the transcripts. Then I tried to group the related ones under different categories which formed the conceptual framework. As suggested by Spencer *et al.*

(2014a), initial descriptive codes should be recorded in the transcripts and the more refined categories or themes should be applied to the thematic chart. Take for example, the codes including avoidance of conflict, financial independence, desire for autonomy and being capable of self-care were grouped under the category of 'older people's preference for independent living'. Among them, different themes and sub-themes would be developed. For example, one of the themes I developed was to compare the 'traditional family support' with the 'contemporary care arrangement'. While doing the data coding, I took notice of the subtle meanings the interviewees tried to convey and how they were related to the research questions. Analysis was made to see in what ways the data under different themes were related as well as what and how the interviewees said about a particular theme. The data was organised in a table to show how the categories, themes and subthemes were inter-related. Throughout the process, the meaning of the themes, the assumptions underpinning them, conditions giving rise to them and the reasons for the interviewees to perceive in a particular way were given thought to.

## **Ethical considerations**

The ethical concern in the research was that no harm would be done to the research subjects. Among the different categories of research subjects, 'older people' was the vulnerable group so that I needed to give thoughts to all the possible ethical concerns. To comply with my university's procedures, the Research Ethics Committee Application Form was submitted on 10.2.2014 and approval was received on 27.2.2014 to conduct this research (Appendix 2). The following paragraphs describe the ethical issues that I considered, which included obtaining informed consent, protecting interviewees from harm, adhering to the principles of anonymity and confidentiality and payment issue.

## **Informed consent**

Before the interview, I explained to the interviewees the purpose of the study, the time involved, the level of involvement required of them and the use of the collected data. As noted by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), information that is likely to affect the willingness of the interviewees to participate should not be deliberately withheld from them so that they can make the choice on whether or not to participate. They should not be given the impression

that they are required to participate (Bryman, 2012). These points are particularly relevant in this study when older people were referred by the NGO staff or the local Residents Committee officers in their neighbourhood. Such referral might lead them to think that they were obliged to participate in this research. Therefore, before the interview, I emphasised that their participation was voluntary and they could opt out of the study anytime during the process without any consequence. It was explained to them that if they decided to withdraw from the research, their data would not be used.

I obtained either written or recorded verbal consent from the interviewees prior to the interviews. The reason to allow verbal consent was, as Bryman (2012) pointed out, that asking the participants to sign the consent form is likely to reduce their willingness to get involved in the research. This is especially true in China when the government is authoritarian and the people may worry about the legal implications if they sign any kinds of documents. Prior to the interviews, I gave all interviewees a copy of the written consent form which specified their rights and included the contact details so that they could make enquiry if they wished in future. For those older people who were illiterate and had difficulty in comprehending the content of the document, I read the consent form to make sure that they understood it well before allowing them to participate.

### **Protection of participants from harm**

It is important to give thorough consideration to the possible ways that may cause harm to the participants so that specific steps can be taken to minimise the potential risks that may arise (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Ryen (2011) raised the point that although sharing of unpleasant experience may relieve the stress of the interviewees as they have someone to listen to their stories, it may also cause emotional stress. Lewis (2003) drew attention to the possibility that some participants may appear comfortable and calm and share their thoughts on the sensitive topics and later regret having been so open. In this study, the older people were required to talk about their existing living arrangements which might possibly arouse their unhappy feelings if living alone was not their choice. Some of them were open to talk about their unhappy parent-child relationship or how the family members did not respect their views. Since they were left alone to cope with the negative feelings being stirred up during

the interview, after each interview, I usually stayed for a while and chatted with them on other casual topics to see if they had any concern or needed any kind of emotional support.

## **Anonymity and confidentiality**

I explained to every interviewee how their anonymity and confidentiality were protected in this study. I emphasised to them that their personal information was kept separate from the transcripts and was stored either in a password protected computer or in a locked cabinet to which I was the only person having access. Since interpretation service or contracting out the task of data transcription was not required, there was no issue of confidentiality in this respect. All the data would be destroyed one year after the submission of my thesis.

Based on the assumption that the older people did not want their identity to be disclosed, they were explained that their personal data were kept anonymous and confidential in the thesis. For the other categories of interviewees, it was not certain if all of them wanted to be treated anonymously. There might be cases where the officers of the district in which the research was undertaken would like to be acknowledged in the research findings. Therefore, the other categories of interviewees were asked to specify their preference of anonymity. There were one official, two academics and four NGO staff who indicated their wish to be reported with different degrees of anonymity. Among these 8 interviewees, some indicated that both their personal name and agency name should not be used while some noted that either their personal name or agency name should not be reported in the thesis. These were recorded down. In addition, King and Horrocks (2010) noted that the sharing of the participants is always set within their own lives with unique experiences and therefore, quoting what they have said in the findings may lead to the disclosure of identity. The use of pictures, though adding information to the data, can lead to the identification of the neighbourhood where the interviewees stay (Ryen, 2004). As such, while presenting the data findings, I paid attention to check how readers were likely to interpret them and tried the best to protect the interviewees' identity.

## **Payment for participation**

Payment for participation of the interviewees is a controversial issue in the research. Those who receive payment may feel obliged to respond in a particular way and fail to exercise their choice in the process of participation (King and Horrocks, 2010). The interviewees would feel that they had to be cooperative by answering all questions even though they were not willing or had reservations about disclosing their views such as on their family relationships. With this ethical concern in mind, instead of paying for their participation, I prepared some small presents such as towels, toothpastes or toothbrushes for the older people as tokens of thanks for their time and efforts made for the interviews.

## **Reflections on the research method**

### **Validity**

The validity of the research findings very much depends on the accuracy of the collected data which in this study in turn relies on how truthful the interviewees' responses and answers were. In an authoritarian regime like China, people often worried about the consequences of expressing negative views towards the state. While interpreting the data findings, I paid attention to the possibility that the quality of the data was affected by the sensitivity of the topics. When I discussed the adequacy of the local service provisions for older people with the NGO staff, even though rapport was established with them, they might avoid being very critical of the policy since the survival of their agency depended on state funding. Also, because of their position, the officials or the local Residents Committee officers might be hesitant to express their personal views when discussing the policy.

To establish the validity of the findings, Robson (2002) suggested that the concept of triangulation can be used to check the quality of the qualitative data. Patton (2002) also noted that since each research method reveals different aspects of the empirical reality, employing multiple methods can add perspectives to the research. In this research, empirical findings were checked against other sources of information such as the various five-year development plans for supportive services for older people to see if there was any contradiction between the policy content and the data findings. The commitment of the state

to improve the services as written in policy documents could be checked to see if the policies were actually implemented, as reflected in the data provided by the interviewees. If this triangulation of the data sources did not bring consistent findings, it was an opportunity for me to think critically of the reasons behind the policy failure during implementation at the local level.

## **Reliability**

Since I was responsible for the whole research process, bias could easily seep in since it relied on my knowledge to frame the research. As noted by Bryman (2012), the values of the person taking charge of the research exert a great influence which permeates the whole process from the formulation of the research questions, choice of a research site, to the possibility of taking sides with the research targets and to the presentation of research findings. My belief system, to a certain extent, has been shaped by the Chinese culture as well as my life experiences in a Chinese society. For example, believing that older people's cultural preference to live with their children might limit my exploration of the reasons for the co-residence living arrangement since I might assume that there was no need to investigate further. During the data collection process, I made conscious efforts not to have any preconceptions or assumptions about old-age care in the Chinese context.

As suggested by Sarantakos (2005), to minimise the personal prejudice and bias of the researcher, the objectivity of the research can be enhanced by providing the readers with detailed information on research design, sampling strategy and data collection. To increase the reliability of this research, I tried to enhance the transparency of the whole process by documenting in great detail the choice of research sites, sampling strategy, access to the interviewees, data collection and data analysis. This could provide readers with thorough information to evaluate the credibility of this research. Moreover, I tried to obtain the audio-taping of all interviews. In order not to miss out any data, I made the full transcripts of all interviews and exercised great caution in transcribing the data and translating them from Chinese to English to ensure the accuracy. With all these steps in place, the external party could evaluate whether or not the research approach was adopted appropriately and the steps in the research process were implemented logically.



## **Generalisability**

The concern of generalisability of the findings is the extent that they can be generalised or transferred to other settings. Despite the fact that the choice of the samples was limited by the accessibility to certain locations, the formulation of the sampling strategies enabled me to elicit a range of views relevant to the research questions. The findings are unique since they are empirically grounded on older people's perspectives. Also, the interviews with different categories of stakeholders can provide a wide range of views from different dimensions on old-age support in urban China.

The findings in Beijing and Guangzhou are specific to these two geographical contexts and cannot be treated as representative of other cities since China is a huge country where wide regional variations exist in the level of economic development. Despite this, these research findings can produce explanations which can be generalised to illustrate how the demographic and socio-economic processes undermined the care support for older people and how the rights and responsibilities in old-age care were newly perceived in the transitional economy. As the development of these two cities is well ahead of a majority of cities or regions in China and the rate of urbanisation is growing, predicted to reach 70% in 2030, as noted in Chapter 1, the emerging trends or problems in the care of older people encountered there will also likely to be faced by other parts of China in the near future.

## **Summary**

This chapter gives an account of the whole research process. It includes the rationale for the choice of research approach, research sites and samples. The strategies employed to overcome the challenges encountered in establishing the research contacts, accessibility to interviewees and the data collection process were documented. Before the data collection phase, the ethical issues were given thorough consideration so as to protect the interest of the research subjects. Lastly, how to maintain validity and reliability of this research as well as the generalisability of the research findings were discussed too.

## Chapter four: The role of the family in the care of older people

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### Introduction

This chapter discusses the changing perception of older people towards family care. Family care in this study refers to the care provided to older people by their own children and not including other kin. My research from the older people's point of view, being supplemented by the stakeholders, shows that the current generation of older people have shifted from relying on the family for their well-being to the desire for independence and autonomy in the choice of their life arrangements, assuming a greater role for their own welfare. Yet, fieldwork findings suggest that their choices or desire for independence from the family will not be realised unless there is policy to support their independent living in the community.

The first section illustrates the circumstances which make the traditional family support function well from the perspectives of the interviewees. This provides the background for the discussion on the constraints of the current care-giving mode under the impact of socio-economic and demographic challenges in section two. The third section discusses the changing perception of the rights and responsibilities in contemporary family care. This section evaluates the effectiveness of the revised Welfare Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Older People mentioned in Chapter 2 which is supposed to enhance older people's legal rights to family care. Revealing the underlying intention of this revised law may show that the state still regards the family, despite its declining capacity, as the ultimate responsibility in the care of older people. The older people's adjusted expectation of filial responsibilities illustrates that they can expect very limited family support though they still value the family life with their children. On the other hand, they still consider themselves to have a role in enhancing the welfare of their children's family without expecting the reciprocity of care from them. How older people develop their resilience to cope with the changes in family care and their perception towards a good retirement will be discussed in the fourth section. In the fifth section, as an alternative to family support, the older people's consideration of other care options reveals the service gaps in their support if they do not wish to put the care responsibility on their children. This calls for a greater role of the state to

improve the service. The last section will discuss the policy implications based on the findings of this research.

## **Rights and responsibilities in traditional family care**

In the traditional Chinese society, older people were cared for by their children in the multi-generational households. Confucian teachings stress filial piety which requires the younger generation to have responsibility for the welfare of older people who have strong expectation to be cared for by their children (Laidlaw *et al.*, 2010). This is based on the reciprocal relationship that the children have to repay the sacrifices their parents have made for them when they were young (Tao, 2004). As such, older people have taken it for granted that their children would look after them in their old age. Above all, the family members living together in the traditional multi-generational households provides an environment to facilitate the care of older people. The following section explains how the rights and responsibilities in the care of older people by the family are constructed under the traditional Chinese norms in the eyes of the interviewees under study.

As noted by an older person, Ms Ouyang from Guangzhou, traditional culture had a role in promoting the care of older people in the past. She explained that under Confucian doctrines, children were socialised with values such as filial piety and respect for older people who expected care from their children when they themselves became old. This point was echoed by another older person, Ms Feng from Guangzhou, that under the influence of traditional culture, older people naturally looked upon the family for support in old age when by that time, they had a big family with many children as ample source of support. Therefore, taking care of older people was not a big problem in the past:

If older people had mobility or self-care difficulties, traditionally, they had many children to take care of them...Basically, older people relied on their children who accompanied them till the end of their lives.

Apart from the traditional culture which laid the foundations of family ethics and established the rights and responsibilities in the care of older people, the mutual reliance of both the older and younger generations also explained why the family members would stay together

or close to one another. Relying on younger people for farm labour was the reason for the family to live under the same roof, as recounted by Mr Fan from Guangzhou:

In an agrarian society, it was natural that they (the children) were (living) with older people...for pooling farm labour. Even if they didn't, they would have lived in the same village or beside their parents' house.

On the other hand, the life constraints such as the lack of financial capacity and the reliance on older people for child care in the past rendered younger people no choice but to live with their parents, thus perpetuating the co-residence living arrangement, as noted by Ms Guo from Guangzhou:

In the past, we lived with the older generation because we didn't have the necessary conditions to lead an independent living. (If living apart), no one was available for child care. How could we afford to hire a helper to take care of the children?...Now younger people have more choices. If they don't, they still have to live together (with the older people)...It's like that sometimes, under constraint.

Moreover, a majority of the interviewees raised the point that the big family size with several children allowed the sharing of care responsibilities. Ms Liu from Guangzhou was one of the older people who found this factor significant, as it made possible for the care of older people in a big family in the past:

We are different from the previous generation...They have six children, or at least four...Their children can share the responsibilities...take turns to look after their parents. They only need to be on duty once every five or six days.

Professor Sun, China Youth University of Political Studies, Beijing, also remarked that those older people who were now 80 or over, usually had four or more children. Therefore, it is common for those who are now in their 60s to look after their 80- or 90-year-old parents:

Just like my sister, who is in her 60s now, she has retired and is looking after our parents who are 84 and 85... A majority of the older people are still looked

after by their families at present. However, for my generation, we only have one child. Ageing is going to be a very serious problem; the people don't seem to have much hope in their future.

Though the traditional values laid the foundations for the rights and responsibilities in family care, the family size with several children provided a condition for making the reciprocal nature of care possible. The older people's recollection of family care reflects that they still cherish the old days when the family had the capacity to provide support to older people. As witnessed by Ms Chen from Guangzhou, the transition from a young society to an ageing one implied that the external support from the service organisations was necessary to meet the increasing needs of older people:

In the past, we didn't have so many organisations providing services for older people...The society is ageing. When we were small, the society was youthful, older people were just a minority. But now walking down the street, we can see older people in the majority.

Confucian teachings have provided a moral foundation for the practice of filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity. These family values were reinforced by practical reasons such as dependence of the older generation on the young for farm labour and reliance of younger people on older people for subsistence. The reciprocal nature of the rights and responsibilities in family care established by the traditional values can be maintained when a large family size can encourage the sharing of care responsibilities and when the older population size is not too big with care duties beyond the family capacity. The above findings, apart from showing how the older people interviewed interpret the conditions for the rights and responsibilities in traditional family care, also illustrate the transition from a society with a young population to an ageing one, from multi-generational families to small families mainly with a single child, and the shift from a traditional society with life constraints and limited alternatives to the contemporary one with increased choices. The challenges facing the current family care for older people that have surfaced are apparent, which renders the pre-conditions for the rights and responsibilities for the traditional family care become

increasingly incompatible with contemporary society. The next section is a discussion on the socio-economic and demographic impacts upon the current family care of older people.

## **The reality of current family care and constraints**

The traditional norms were able to survive in a self-sufficient agricultural economy with stable life patterns where the older people, being the head of households commanding economic resources, enjoyed superior status, as described by Fei (1992). As discussed in Chapter 1, when society develops with increasing work opportunities, younger people do not necessarily have to rely on the family for subsistence. The knowledge and skills possessed by the older generation may not be relevant to younger people since their present occupations are largely based on formal qualifications. Moreover, Chen (1996) explained that when the economic conditions of families improve, their consumption pattern changes accordingly with more entertainment or holiday plans. This is in contrast with the traditional concept of family care where adult children were always around to serve their parents. Most significantly, the one-child policy has considerably limited the family ability to support older people, which is a dominant understanding among this generation of older people. Below is a discussion on how the interviewees perceived the impact of the socio-economic changes and demographic challenges on the contemporary care of older people.

## **Impact of socio-economic changes**

A great majority of the older people in this study thought that the growing population mobility, the strife for a better standard of living and changes in lifestyle, the increasing work demand, the need to take care of their own family and the fading of the traditional family values have weakened the foundations of the rights and responsibilities in family care of older people. These are explained in the following discussion.

As described in Chapter 1, the expansion of educational opportunities, the disintegration of the work unit-based system and the emergence of the private business sector since the economic reform in the late 1970s, have increased the mobility of younger people to seek opportunities in other parts of the country or go overseas. This makes them physically unavailable to look after their parents. The increased population mobility especially among

younger people has rendered the provision of family care to older people under the co-residence living arrangement less feasible. The diversity of the modern living arrangements is a contrast to the traditional multigenerational households in which the family members live together and can take care of one another when needs arise. This was illustrated by the sharing from Ms Liang, Guangzhou, whose happy communal life of her younger days no longer existed when her siblings were now in different parts of the world:

When we (the siblings) were small, although we were poor, we were happy. All the siblings and our maternal grandma had meals and lived together...Now, life is no longer like this, because we are living apart in different places...one in Hong Kong...one in Australia.

Ms Zuo, local Residents Committee officer from Dongcheng District, Beijing, pointed out the difficulty in providing care for older people by the young who were not around with their parents:

Those who work overseas do want to come back to look after their parents when the latter are sick. But if they (come back) and stay here, they will lose their jobs when taking leave for too long.

Nevertheless, even if younger people live near their parents, the increasing life demands in the new economy also make it difficult for them to spare time to attend to their parents' needs. As discussed in Chapter 1, the market reform emphasises economic growth, thus placing priority on values of effectiveness, efficiency and productivity so that employees have to struggle hard to compete with others in the workplace. The life pressure in the market economy was described by Ms Zhou from Beijing. She recalled her life under the pre-reform era when it was a bit hard, but they had no worry about the price inflation. Now the price of almost everything was on the increase and life was not easy today. Ms Tang from Guangzhou also contrasted the life situations before and after the economic reform when younger people were facing great pressure from coping with life demands and the desire to possess consumption goods in the competitive economy:

At present, the pressure is getting greater and greater in the society. People have an insecure feeling about their livelihood. In the past, we didn't have this. We were poor in Mao's era. If we had a mouthful of rice, we would feel very happy. Now, the people are chasing after superior, modern things...always comparing their own situations with others.

Since the market reform, the basic goods are no longer provided free for the people who now have to earn by their own efforts in the competitive workplace. Understandably, this creates an insecure feeling among individuals when they have to worry about earning 'enough' money to cover the living expenses.

As noted by Ren (2013), freedom from political control over the private life of individuals, improved living standard, rising consumption culture and increasing entertainment pursuits during free time lead to changes in the lifestyles of urban residents since the economic reform. These new values affect how the younger generation negotiates their priorities in meeting different life demands such as family responsibility, career development or pursuit of social life. To a great majority of the older people in this study, the preoccupation of younger people with busy work and the need to look after their own family are the two important factors which make them unable to fulfil their care responsibility for the older people today. Ms Feng from Guangzhou considered that younger people had a new role to play in the country's economic development, making them less able to look after their parents. With the transition from the agricultural society to the market economy, Mr Fan from Guangzhou also opined that it was not practical to expect younger people to offer the traditional form of family support since the mode of life was different from that of the past:

The children have their pressures...they have to struggle with their work. If we require them to treat us as in the agrarian days, we are very selfish. It isn't suitable for present-day living.

Ms Liu from Guangzhou echoed this by pointing out that the work demand on younger people today was by no means comparable with the job demand of the past:



Their jobs nowadays are very demanding. It's not like ours in the past that after working for eight hours, we could be off duty...They have to strive hard to survive. If we want them to take care of us, they can, but have to quit their job. Of course, this is impossible.

This view was also supported by Ms Guo from Guangzhou that due to the less demanding workload in the past, she could still manage the competing roles of working full-time and taking care of the family at the same time:

I had gone through this hard time in the past...I had to cope with my job, to worry about my family. It was really demanding. I had to worry about the older relatives as well as my child at home. Now, it's even more difficult for the young workers to take leave, nowadays the work demand isn't the same as what we had in the past.

From the carer's perspective, Ms Li, local Residents Committee officer from Changping District in Beijing, expressed that the work commitment made her unable to fulfil her family obligations:

It's a practical issue. Like me, if I have retired and the relatives have care needs requiring me to help them, I'm able to do it. But if I'm still working, it's impossible.

The nationwide Employment Satisfaction Survey in 2014 indicated that Beijing ranked the top with 17% of its employees having to work 12-16 hours daily on average. Shanghai ranked the first with 17% of people having to spend more than two hours in their daily commute to work (Xinhua News, 2015a). To a certain extent, this confirms what the interviewees put forward that the work demand in the market economy has taken up much of the time of the younger generation.

Other than the heavy work pressure, another reason the older people in this research put up was that their children's responsibilities towards their own family took up much of their time. Mr Wang from Guangzhou remarked that it was not realistic to rely on his children for support:

The traditional saying *yangerfanglao* (raising children to provide security for one's old age) has not yet disappeared. But in reality, if we grow old and have to rely on the children, they do not have the capacity. What does that mean? They have their own children; they have to pay for their educational expenses. How can they help us?

Ms Du from Beijing, against her own wish to stay with her children, expressed understanding of the competing roles the latter were now facing, namely, to earn a living, look after their own family as well as having to spare time for them:

We can't ask them (children) not to earn money by staying at home to look after us. They have to look after their own children, have to go to work, leaving them no time...I wouldn't say in front of them that we don't want to live by ourselves, but we have to, just due to the constraints.

The older people in this research provided reasons such as busy work schedule and the need to look after their own families to justify their children's being unable to look after them although they might understand that the allocation of time by the younger generation in fulfilling different roles was always a matter of priority. In a sarcastic tone, Ms Hu from Beijing remarked that the present-day younger people were spending money extravagantly on themselves or their children but spending on older people where necessary was a different matter. To a certain extent, the above discussion reflects that the older people have come to terms with the reality that devoting time to develop one's career and sparing the resources to nurture their kids are the norms prevailing in the transitional economy. The popularity of parents investing resources in grooming their children is reflected by a parent in Shanghai who noted that she had to spend 20% of her monthly wage on her 12-year-old daughter to provide food and lessons in saxophone and ballet in addition to saving up for her college education (South China Morning Post, 2014).

Older people's changing expectations about family care is further influenced by the younger people's fading adherence to traditional virtues such as filial piety and respect for older people. Mr Guo from Guangzhou was of the opinion that the respect for traditional norms by younger people, though not disappearing completely, had weakened to a large extent:

Our generation definitely has more filial devotion to our parents than the current younger generation...If our parents had any request, we would try our best to satisfy their needs unless it was beyond our ability. We always put them in first place. Now, it's not the case. When we raise any request and ask them (the children) to offer help, they are just not that willing to do it for us.

In the study of the family life in a village of North-east China, Yan (2003) noted that as portrayed by the older villagers, the essence of filial piety is the unconditional obedience and respect for the parents by their children who should never talk back. The views of these rural older people were also held by some of the older people in this research. Ms Chen, aged 70, living in a multi-generational household in Beijing, expressed her frustration facing the rude attitude of her grandson towards her show of concern:

The younger generation doesn't understand the meaning of filial piety and that they have to be obedient. Nowadays, they don't obey...they always argue with older people...Just like my grandson, I love him very much and always show concern for him, reminding him to return home earlier and pay attention to safety. Then he turned impatient and asked me not to say again, not to say again, not to say again...he found me nagging.

Ms Tang from Guangzhou explained that the failure of younger people to observe the traditional norms reflected that the current generation of younger people was not ready to reciprocate their parents who devoted their efforts to bringing them up. To her, the intergenerational relationship could still be maintained in good terms when older people could make contribution in the family:

They (the children) have pressure in bringing up their own children. In their workplace, they have pressure. Under these circumstances, when they are back home, if (they feel that) we can still help them, they are happy. If we can't help but give them trouble, they will become displeased. At that time, argument will arise. From the old people's viewpoint, we have made our contribution. When their children (our grandchildren) were small, we helped

them. When we can no longer help them out, they mistreat us. This makes us feel unhappy and uncomfortable.

The above three interviewees noted that not showing respect towards older people and having no readiness to provide support or reciprocate their parents for bringing them up are the examples of the fading of the traditional family ethics. In some way, this makes older people become more aware that they cannot take the care from the family for granted as they did in the past in the sense that they can automatically receive support from their children at old age. The views of Ms Lu from Beijing on receiving family support further demonstrated the point above. She enjoyed leading an independent life with her spouse and noted that if her spouse passed away in future, she would wish to live with her children but she had reservations to take the initiative to suggest the co-residence arrangement:

I won't immediately express to them that I will move into their house. I think I won't say I will move into their house.

Such restraint may indicate her worry over the possibility that her children may reject her idea which will ultimately upset her or their parent-child relationship.

In summary, the above findings point out the factors associated with the socio-economic changes under the market economy including the competing role demands on the younger generation, the decline of the traditional family norms and the increasing population mobility interact with one another, serving to weaken the family support for older people. The older people in this research have internalised these factors and attributed their children's inability to provide them with care largely to their lack of space and time due to work commitment and the responsibility for their own family. In addition to the socio-economic factors affecting the care of older people, the one-child policy is viewed as another key factor that weakens the family's capacity to provide care to older people.

### **Impact of the one-child policy**

The practical difficulties facing the one-child generation in the care of older people and the societal response towards the recent changes in the one-child policy are discussed in this section. The interviewees stressed that the care responsibilities could be shared when there

was a big family size with several children, but having only one child made family support impractical.

Mr Guo from Guangzhou expressed that his daughter and son-in-law have emigrated to Canada. He added that even if her daughter were still in China, she, as a single child, could not provide him with much assistance since she had to handle different life demands:

How can they take care of me?...Our generation is destined to be alone...It's due to the government's one-child policy that we can't have more children. The traditional family support is absolutely impossible...After two single children got married, they have to take care of several older people...have to look after their own child, have to work. How can they spare the time for us?

The following interviewees voiced the practical difficulties that the one-child generation faced, highlighting the health concerns of their older family members:

They (my son and daughter-in-law) belong to the one-child generation... Sometimes, we are sick; at other times, my daughter-in-law's parents fall ill. So they have great pressure (Ms Liang, Guangzhou).

When you are sick, it's always necessary to go to the hospital for check-up which takes at least several hours. Money is not an issue though. The problem is that the single child can't spare the time to accompany you for this (Ms Zuo, local Residents Committee officer, Dongcheng District, Beijing).

When the one-child generation is in their 30s, it is very likely that their two parents and four grandparents are still alive and need some form of care which is known as the 4-2-1 phenomenon (BBC News, 2010). A news report exploring the attitude of the one-child generation towards the care of their parents depicted the experience of a Mr Jin, now 33, and his wife, both of whom are single children living apart from their parents. Mr Jin remarked that he and his wife pray for the good health of their four parents, and in case the parents are sick, they will have a hard time (Lan and Liu, 2015). This indicates that the first cohort of the one-

child generation is caught in the dilemma of fulfilling the care responsibility for their parents and other life commitments.

Although the government relaxed the one-child policy in 2013, which allowed couples to have a second child if one of the parents was a single child, Ms Chen from Guangzhou considered that having a second child was an extra burden to the young couple and was not a solution to the ageing problem:

Now the policy has changed which allows them to have a second child. It is even worse: that means they need to take care of an extra child. With two children and four older persons, how can they manage?

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the government took a further step to implement the two-child policy nationwide in October 2015 with an aim to balance the population development and mitigate the challenges of an ageing population. Yet, it is not as simple as the government believes, that by giving the couples the chance to have an additional child, it can solve the ageing problem (Hangzhou Daily Press, 2015). The media reports revealed that the general public were reserved about having a second child. Cai Yong, Assistant Professor of the University of North Carolina, the United States, opined that the readiness to compete, eagerness to achieve success and the desire to possess consumption goods such as a house or a car are the values held among the Chinese people, which affects their child-bearing decisions (South China Morning Post, 2014). A parent in a media interview noted that she was not willing to sacrifice another three years of her time to take care of the second child (Gao, 2015). Some young parents expressed worry about having to look after the second child and also the older relatives simultaneously (China Youth Daily, 2015). Although there were parents who put forward the reason for having a second child to reduce the lonely feeling of the single child, rarely did young couples indicate that they wanted a second child to 'provide security for one's old age' (Xinhua, 2015c). When Nie and Wyman (2005) conducted a research with the younger generation in Shanghai in the early 2000s, they found that the 3-person families became the norm under the urban culture. Instead of being at odds with the one-child policy, the younger people in the above research have already internalised the policy into their culture. The one-child policy has frequently been put up as the key reason

for the limited capacity of the family to take care of the older people. But when the current younger generation is given the choice of having a second child, they express their reservations. Apparently, their current life priority is to maintain a better standard of living instead of devoting their time and efforts to bringing up a second child and perceiving it as an additional security in their later life. The society as a whole no longer shares the value that one has to or can rely on the family in their old age.

Summing up, a contrast of the traditional family support with the contemporary care arrangements reveals the changes which account for the decline in the family's function in the care of older people. The demographic and socio-economic impacts of market reform serve to weaken the role of the family to take up such a duty. Currently, the younger generation has multiple responsibilities not only towards their parents, but also to contribute as expected to the economy and to struggle to earn a living in order to support their own families. Under the emerging new values in the transitional economy which emphasise competition, career success and life enjoyment, the older people have accepted the reality and 'endorsed' the priorities of their children to attach more importance or responsibility to their work and their own family. The conditions for the rights and responsibilities in traditional family care are apparently not in harmony with the contemporary social values, although this is not to say that the filial value has disappeared entirely. This makes the older people in this study aware that the family no longer functions as an adequate source of support as in the past. Before discussing the coping mechanisms of the older people and the policy implications, how their changing perceptions towards the rights and responsibilities in family care have to be understood first which is discussed in the next section.

## **Rights and responsibilities in contemporary family care**

This section includes a discussion on the societal response towards the enforcement of family responsibility under the new law requiring the children to make regular visits to one's parents, the changing interpretations of the rights and responsibilities underlying the contemporary concept of family care, including the older people's perceived family role and the adjusted expectations of filial responsibilities.

## Legal responsibility in family care

As discussed in Chapter 2, the state revised the Welfare Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Older People in July 2013, making the regular visits to check upon one's parents a legal obligation. The media used the slogan *changhuijiakankan*, meaning visiting your parents often to describe this new legal requirement. An official from the key advisory government body interviewed in this study explained that the intention of this revised law was to encourage and remind the children to show concern and take care of their parents. To him, a great majority of the younger people were still concerned about the welfare of their parents whenever possible but there was still a minority of the younger people who did not show respect for traditional family values. His view implied that taking care of older people is still the family norm and that the law is a means to 'remind' some younger people to show their care to their parents and to 'encourage' those filial children to continue their good behaviour. Undoubtedly, the majority of the younger people still show concern towards their parents but the central problem is whether it is realistic to expect the younger generation to assume the care responsibility the law aims at when they face multiple life challenges. Ironically, the older people in this research thought that it is not practical to rely on their children for support, as quoted earlier. The following discussion better illustrates the dilemma involved in the use of the legal means to strengthen family responsibility in the care of older people.

Some older people in this research considered that this legal requirement, to a certain extent, reflected the government's concern about the ageing problem though they did not think this law had much practical implication. Ms Ceng from Guangzhou, though appreciating the government's good intention of reminding younger people of the importance of family responsibility, stressed that the law had not much role to play in her life since she prepared not to rely on her children. To her, the children should be free from the care responsibility so that they could pursue their own career and aspirations.

Ms Chen lived in Guangzhou with her spouse. Her only son worked in Shenzhen where it was one hour by rail from home. She responded positively towards the introduction of this new legal requirement, saying:



At least, this reflects the government shows concern in this area...gradually showing more concern for older people.

Nevertheless, she continued that the law would not help much on the ground that bringing the issue to court would create trouble to his son who was, in fact, busily preoccupied with his work as well as bringing harm to their parent-child relationship. From the perspective of a parent, Ms Chen noted that the law did not have much meaning since it was impractical:

Like the case of my son, if he hasn't come back for three months, should I bring him to court? If I do so, it will give him trouble as he has to work. You may say I have no need to do so at present, I am still capable of self-care and I don't need him. But when I really need him, there is no use to bring him to court since he has to work, he is very busy indeed, just can't spare the time to take care of me...Who is willing to tense up the family relationship? Besides, I have only one son. If I bring him to court, what's it for?...How can you enforce it? For example, it needs to specify that if the children don't visit the parents for, say one year, they will be given a certain period of imprisonment. But how can the society take care of these things in such detail?

To these two older persons, the law does not seem to have much effect in enforcing family responsibility when their children are already facing such great pressure in the competitive economy that they should not be burdened by family duties. With the implementation of this new legal requirement, Ms Qu, the nurse-in-charge of the Hangzhou Welfare Residential Home for older people, noted in a media interview that the older people were in fact eager for their children's visits but they tried to cover up their desire of having a good time with them (Xinhua News, 2013b). She further observed that during their children's visits, the messages of the older people such as 'The weather is so hot, I'm doing fine, you don't need to visit me' and 'I am doing well, what's your purpose of visiting me? You are so busy, why not take more rest?' were inconsistent with their yearning for their children's visit inside their heart. Similar to the findings of this research, the older people also commiserate with their children about their difficulties and choose to give them more room for their life pursuits.

This new law also called for the enterprises to act in accordance with the state's Leave Regulations so that their employees can take leave to visit their parents (CNCA, 2013b). The State Council's Regulation on Employee's Leave entitlement for visiting relatives in 1981 gave unmarried employees 20 or 30 days of leave each year while for those children who are married, they are entitled to have 20 days of leave once every four years to visit their parents (People's Daily, 2015a). When this law was promulgated in the early 1980s, family size was still large with several children still living with or near their parents and there was little population mobility (People's Daily, 2015a). Such a law seems to be incompatible with the social changes that have taken place in the last few decades. Moreover, the Employees' Paid Leave Ordinance implemented in 2008 specifies the number of paid leaves that the employees are entitled to in accordance with the number of years they serve (Yu, 2011). However, Yu (2011) further commented that the state does not seem to have taken into consideration the difficulties of enterprises to grant leaves to employees in addition to the public holidays and leaves for visiting their relatives, leading to the poor adherence of enterprises to this law. In fact, many people have not claimed this leave entitlement because they dared not apply for it or their applications were rejected (Yan, A., 2013). Understandably, employees do not want to risk the possibility of losing the job if they insist on taking leave. Another survey result indicated that 40.1% of the employees were not entitled to paid leave and another 18.8% had the paid leave but could not take leave whenever they wished (Sina News, 2013). Thus, it is not surprising to learn that 90% of the 25 migrants employed in Hangzhou, an eastern coastal city, away from home remarked that they so far had no plan to increase their frequency of visiting their parents to comply with the new law requirement (Xinhua News, 2013b). Being busy, far away from home and the travelling expenses involved explained their hesitation in taking the journey back home (Xinhua News, 2013b). This shows that the mere enforcement of the legal requirement is unlikely to have effect without considering the practical difficulties that the working population face when they have to struggle between earning a living and fulfilling the care responsibility towards their parents.

Though many cast doubt upon the enforceability of this new legal requirement, Mr Zhang, a lawyer in Beijing, noted that it was hard to put the law into practice but not impossible

(Hatton, 2013). Mr Zhang argued that if a case was brought to court by an older person, the court could order an individual to visit their parents certain times within a certain period. Yet, the discussion above shows that the older people are unlikely to exercise their rights when they understand the life challenges of their children. Another key factor is that older people still have a strong family concept and they are keen on maintaining the family harmony and integrity, making them unlikely to claim their legal rights. Taking this kind of family issue to court would probably be widely reported by the mass media, exposing to the outside world that their children shirked their filial duties, thus bringing shame to the whole family, as perceived in Chinese culture. Baker (1979) noted that the law is responsible for the broad framework with custom filling in the detail. In other words, whether or not the law can have effect depends on whether the cultural norms of a place are taken into consideration.

This brings out another issue of the desirability to employ the legal means to enforce the care responsibility for older people. Several interviewees mentioned that the family obligations involved ethical and moral considerations, and it was not appropriate for the government to resort to legal means to strengthen family responsibility. A professor in Sociology from Peking University opined that:

The children's obligations to take care of their parents...is not a matter whether or not one wants to do it...It is not necessary for the government to tell us (as adult children) to do it...It is a moral and ethical issue, not a legal issue.

He further said that if the state desired to have the family responsible for the care of older people, a family policy should be in place to strengthen its function:

China has a long history of its traditional culture...Filial piety and family values are the examples. But the rapid social changes have led to transformation in the social structure. The government needs to do something to maintain and enrich the culture. For example, it needs to have a policy to offer support to the families. Now, we don't have much in this aspect.

Professor Pei from Tsinghua University in Beijing expressed that instead of using legal means to deal with family responsibility, the government should have measures to support younger people who could not be just perceived to have the ability to fulfil the filial duties:

Of course, the parents have the right to resort to legal means if their children fail in their filial duties...In that case, I have to ask what is the purpose of this law, to support the family or upset their relationship?...In fact, it (the government) can give financial incentives to the employers to encourage them to release their employees to visit their parents...Government has to do something at least, can't just pass the law without doing anything. The children nowadays have great work pressure...can't just take leave whenever they wish. If they have children, they have to take care of their own families as well. But now at the same time, the law requires them to visit their parents often.

Another professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing noted that the issue of care responsibility for older people was not so simple that legal means can be used to solve it since every family has its own limitations. Instead, she noted that it was a matter of family relationship and cohesion, and another policy should first be in place to enhance the parent-child relationship when the children are still small. To her, when the parent-child relationship was distant and aloof in society, the government could not expect the children to show care and concern for their parents in their old age. It would further strain their relationship if they were forced by the law to visit their parents.

Including the moral norm of filial responsibility as a legal requirement can be read as an intention of the state to convey to the children that looking after older people is the family responsibility. This revised new law also reflects the state's concern about the retreat of the family responsibility to take care of parents and that the state cannot take up full responsibility. Nevertheless, the findings show that the law in itself cannot have much effect without supporting policies to assist the family to shoulder the responsibility. The welfare of older people will be compromised if the government enforces obligations which are not consistent with the current family practice. The development of formal service would be

hampered if there is an unrealistic expectation on the caring capacity of the younger generation (Choi, 2000). This leads to the question about the balance of responsibilities between the state and the family in old-age care amid the ongoing social changes which will be further discussed in Chapter 6. The older people interviewed, instead of claiming their right to family care, found themselves to have a role to provide support to their children's family which is discussed in the next section.

### **Older people's role in the family**

This section seeks to understand the reasons underlying the intergenerational flow of support from the older generation to the younger. As noted in Chapter 1, older people make considerable input into their children's families such as grand-parenting, managing the household chores and contributing their financial resources. In this research, the older people perceived themselves to have responsibility to enhance the welfare of their children and worried that without their support, life would be difficult for their children in a competitive society. On the other hand, the older people did not expect reciprocity from the younger people to take care of them in future. These thoughts were reflected in the interviews with both Ms Hu and Ms Chen from Beijing who felt obligatory to offer help to their children in the multi-generational households but carrying no expectation to receive family care even though they lived with their children.

Ms Hu, aged 74 and a widow, was an ex-factory worker. She was now living in a three-generation household in Beijing with her son, daughter-in-law and grandson. She took care of the household chores and family meals. She also looked after the grandchild when he was small and contributed to the household finance. While describing her contributions to her family, her beaming smile showed her satisfaction:

To let the children have no worry about the family, we need to help them. It's from our inner heart...not looking forward to their repayment. When the children are out for work, we need to take good care of the family...Even though I enjoy a very good relationship with my daughter-in-law, I still prefer to receive residential care...if I can't move and rely on others' care; my family will worry when I'm alone at home.

Another older person, Ms Chen, aged 70, a widow and a retired teacher, was also living in a three-generation household in Beijing. She felt happy at living with her son's family. She expressed that being influenced by Mao Zedong's doctrines, she always put the interests of others before her own and made contributions without expecting repayment:

I contribute my money to maintain the household...My son previously gave me 400 yuan each month. But since he has suffered from poor health, though still working on a job...I don't accept any money from him...I would make contribution as far as I can...(In the future), the reason why I choose to go to a residential institution is that I don't want to give trouble to my children.

There were also older people who either came from their hometown like Ms Tang and Ms Ouyang or moved to other cities such as Ms Fu to offer assistance to their children's family. Though not expecting to rely on their children in the future, they feel that they have a responsibility to give them assistance when they have the need. Ms Fu, who just returned to Guangzhou from Zhejiang after spending a few months there to help look after her grandchild, emphasised her responsibility in providing assistance to her only daughter:

If I can still help her, I should try my best...because she has great work pressure...Because I'm still capable, I should help her family.

Similar views were also held by Ms Tang who came to Guangzhou from Wuhan, her hometown, to help look after her grandchild to relieve the pressure of her child's family:

We have already retired. The younger people are facing heavy pressure and need others to help them...Now, I bring my granddaughter to school. I prepare meals for them.

Ms Ouyang, who came with her husband from their hometown, Changsha to Guangzhou a few years ago, was now looking after her grandchild for her daughter. Although she preferred to stay in her hometown rather than Guangzhou, she still found it her responsibility to come over to assist her daughter:

We will return to our hometown once our child does not need help. When my grandchild finishes nursery, we can leave...We prefer to stay in our hometown.

Making sure that their children are able to lead a stable and happy life seems to be the goal of the older people. Since most of the older people live separately from their children, offering help to the latter can be considered as a means to keep a link with their family. They value their contributions in their children's family in the sense that they can establish their family role and identity. Having a desire for independence from the family but still holding a wish to have the family linkage reflects the optimum family dynamics in the older people's mind, which has policy implications regarding the family's responsibility in old-age care.

### **Adjusted expectation of filial responsibilities**

As a recapitulation from Chapter 2, under the traditional family care, the fulfilment of filial responsibilities means that younger people have to reside with their parents, show them love and respect, make sure that they are happy and mostly importantly, make themselves always available to serve their parents. Yet, the older people in this research have adjusted their expectation of filial responsibilities from the regular daily support to no more than the children's willingness to provide assistance and having access to their support when needed, keeping phone contacts with them regularly and having family gatherings during festive occasions. Although this shows that the care the older people expect from the family is very limited, it does not mean that the family has no role in the life of the older people. How the latter perceive the current family role is reflected from the findings below.

Ms Lu, aged 84 from Beijing, experienced the practical difficulty in seeking medical treatment and even getting by her spouse, aged 83, to accompany her. She expressed that her children were a source of support in case of emergency. She still enjoyed independent living as long as she and her husband could obtain help from their children whenever needed:

When I seek medical attention...my husband has to queue up at different counters (in the hospital)...so we have to tell our children to help...This is the reality. His mobility is not good...has to limp to different counters to pay the fees for me. When the children arrive, they would take care of this...To us,

maintaining a separate household from our children but having access to their help when needed seems to be an ideal arrangement.

Maintaining regular contacts with the children seems to be the wish of the older people who still value family togetherness. Ms Hu from Beijing hoped that her children would pay her weekly visits if she had to receive residential care in future. Another reason for older people to have regular contacts with their children is the need to obtain assistance from the children in case of necessity. Both Mr Fan and Ms Du considered that maintaining regular contacts and receiving help from their children if needed were the desirable intergenerational relations these days:

It is not necessary for them to return daily to have meals with us to make us feel they have fulfilled their filial duties. When they call us occasionally to show their concern or they attend to our needs if we require them, for example, to finish some procedures for us, these are also filial responsibilities...Giving us a call or sending a text message to express concern to each other is good enough (Mr Fan, Guangzhou).

We have our own lives and they have their own. We can be together during festive occasions. They will call us daily or once every few days. If they know we need them, they will take a day off and attend to us (Ms Du, Beijing).

The above findings also reflect that when the society becomes more affluent, the types of support provided by the families to older people would change from focussing on the practical daily care to emotional or organisational type of support (Izuhara, 2010). While being aware of the limited support from their children who have their own difficulties, they still require a helping hand in case of need if no alternative assistance is available. Even so, they are careful not to demand too much on their children.

As a summary, the new legal requirement, though giving older people the right to claim family care, can be seen as a means of the state to reinforce family responsibility in the care of older people. Perceiving this new law as having not much practical meaning in their life, the older people in this research prefer to free their children from the family responsibility,



which can be reflected in their adjusted expectation of filial responsibility. Maintaining the intergenerational relationship is valued by the older people in this research. Apparently, the older people in transition from the socialist era to the market economy era are adapting to the changes under the prevailing values such as privacy, life enjoyment, competitive culture or self-responsibility which affect their perception towards family care. Instead of reacting passively to the declining family role, the older people in this study turn to be more independent and self-reliant in handling their life routines and actively seek alternative resources to meet their needs, as will be discussed in the next section.

## **Views on a good retirement**

This section portrays how the older people interviewed give a new meaning to a good retirement. Ms Ceng from Guangzhou noted that being independent as well as maintaining good health were the goals that older people should aim at today so that they would not make their children worry about them. This view was also echoed by Ms Wang, local Residents Committee officer from Xicheng District in Beijing:

This generation of older people...they are more open-minded, aren't they? Not willing to create trouble for their children. That's what they are saying now: they don't want to burden their children...to keep good health...so that they won't give them (their children) trouble.

Instead of portraying the traditional image of counting solely on the family, the interview findings indicated the older people no longer perceived the family as the key source of happiness. Ms Ouyang from Guangzhou opined that older people nowadays should adjust their way of thinking towards family care:

Life isn't the same as in the past...we should be more open...with the development of the society, we have to adjust our way of thinking. We should not always focus on how unfilial our children are, haven't paid us visits...we should grumble less and spend more time in social activities.

Under the influence of new values in the transitional economy and facing the reduced family role, the older people in this study took a more active approach to seek community

resources to fill the gaps left by the family in order to bring about a fulfilling retirement. To them, the elements of a good retirement were financial independence from the family, maintaining an active social life and autonomy in life choices. This is made possible by the improved financial conditions of older people which offer them more life choices.

### **Financial independence from the family**

The state pension, as noted by the interviewees, did offer income security for a majority of the older people, which loosened the economic ties within their families and could give them a wider choice of lifestyles such as leading an independent living which was not possible otherwise. The following findings reflect that without the need to rely on the children financially, having the ability to contribute to the family finance and enjoying considerable autonomy of making choices in the living arrangements were valued greatly by the older people. Some of their views are as follows:

If I don't have the means of living, certainly I have to rely on the younger people. But now we have pension. I have no need to rely on them (Ms Chen, Guangzhou).

I have around 3,000 yuan (every month), it's enough for subsistence, I can enjoy my life, get money without the need to do anything...I'm so satisfied with my life (Ms Liu, Guangzhou).

I feel that older people are particularly fortunate with no worry about food and clothing today (Ms Hu, Beijing).

Nowadays, they (older people) have pension and can maintain their own living without relying on their children. They have no need to ask the children for money (Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou).

For those older people like Ms Chen from Beijing who stayed in a multi-generational household, they even contributed to the family finance, as mentioned in the previous section. Having financial resources also gave the older people choices to lead their preferred living arrangements without the need to compromise their autonomy in the co-residence

arrangement, as opined by Mr Zheng, Residents Committee in-charge in Dongcheng District in Beijing.

The research of Gabriel and Bowling (2004) drawn on data from those older people aged 65 or over in Britain showed that about three-quarters of the interviewees linked their finance to their ability to enjoy life, to do the things they like and to participate in society. In the Chinese context, when asked about the financial status of older people, the first response of the different categories of interviewees was the emphasis on their financial independence from the family. The independent financial status gives them a choice in making life decisions without necessarily relying on the family for support.

### **Autonomy in private life**

Older people can afford more choices in life decisions made possible by their financial independence. Changes in the living arrangements of the older people can be seen in the increasing number of empty-nest households. The interview with an official from a key advisory government body on ageing policy in this study indicated that around 60-70% of older people led an independent life of their own choice. He added that if they had financial resources and were capable of self-care, they preferred to live independently. He believed that a large proportion of those who had to stay with the family was not due to traditional values but because of having no choice. The older people interviewed treasured the time with their children but they also valued an independent life without the need to accommodate their children's family life routines and a life in which they can avoid intergenerational conflicts to preserve family harmony. They did not consider co-residence to be necessarily an optimum living option when they could afford a lifestyle they felt comfortable with.

To have freedom in their life routines was cited as a reason for the older people interviewed to continue living independently. Even though the living environment of their neighbourhood may not be perfect, such as where some residents still had to share the communal facilities, the older people still preferred to continue staying there, as expressed by Ms Wang, local Residents Committee officer, Xicheng District, Beijing, who was responsible for the welfare of the older people in her neighbourhood:

Older people are easily satisfied. They just feel that they can have freedom by staying at their home and don't prefer to stay with the younger generation... although their (children's) houses are much better than their own home in our neighbourhood.

Mr Zheng, Residents Committee in-charge, Dongcheng District, Beijing, also mentioned that older people's desire for independent living was their eagerness to maintain their own lifestyles without the need to follow their children's life routines. This might explain why Ms Du from Beijing commented that the traditional multi-generational living arrangement was no longer suitable for the contemporary lifestyle. She described it to be 'chaotic' if three generations with different living habits had to live under the same roof.

When both the younger and the older generations attached more importance to privacy, sharing household living with the children was not the desire of most of the older people under this research. Some interviewees preferred to keep contact with their children by living near to each other so that they could have mutual support when necessary, similar to the concept of 'network family' as noted by Chen and Silverstein (2000). This was pointed out by the older people like Ms Ceng and Ms Ouyang from Guangzhou saying that both generations needed personal space to accommodate different lifestyles:

Nowadays, older people won't like to live with their children. I think the young people have their own lifestyles, they have their own ways of thinking, and they need their personal space. Like us, we also need personal space and we have our hobbies...We can do a lot of things together but just want to live apart (Ms Ceng).

If living together...there are a lot of inconveniences...Therefore, if we can live in the same neighbourhood but not together in the same household...that will be good enough...not living far away from each other. We can help each other out in case any problem arises (Ms Ouyang).

The avoidance of intergenerational conflict was cited by several older people as the chief reason for living apart from their children. Some of their views are as follows:

Living together with the children can give a feeling of family togetherness. Yet, there is generation gap. We have differences in conversation topics, diet, work and rest patterns. With advanced telecommunication, we can call them if anything arises and they will come over to us. Why then is there a need to live together when this can make both parties unhappy?...It will be good if a distance can be maintained between the two generations (Mr Fan, Guangzhou).

If we can live together with younger people, it will be more lively and cheerful... But many older people nowadays don't prefer this...If we live separately, there won't be so many conflicts...Take for example, even on how to take care of their child, they have their views, and we have our own. If we live apart, I don't care how they do it...If we live together, I will intervene if I find anything wrong. But they may consider my way of handling their child not good enough...Most of the people I know prefer to live apart (from their children) if they have the means to do so (Ms Guo, Guangzhou).

To avoid trouble in family relationship was also the main reason for Ms Lu from Beijing, to live separately from her children. She recalled that when she shared a housing unit with her colleagues in her younger days, she witnessed how the family relationship turned sour when three generations lived together.

The findings reveal that living separately from their children while preferably being near to each other is the ideal living arrangement, as expressed by the older people since it can facilitate mutual support, avoid running into family conflicts and allow for autonomy in life routines for both generations. Such changing preferences in living arrangement is attributed to the growing importance in the values of privacy and autonomy that both generations attach to.

### **Active social life**

This section depicts the means the older people in this research employed to expand their social circle when the family was less able to meet their social and emotional needs. The

findings show that the older people relied less on the traditional sources of support such as the family or neighbours and increasingly started to seek support from other channels such as their former classmates, workmates, friends with common interests or those who got acquainted in the community centres:

Our generation knows how to arrange for our social life. My circle comes from my former colleagues...but seldom from my neighbours (Ms Chen, Guangzhou).

My peers seldom come from my neighbours. My network is formed on common interests such as those who are ping-pong lovers, or those who enjoy karaoke (Ms Liu, Guangzhou).

My close friends are those whom I knew in the schooldays. Till now, we still have regular contacts, we chat often...My former work unit continues to organise recreational programmes for us. I am active in this aspect (Ms Lu, Beijing).

This shows that the older people take the initiative to expand their social circle by maintaining contacts with different groups. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, with increasing community venues providing social programmes, older people have more opportunities to expand their social network, develop their interests and enjoy social life with their peers. They can establish a new identity by belonging to different groups or networks in the community and establish a purpose in life. As observed by Ms Zhang, Team Leader of the Home Care Support Section of an Elderly Integrated Services Centre in Haizhu District, Guangzhou, the retirees knew how to organise their life routines and from where they could look for resources in the community. Also, some of the older people expressed that they derived much happiness and satisfaction from having an active social life in the community:

I join the dancing class three times per week in this centre. We talk to each other, open up ourselves and broaden our vision; my social circle expands...It's better than staying at home alone (Ms Ouyang, Guangzhou).

We, older people, are very active and outgoing and participate in different activities, say, dancing, singing, tai-chi (exercise) in our neighbourhood... Whenever older people go to the park; activities such as dancing are always there for them to join in (Ms Hu, Beijing).

Quite a number of interviewees shared how travel contributed much to their life satisfaction. Ms Chen from Guangzhou expressed great pleasure when she gave an account of her experience of travelling to other parts of China and the ways how she saved up the 'travel money' bit by bit from her monthly pension of about 3,200 yuan.

The above findings indicate that the life of the older people no longer centres on the family which provided them with almost the sole source of satisfaction in the past. At present, their life satisfaction and happiness come from different sources. The value underlying this social relationship they enjoy can be said to be the means to reduce loneliness at home, by having companionship and fun while enjoying the social activities as well as finding a possible source of practical support after building up the friendship network. This is how they build up their resilience to meet their social and emotional needs formerly provided for by the family. In some way, this shows their understanding of the need to have the initiative in organising their lives when family care cannot be looked upon as a source of life satisfaction. Despite the fact that the impact of declining family support on older people's well-being has been mitigated to a certain extent by their growing independence from the family, they still need external support when their self-care abilities deteriorate.

### **Perceived service gaps in meeting care needs**

The home-care needs of older people is a continuum that moves from a state when older people are independent to handle the life routines to requiring external support and ultimately residential care if their self-care abilities continue to worsen. It is common for older people to require home-care support if they experience deterioration in self-care abilities. Ms Zhou from Beijing pointed out that the older people would encounter practical home-care difficulties when their health could not permit them to perform the household duties:

When you age, you cannot do things such as household cleaning, and other chores...don't have the strength to do these things, when health has worsened.

Regarding the home-care issue encountered by older people, a professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing was of the view that older people, instead of relying on their children for care, are usually looked after by their spouse so that they help each other in the daily routines. Nevertheless, Ms Chen from Guangzhou foresaw the difficulty in looking after her spouse if the latter happened to rely on her for care in future:

When I reach a certain age, even though I want to take care of him (her spouse), I don't have the ability to do so. If my own health is on the decline, and I still have to look after a person who is sick...it's not an easy task.

Living in an empty-nest household, Ms Feng, aged 72 from Guangzhou, expressed that she needed external assistance in looking after her husband, aged 76, who had a stroke. She planned to hire a care worker to help them. Mutual support is possible when the aged couple enjoy good health. However, with advanced age and declining health, it may not be realistic to expect these two older persons to provide care for each other without some form of external assistance.

Lack of emotional support is another concern when older people become homebound, hindering them from maintaining an active social life. They were likely to experience isolation since they could no longer maintain much connection in the neighbourhood. Ms Liang from Guangzhou spelled out the lonely feelings of the older people if they became homebound:

Older persons who don't live with their children face the four blank walls every day and are very lonely and upset. They really want to have someone who can talk to. They can't just watch TV all day long.

This was echoed by Ms Ouyang from Guangzhou that when the older people became homebound, they needed concern from the society:



When we can't leave the house, we feel particularly lonely. Apart from watching television, there aren't many channels from which we can get information from the outside world. The children are not around. It's the spiritual aspect...I hope to have communication with the outside world. I hope there are people who can often visit us...show us concern.

Leading an independent life and having to cope with home-care or emotional needs is always a matter of compromise for older people. A few older people in this research expressed that it would not help much to think about the future care since there were circumstances such as their health status that were beyond their planning. Such reaction may be due to their ambivalent feeling towards their future care. In the past, when family care was taken for granted, older people had not much need to consider how they would be taken care of in their old age. At present, they are left to think about the home-care issues by themselves. Despite this, a majority of the older people in this research gave thoughts to the future care options to give themselves better psychological preparation for the home-care crisis that they will face one day. Their future care options such as hiring a care worker, utilising the community support services or receiving residential care can possibly offer them some solutions.

Hiring a full-time or part-time care worker was an option that the older people in this study considered if they needed home-care assistance. Ms Liu from Guangzhou noted that she preferred to stay at her own home so that she could enjoy the autonomy in her life routines:

We can hire a care worker so that we can stay at home. At least I can still have a home feel...I can eat the food I prefer...decide on the ways of cooking the food. I can have autonomy.

Though a care worker is considered to be a helping hand to relieve the older people of their home-care difficulties, both Ms Chen from Guangzhou and Ms Zuo, local Residents Committee officer, Dongcheng District, Beijing, remarked that it was expensive to hire a live-in care worker, which would cost around 3,000 yuan per month, more or less equivalent to the entire pension of the older people. Ms Chen, Officer-in-charge of a social work organisation in Shijingshan in Beijing, revealed that hiring a care worker was rather

expensive as its supply could not meet the demand. She noted that not too many care workers were willing to take care of older people since the job nature was tough, requiring special skills to handle the needs of older people. Echoing this point, some older people also expressed worries about the possible risks if the care workers were not good to them or did not have the skills to cater to their needs:

If older people are of weak health while the care worker is not good to them, without understanding their needs, they become vulnerable (Ms Chen, Beijing).

I might consider employing a care worker to take care of me, but it's difficult to get a good one...If I'm sick and lie on the bed, I can't monitor the performance of the care worker (Ms Lu, Beijing).

Zhan, Feng and Luo (2008) also raised this concern that as a majority of the older people are not living with their children, hired care is rather an unrealistic option when the family cannot supervise or provide guidance on how to take care of older people at home. Mr Fan from Guangzhou also had a plan to hire a care worker when he needed assistance, and yet expressed concern about the cost and service quality of care workers and called for state regulation of the care service industry. Showing concern about the service quality and desiring the state to play a bigger role in regulating the market mean that the older people are eager to see the service improvement so that it can become a practical home-care option for them.

Other than having a care worker at home, community support services such as day-care centre, meal service or home-based medical support were alternatives that older people could make use of so as to meet their choice of staying at home, as expressed by a majority of the interviewees. Some of the viewpoints are as follows:

It will be convenient if there is a day-care centre in the community where older people can have meals and join the social activities there in the daytime (Ms Hu, Beijing).

It would be good if there's a canteen...We are already old without much energy to do shopping and prepare the meals...If the canteen is managed by

the local government such as the Street Office or the Residents Committee...there would be better monitoring...Even though they are profit-making, they won't be charging excessively (Mr Guo, Guangzhou).

Of course, we prefer to stay at home if there are services provided in the community such as meals, social activities or medical care. Everybody prefers to stay at home (Ms Bai, Beijing).

Ms Liu from Guangzhou also highlighted the importance of having regular home-based medical care so as to support their living in the community:

If there is a visit from the medical personnel once every week or when I'm sick, it's home-based, then we can stay at home when we are old...It's common for older people to have different kinds of illnesses.

Home-based medical support is particularly important for those who have mobility problem. Mr Ma, social worker of a social work organisation of Chaoyang District in Beijing, said that it would save older people a lot of trouble if they could receive medical support for minor health issues at home:

Older people may have minor health problems which require medical attention, for example, hypertension...It will take great effort to go to hospital...It will be good if there is routine health check for them (at home), such as injection, monitoring the types of drugs they have taken.

Ms Ouyang from Guangzhou said that she could purchase the domestic household services from the market, but home-based medical care was not the kind of service that was available for her to buy. This underlines the need for the government to extend such service provision for older people to age in their own homes.

All this seems to be an outline of older people's wish list for community services. In their words, they would appreciate the provision of these services but had no idea if they already existed in their community currently. The provision of the support services in the community

will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 6 to see how far the existing provision has met the expectations of older people.

Being familiar with the environment and the home being a place representing their memories were the reasons for their preference to remain at home, as observed by Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou. Larsson, Silverstein and Thorslund (2005) noted that older people may assign a special meaning to their 'home' where they have raised a family and developed ties to the community over years of residence. However, when they lost the self-care abilities, receiving residential care was also a last resort as most of the interviewees in this research considered. In their words, residential care could give them psychological comfort by allowing them access to care and acquaintance with other older people while their main consideration was to free their children from care responsibility:

Living with children is just adding a burden to them...Going to the residential home is not to trouble them...If I need them to take leave from their work to help me out, how can they do it so often? (Ms Chen, Guangzhou).

We have to go to the residential home...because we are the one-child generation. Even though you have two children, it is still not possible to take care of us at home...One reason is that they don't have time; another is, they don't have the energy to look after us (Ms Bai, Beijing).

The last option is to go to a residential home if I lose my mobility. The home is well-equipped with medical facilities, with medical personnel...So by staying there, my child has no worry about me...and I don't have to worry about having no one to take care of me (Mr Fan, Guangzhou).

If we stay at residential homes, we can have our own social life...It's good to be with other older people (Ms Hu, Beijing).

The above interviewees seemed to welcome the residential care option, but there were some who were not in favour of it and viewed it only as a last resort. Mr Guo from Guangzhou recounted that he was aware of the unpleasant aspects of residential life since

he paid a monthly visit to her elder sister who stayed at a private residential home in Hong Kong. He repeatedly stressed that this option could only be regarded as the last resort:

I have visited many residential homes in my district...Those (homes) that can provide good care to older people are very rare...The private operators aren't willing to pay good salary to hire care workers...They don't have training or skills...When I can't move, then I have no say.

Some of the older people in this study held a positive view towards residential care although among them, they might also, like Mr Guo, be aware of the management problems of the residential care. However, it seems that when there is no other viable option, this choice can provide them with a sense of security that at least there is a place where they can receive care. This explains why Mr Wang from Guangzhou expressed his unwillingness to receive residential care but was prepared to accept this option when there was no other choice. Ms Li, local Residents Committee officer from Changping District in Beijing noted that in the past, older people were not willing to stay at residential homes but they had to accept the reality in the absence of family support.

Despite the fact that residential care is seen as a care option for older people, the findings also revealed that whether it can be an option depends on whether older people could afford the cost of it. Ms Chen from Beijing, a former teacher receiving a monthly pension of 4,000 yuan, also sounded out the dilemma that she was not sure if her pension was enough to pay for the home fee which was on the increase. Still she indicated her wish to take it so as not to burden her children. The issue of affordability for the residential home fee was raised by quite a number of interviewees in this research:

(The private home) is expensive and our pension is not enough to pay. It requires about 5,000 yuan; some charge 4,000 while the cheapest takes around 3,000. As retirees like us, we get about 3,100 on average. It's certain that I need to queue up for the state-owned ones (Ms Liu, Guangzhou).

For those state-owned homes with good facilities and relatively low monthly fee, older people have to wait for a very long time and they may probably pass

away before a place is available. They don't want to go to those private homes with poor facilities, but they just can't afford those at the top end charging very high fees (Mr Bian, Director of Qilerong, Beijing).

Regarding the affordability of residential care, Ms Hu from Beijing, receiving a monthly pension of about 2,000 yuan, expressed her wish that the government could build some residential homes for those older people whose pensions were low. Ms Wang, local Residents Committee officer, Xicheng District, Beijing, considered that when it was beyond the capacity of the one-child generation to take care of their parents who then have to receive residential care, it became a social problem which the government has the responsibility to solve. Though the state estimates only about 3-4% of older people are in need of residential care, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the above discussion brings out the issues of its service quality and the affordability of older people. This calls for a greater role of the state to sponsor those who cannot afford residential care or regulate the service industry.

The older people in this study, being unwilling to rely on the family for support, consider other care options such as residential care, hiring a care worker or utilising the community support services. These options are seen as the way out when older people encounter home-care problem. Yet, the interview findings indicate that service regulation, increased provision or form of financial sponsorship is necessary if all these care options can turn out to be a realistic choice of care support for older people. To a certain extent, improving the community support services can enable them to age in their own homes without ending up in residential care prematurely, which is also not the preferred choice of the older people in this study.

In sum, a majority of the older people in this research indicate that the family is unlikely to offer much support to them and they also do not want to add responsibility to their children given the limitations the latter are facing currently. Rather than relying on the family as a key source of support, the older people developed their capacity to tackle the changes in family care, which was made possible by their improved financial conditions. The improvement of the living standard enables older people to make choices according to their needs and

preferences (Yan, 2009). To the older people, a good retirement means to be financially independent from their children, have autonomy in life choices and maintain an active social life. The life fulfilment of the older people, as indicated in this research, comes less from the family which is traditionally a key source of support and happiness for them. Their needs are increasingly met by other sectors and this calls for increased service provisions in the community and regulation of the market by the state.

## **Policy implications**

The older people's viewpoints are central in this research since they reveal their changing perceptions of the rights and responsibilities in family care and their expectations of the desirable family relations, leading them to come up with strategies to cope with the issue.

This research adds to the knowledge on how the Chinese older people's care expectations have changed when their perception of the rights and responsibilities in family care has shifted. They have assigned a new meaning to a 'good life' in the transitional economy, showing their life satisfaction no longer comes solely from the family but from multiple sources and the ways they treasure the autonomy and independence in life arrangement. Though various literature (Zhang and Yu, 1998; Mao and Chi, 2011; Lou and Ng, 2012; Sereny, 2011) shows that older people in the Chinese society consider the family to be significant in their life, this research indicates that the perception of the importance of family responsibility has been mitigated by the growing independence of older people. Nevertheless, given the long history of family culture, the family is still looked upon as a source of support especially in the emotional aspects among most of the older people in this research. This has also been discussed in the literature (Pei and Pillai, 1999; Izuhara, 2010; Shi, 2013). The findings point to two policy options: enhancing older people's autonomy and strengthening the family capacity in the care of older people.

The impact of the demographic challenge and socio-economic changes since the market reform has weakened the family's capacity to provide care to older people. Seeing the practical difficulties in negotiating competing roles by the present-day younger generation, the older people in this research have come to terms with the reality that the family is no longer a key source of support in their old age. Since the economic reform, the new values in

the transitional economy such as the competition, personal success, emphasis on privacy and autonomy and leisure enjoyment have affected the social perception of family care for older people. When the society cherishes success in one's career and devotion of resources to nurturing the only child, as indicated in this research, the older people become aware that their own welfare was inevitably accorded a lower priority by the younger people.

The ongoing social changes have also led to the re-interpretation of the rights and responsibilities in family care. Despite having the moral and legal right to family support, the older people interviewed realised that it was not practical to do so as they did not wish to add responsibility to their children. Perceiving the gap between the expectations and the available family care in real life, rather than reacting to the changes passively, the older people, who are also under the influence of the new values, have adopted a positive approach to construct their lives by actively seeking alternative resources in the community. The improved financial condition gives them more choices in living arrangement, though they are aware that the options will be constrained by their deteriorating health in future. They have adopted a more realistic attitude to redefine the family care relations, as reflected by their adjusted expectation of filial responsibilities. The idea of keeping a distance by respecting mutual privacy, maintaining a family linkage and having access to support characterises the optimum intergenerational family relations perceived by the older people in contemporary China. To them, being financially independent, having autonomy in their living arrangements as well as maintaining an active social life are the elements of a 'good' retirement. Their view of the 'good life' can be regarded as an outcome of their response to the changing social circumstances in the transitional economy.

Such calls for a policy which should direct at enhancing the independence and preserving the autonomy of older people to meet their new expectations when most of them are now more affluent and look for a better quality of life. The findings also reveal the service gaps in the alternative home-care options that older people have to increasingly depend on when they no longer derive much practical support from the family, and that service improvement is necessary. The service provisions in the community will be further discussed in Chapter 6. When the service for older people is well in place, it can release the care-givers to participate



in the labour market in the long-run which is seen as a way to solve the problem of shrinkage of labour force in an ageing society.

To a majority of the older people in this study, though the family can no longer be relied upon in old age, it remains as a source of support, especially in the emotional aspects, as shown by how they would cherish their time with their children and how they would seek help from them in times of need. As discussed in this chapter, enforcing the legal responsibility for family care is unlikely to have much effect without a family policy to support the younger people to fulfil the duty. To be effective, the formulation of a family policy should take into account Chinese family ethics with attention to the practical limitations experienced by younger people today. The state can give allowance to the enterprises to sponsor the family leaves given to employees to assist them to fulfil the care responsibilities, such as attending to the medical needs of their parents. Priority can be given to those employees belonging to the one-child generation or being the only child living in the same city with their parents. The employment measures such as jobs with flexible work hours or part-time work can make it easier for family members to look after their aged relatives. These flexible arrangements can also encourage the labour participation of the care-givers when they cannot commit themselves to full-time employment. Incentives such as housing allowances can also be given when two generations prefer to live together or near to each other so as to facilitate mutual support. Should the family's potential be utilised in a positive way, it is conducive to promoting intergenerational support and in the long term, reduce the reliance of older people solely on state support.

This research can provide a better focus on how the state policy can be tuned to meet the new expectations of family care in the transitional society. Even though the family policies are in place, it should not mean that the family can take up the whole responsibility in the care of older people. The formulation of the family policies should also take into consideration of the emergence of the new social aspirations for leisure enjoyment, privacy in life or a competitive work culture since such elements can affect the young's desire to assume responsibility for the care of their parents. On the other hand, if the policy direction leans too much towards strengthening the family's responsibility, it will go against the

changing perception of the rights and responsibilities in family care among the older people who are looking for autonomy to choose their preferred lifestyle.

## Chapter five: The role of the neighbourhood in the care of older people

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### Introduction

This chapter examines the role of neighbourhood support in the care of older people and shows how the socio-economic changes brought by the market reform in the late 1970s affect the changing perception of the rights and responsibilities in neighbourhood support. The findings show that instead of relying on the benevolence and goodwill of individuals to sustain the informal network in the neighbourhood, a greater involvement of the state is called for in the coordination of the community resources.

The first section describes the value of neighbours as a source of support for older people in the neighbourhood and explores how the older people interviewed actually perceive the changing neighbourly relationship in relation to their everyday life. Through examining the transition of the neighbourly relationships from the socialist era to the market economy era, the factors affecting the sustainability of this relationship emerge.

The second section depicts the state's efforts to revive the spirit of mutual help by mobilising the volunteers as an informal source of support to cater for the rising home-care demands of older people. An examination of the delivery mode of voluntary service illustrates that relying on the goodwill of the individuals based on traditional virtues can hardly meet the regular needs of older people when the concept of the rights and responsibilities in the neighbourhood has changed. This section ends with an observation that greater state responsibility is needed if the voluntary service is meant to be an effective means of support for older people in the neighbourhood.

The third section examines the role of the Residents Committee which all along is involved in organising residents to help each other, especially the vulnerable older people since the pre-reform era. Despite the expected greater welfare responsibility in meeting the welfare needs of residents in their neighbourhood since the market reform, the findings show the Residents Committee's support is extremely limited even to the vulnerable categories of older people. Understanding the difficulties experienced by the Residents Committee helps identify

barriers to effective care provision at the local level. Lastly, the policy implications will be discussed.

## **Neighbourly support for older people**

This section shows the value of neighbours as a source of assistance for older people before discussing the impact of the transition from the socialist era to the market economy era on neighbourly relationship. As noted in Chapter 2, neighbourly help is important to older people especially those in empty-nest households. Its significance was also emphasised by the interviewees who thought that it could assist older people in their daily routines. Ms Wu, Deputy Director of a social work organisation in Liwan District, Guangzhou, pointed out the familiarity among neighbours served as a good source of support for older people:

The neighbours can help cook the meals and do the shopping (for older people)...In the neighbourhood where my former workplace was situated...which is much older, with single-storey houses...the older people told me that they would boil soup for their neighbours...They have stayed there together for a few decades...and they have known each other well.

Neighbourly support is especially important to those older people in the empty-nest households in case of emergency when their children are unable to come to their immediate assistance. Mr Ma, social worker of a social work organisation in Chaoyang District, Beijing, opined that apart from providing practical assistance to older people, neighbours could also keep a watch on them and help liaise with the community organisations or their family members in case of need. In other words, neighbours can provide short-term help to older people in urgency before their family or formal services are available. Both Ms Fu and Ms Ouyang echoed the importance of having a good neighbourly relationship when their children could not provide them with immediate assistance in case of need:

When my family is living far away from me...if I have any urgent business, they can't come to my assistance. If I have good relationship with my neighbours, they can offer me help immediately. So, this is what the old

Chinese saying *yuanqinburujinlin* (implying the next-door neighbours are more reliable than relatives living far away) means to me (Ms Fu, Guangzhou).

My children are living far away. It's no use to call them as they can't come to help me. If I'm sick or facing urgent problems, it's certain that the help will come from the neighbours...The proverb *yuanqinburujinlin* still applies (Ms Ouyang, Guangzhou).

Ms Hong, local Residents Committee officer in Yuexiu District, Guangzhou, pointed out that having known each other for a long time was the factor sustaining the neighbourly support. To her, new neighbours were less close and helpful. The long residence is also conducive to the development of a sense of belonging and attachment to the neighbourhood where older people can derive support from their already established network. A professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing said that when she did her research with the older people staying in the old neighbourhoods with shared communal toilet facilities, she had the impression that the older people valued the network established there where concern and assistance were readily available:

It's rather inconvenient...but they don't want to leave their neighbourhood. They put up the reason that they are familiar with their neighbours...The local Residents Committee officer always shows concern to them...sometimes helps with their shopping from the market.

Liu and Chai (2013) in her research on the residential mobility of the older people in Beijing found out that the strong sense of neighbourhood attachment led to their reluctance to move away from their residence in the old neighbourhoods. Having others' care and concern were particularly important to those older people in empty-nest households as observed by Ms Wang, local Residents Committee officer in Xicheng District, Beijing. As discussed in Chapter 4, a majority of the older people are basically financially independent and enjoy independent living in the neighbourhood. However, when their mobility deteriorates due to health and age, they have to spend most of the time in the neighbourhood or simply at home.

As pointed out by Victor (2005), though the amount of support that older people can obtain from their neighbours is important, the existence of neighbourly relationship can offer them a sense of psychological security since they know that help is available in case of need. In fact, the quotes above highlight the yearning for this sense of security the neighbours or networks can provide especially when the older people or other interviewees talked about the unavailability of their family members in times of need or their unwillingness to leave the old neighbourhood.

In short, a long stay in the neighbourhood is conducive to the continuity of social relationship with neighbours whom they have known for a long time enough to become a source of emotional and social support in need. The question is how this neighbourly support can be sustained in the transitional society when the socio-economic changes have great impact upon it. An examination in the coming section of how the neighbourly relationship has evolved over time from the pre-reform era to the market reform era will enhance our understanding of the factors affecting such relationships, such as whether its role in supporting older people remains today, and the policy insights that can be drawn from it.

## **Neighbourly relationships in transition from the socialist era to the market reform era**

This part includes a brief discussion on the neighbourly relationship in the socialist era to provide a background for an understanding of the factors underlying its changes since the market reform in the late 1970s.

### ***Neighbourly relationships in the socialist era***

As mentioned in Chapter 2, traditionally, the spirit of mutual help was seen as an informal means to pool the resources to help each other out in response to the lack of welfare support. This spirit existed when the residents were familiar with each other due to long period of residence. The work unit-based system during the socialist era in which the residents were arranged to work and reside in the same neighbourhood with low job and residential mobility provided a favourable environment to foster a sense of attachment and collective identity in these neighbourhoods. The interview findings also revealed that the work unit-based system

promoted mutual help when people were familiar with one another as they lived in the same place for a long time and shared most of their daily routines together. A professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing noted that the familiarity among the workers from the same work unit living in the same neighbourhood was conducive to fostering mutual help. Ms Li, the local Residents Committee officer in Changping District, Beijing, remarked that this familiarity also generated a sense of security among residents in the neighbourhood who felt they 'need not shut their doors at night'. The high degree of trust encouraged interaction and enhanced the development of a closer relationship among residents who would spontaneously help each other out in case of need.

The older people in this study recounted their personal experiences in their younger days, showing how they related to each other like family members and shared their daily routines together in the work unit-based neighbourhood:

We were living in a one-storey house. When we opened the door, we could go anywhere we liked, we could have meals in others' homes (Ms Fu, Guangzhou).

We didn't lock the doors. I recall that when I was a child, I went directly into my friends' houses if I couldn't locate them by calling their names from outside (Mr Fan, Guangzhou).

The freedom to move around or have meals in others' homes demonstrates the close relationship among residents, which was made possible with a high level of daily interaction resulting in familiarity and trust among them. Dai (2008) described her personal experience of growing up in such a neighbourhood where all her neighbours were her parents' colleagues. She recalled that the residents used to identify each other not only as workmates and neighbours, but also as family friends. They had interactions with one another at the grocery stores, on the work-unit bus, at school, at the work place, in different meetings and during meal time. In this situation, the work unit-based system encouraged neighbourhood stability and fostered the development of social ties and a sense of solidarity.

Unlike the neighbourhood networks in cities of the West, the chief factor for the close neighbourhood ties and spirit of mutual support that existed during the pre-reform era was due to the deliberate attempt of the Chinese government to control the neighbourhood activities (Jankowiak, 2008). Whyte and Parish (1984) stressed that the government exercised control over the neighbourhood life through the Residents Committee and the work unit-based system, thus giving the social life a level of stability and solidarity higher than in Western cities. This explains why the concept of collective responsibility has taken a strong hold during the pre-reform era, providing a nurturing ground for a good neighbourly relationship and creating the mutual expectation of helping each other out in case of need.

### ***Changing neighbourly relationships since the economic reform***

In the following sections, the changing nature of neighbourly relationship, the contributing factors and the implication of these on old-age support are covered. As discussed in Chapter 2, the disintegration of the work unit-based system, the increased employment opportunities in the private sector and the privatisation of housing with the housing market boom are the factors leading to increased population mobility. The redevelopment of old neighbourhoods has upset the social ties of the residents. The impact is greater for older people who are less mobile and who rely much on these established networks for support. Above all, the neighbourly relationship has changed from a neighbourhood with residents from a rather homogenous background and enjoying a close relationship with one another under the work unit-based system to the current diversified one occupied by residents from different backgrounds. Since then, life in the neighbourhood has undergone great changes. The following two older people made a contrast of the neighbourly relationship of the past with the present, showing the changes from a relatively close relationship with sharing of daily routines to a distant and cool relationship today. Their conversation also revealed how they missed having the neighbourly connection in the good old days:

We formerly lived in a block provided by my husband's work unit. We had lived there for 30 years. All of us knew each other well. We celebrated the festivals together. After moving into the existing neighbourhood (ten years



ago), I don't know my neighbours as they close their doors all the time. We only greet each other when we happen to meet (Ms Lu, Beijing).

I feel that relationship among the people isn't the same as in the past. Before, people had concern for each other. When I cooked soup, I gave it to my neighbours. When the neighbours had prepared food, they gave it to us. Now, this is certainly non-existent. All the people close their doors once they go inside their units. We have been living in this several-storey flat for 20 years. We don't know our neighbours...When I meet them, I greet them. Sometimes, we may have one or two ceremonial exchanges with conventional remarks like 'Have you had your meal?' and 'Have you been to the market?'...and then we close our doors (Ms Liu, Guangzhou).

The changing neighbourly relationship witnessed by the interviewees echoed the research findings of Forrest and Yip (2007) that the level of social interaction, local intimacy, trust and mutual assistance would reduce when one moves away from the old and established neighbourhoods to the new one composed of people from diversified backgrounds. The distant neighbourly relationship implies that help was unlikely to be available from the neighbours in case of need today, as noted by the following interviewees:

In the past, we had good neighbourly relationships, if anything happened, we would help each other. For example, if we went out leaving an older person at home, we would seek help from our neighbours to keep an eye on the older person...We don't have this nowadays (Mr Guo, Guangzhou).

Sometimes, when some residents left home, they would tell their next-door neighbours to keep an eye on their flat to watch out for anything wrong...You would pay attention to anything that happened to your neighbour. The neighbours were related to each other like this and this is mutual concern...Now people just close their doors after they return home. Therefore, they don't know and won't communicate with others...Seeking help from neighbours isn't common nowadays (Mr Fan, Guangzhou).

It's not convenient for older people to live in the multi-storey buildings. If they become ill, who will know? All the people don't open their doors. The neighbours don't communicate with one another (Ms Wang, local Residents Committee officer, Xicheng District, Beijing).

The above demonstrates the change of neighbourly relationship from how the residents were related like family members with readiness to render mutual help during the pre-reform era to how they maintain aloofness towards each other at present. The fading idea of collective responsibility brings disadvantage to the life of older people as they are unlikely to have their neighbour's help when needed. The existence of neighbourly rights and responsibilities is particularly relevant when there is inadequate support service in the community for older people, especially when there is an increasing number of them in the empty-nest households.

### **Factors affecting neighbourly support**

The increasing residential mobility and a shift to self-contained living mode are the factors accounting for the declining neighbourly support. They are discussed in this section.

#### **Increasing residential mobility**

Since the economic reform in the late 1970s, people enjoy more freedom in choosing their jobs and places of residence. A professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing noted that when the housing units were allowed for sale, the neighbourly relationship would not be the same as in the work unit-based neighbourhood. The commercial housing system that replaced the work unit-based housing allocation system creates a different social context for neighbourhood life (Liu, 2006). The increasing residential mobility breaks the neighbourhood ties, as noted by Forest and Yip (2007) that the neighbourly relationship among residents has undergone great changes when the high residential mobility disrupts the local networks. This is also noted by an older interviewee, Mr Wang from Guangzhou, that the turnover of tenants made it difficult for neighbours to know each other well and that neighbourly relationship was basically non-existent, implying that he would not have access to neighbourly help in case of need:

We moved to this (work unit-based) neighbourhood...been living here since 1985. This block is the staff quarters. But when the parent generation (my colleagues living in the quarters) passed away, their properties (the quarters) were given to their children who may find them not suitable...So they sell them to others. The unit next to ours now has a new tenant...whom I don't know.

The employment opportunities in the urban cities and the relaxation of the *hukou* system have attracted a huge number of migrants to move to the cities (Ren, 2013). When the neighbourhood becomes more heterogeneous with people from mixed backgrounds, the residents would have concern about the safety and security issues, making them adopt a guarded attitude towards those they do not know:

There are also many robberies...That's why people close their doors. Because the law and order isn't that good, people have installed iron gates in their flats...Guangzhou is very big, can be reached from different directions. Those seeking their fortune come here. So it is a place full of people from mixed backgrounds (Ms Tang, Guangzhou).

Now it is disorderly...a lot of migrants coming to Beijing to look for jobs. Some of them who cannot get a job are likely to commit crimes. Media reports on robbing older people make them feel frightened (Ms Li, local Residents Committee officer, Changping district, Beijing).

The public perception of the 'danger' and concern about public safety has changed the urban life experience (Wu and Gaubatz, 2013). This further hampers the development of a neighbourly relationship. It is no wonder one older person, Ms Liu from Guangzhou quoted in the previous section, did not know her neighbours even after living in the same place for over two decades. This may also be related to another factor unfavourable to the development of the neighbourly relationship, which is the transformation of the communal living mode to the style of living in a self-contained flat which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Transformation of the communal living mode to the self-contained living mode**

The communal living mode in the old neighbourhood with the physical structure of one or two-storey houses encourages a close neighbourly relationship. The interviewees expressed that the presence of the courtyard enclosed by buildings provided the communal areas for residents to socialise and get familiar with one another. It was common for them to sit in front of their houses to chat with their neighbours by leaving their doors open. When the doors remained open for most of the time, neighbours were in effect encouraged to come over another's house to chat, to share meals or go through other daily routines. Ms Zuo, local Residents Committee officer in Dongcheng District, Beijing, mentioned that such chances of getting together were conducive to developing the neighbourly relationship among them and mutual support was available:

Living in the *pinfang* (single-storey houses) in the old neighbourhoods, people are familiar with one another. They greet and chat with each other whenever they open their doors...They chat often, which undoubtedly involves mutual concern and they are ready to help each other out.

The physical environment provided the opportunities for residents to meet and become familiar with one another, thus facilitating the building up of a close neighbourly relationship. A sense of neighbourliness in these old neighbourhoods flourished. When one encountered difficulties in daily routines, help was readily available and collective responsibility was the norm. However, the private housing market boom and massive redevelopment projects have gradually phased out these neighbourhoods. China has built around 6.5 billion square metres of new housing space in the first two decades since the economic reform in the late 1970s (Campanella, 2011). This media news also pointed out that there was no skyscraper in Shanghai in 1980 but now it had twice as many as New York. Unavoidably, the dominance of high-rise buildings in the urban cities has also changed the way residents relate to each other. Mr Guo from Guangzhou gave a description of the neighbourly relationship in these high-class residential apartments:

Now, it (neighbourly relationship) has gone. Residents living in the high-class residential apartments seldom see each other. They just use the lift to go

straight to the car park and leave the block in their cars. They almost have no chance of meeting each other, right?

The physical change to residential settings not only has tremendously reduced the chance of residents to meet and interact with one another but also has shifted many daily routines from the public areas to the private domain. One seemingly mundane but telling example is from Mr Guo, Guangzhou:

When we were still children, we gathered together to wash the clothes...When we met, we chatted...Now we have washing-machines...All the units are self-contained, and we can manage all the things in our homes...In the past, we had to rely on our cooperation to get things done. Now it is not the case. You can handle the work on your own and so can I.

Previously, most activities or tasks had to be done through joint efforts of the residents with a sense of shared responsibility. The existing self-contained living mode implies that people usually sort out their problems on their own. Placing value on privacy in the transitional economy also means that social interaction is unlikely to have importance in personal or family matters. Moreover, the individuals' activities such as work or social life are mostly carried out outside their neighbourhood. Bulmer (1987) observed that as society develops, the local neighbourhood is no longer the focal point of life since most of the activities and the social network of the people spread across a wider geographical area. Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou, noted that as a contrast to the everyday routines mainly revolving around their neighbourhood in the past, the social circle of older people, especially the younger old, was no longer confined to their neighbourhood:

They (older people) seldom go to the homes of their neighbours to sit for a while as in the past. Rather, they now go out with their friends for social activities, to have tea or go travelling. They seldom invite their neighbours to go for tea. Basically, neighbourly activities are non-existent.

When activities of individuals are no longer centred in their neighbourhood, the meaning of neighbourhood today is taken merely as a place of residence in self-contained units where

the inhabitants find little need or chance to interact with others, but value their privacy rather than having interest or concern for others' affairs. As asserted by Ms Chen from Beijing, when people closed their doors, they would not bother about others' well-being. The emergence of the consumption culture also affects the lifestyles of urban residents. In the socialist era, as every aspect of life was under state intervention, individuals experienced what Friedmann (2005) coined as the 'enforced togetherness'. Since the market reform, with relaxation of political control over individuals' private life and with rising living standard, individuals can have more choices and freedom to pursue their personal interests in their leisure. The scope of personal consumption and cultural pursuits widened (Ren, 2013). Self-contained flats become a place for private entertainment. The residents spend their time either at home or outside their neighbourhood, which does not favour the cultivation of a sense of community. In some way, when one tries to preserve their privacy, neighbourly relationship is compromised. Thus, one cannot expect that reciprocal help is available.

In short, the interviewees offer the perspective that neighbourhood was once their sphere of life where neighbours related with each other like family members. Neighbourly rights and responsibilities existed. The demolition of old neighbourhoods for urban development, increasing population mobility and modern lifestyles together weaken neighbourhood ties. When there is concern about the law and order in the neighbourhood as well as the emphasis on preserving privacy, the motivation to communicate with others becomes lower than before. The transition from the communal way of living to the existing lifestyle in self-contained accommodation with most of life activities taking place outside one's neighbourhood serves to weaken the neighbourly relationship. To most people today, the meaning of neighbourhood is merely a place of residence without the meaning of mutual support or collective responsibility as formerly perceived. This implies that when encountering life difficulties, one has to rely on their own efforts to resolve them without expecting help from others.

The older people's growing independence and the shift of their life focus from the family, as revealed in Chapter 4 further draw the older people, especially the younger old, away from their neighbourhood, as reflected in the findings that 'my peers seldom come from my

neighbours' as noted in Chapter 4 and 'the older people seldom go to the homes of their neighbours to sit for a while' in the above paragraph. Contrary to the perception that older people less expect neighbourly help, the older people in this study still holds the image of the 'good neighbours' and value their role in their everyday life. This dilemma arises when the younger old, though enjoying venturing outside their neighbourhood, can foresee that they require assistance in their advanced age with their time mostly confined at home. The presence of neighbourly help can provide older people, especially those in empty-nest households, with practical assistance and a sense of security. As indicated in Chapter 2 that while the government has attempted to revive the spirit of mutual support in the neighbourhood, obviously, a better strategy is required when the socio-economic changes are weakening the neighbourly rights and responsibilities. Moreover, when neighbourly support is on the decline, one has to see if there is any alternative available to cater to the needs of older people. The discussion in the next two sections on the mobilisation of volunteers in the neighbourhood and the role of the local organisation – the Residents Committee may shed light on how much support they can provide to older people.

## **Mobilisation of volunteers in the neighbourhood**

This section looks into the role of volunteers in support of older people in the neighbourhood, its effectiveness in fulfilling such a role as well as the possible development of voluntary service. As discussed above, the traditional practice of mobilising resources to help each other in the neighbourhood has been reinforced by the lack of welfare support and individuals have to rely on their own efforts by pooling their resources to pull through difficult times. This practice of mutual help had its roots in traditional Chinese culture, as noted by Mr Lau, Chairman of Wenchang Community Old People's Association, a self-help organisation in Beijing. Mr Ma, social worker of a social work organisation in Chaoyang District, Beijing, noted that the notion of reciprocity was also emphasised in voluntary service:

We arrange the 'younger old' to visit 'older old' to help them in their daily routines, for example, household cleaning...Life's just like a cycle. When they themselves are at an advanced age in future, they will also be served by others.

The notion of the rights and responsibilities is instilled in the helping process. When individuals fulfil their responsibilities to help others out, there is an expectation that they will receive similar kinds of help in future. This idea of reciprocity can be said to be compatible with the contemporary social changes when the concept of the rights and responsibilities is not necessarily confined to one's neighbourhood but can be extended to somewhere else and in the future.

As discussed in Chapter 2, seeing the decline in the role of neighbourhood support for older people, the state has actively promoted the voluntary practice in recent years by stressing the importance of volunteers in serving older people. This has been seen as an attempt to strengthen the responsibility in the neighbourhood to support those older people in need. During my research conducted in both Beijing and Guangzhou, slogan banners, posters or notices were frequently seen in the neighbourhood promoting the spirit of mutual help and volunteering to help the needy.

### **Services for older people by volunteers**

As noted by different NGOs-in-charge in both cities, their organisations had all along relied heavily on volunteers to provide services to older people, due to their limited human resources. They maintained a pool of volunteers who were recruited from all walks of life such as students, employed, or retirees. They were arranged to provide services whenever they were available. According to them, the services rendered to older people included assisting in their daily routines such as shopping, cooking or household cleaning and providing emotional support in form of companionship. Such services are mainly targeted at the older people in empty-nest households who need support one way or another.

Mr Lau, Chairman of Wenchang Community Old People's Association, Beijing, noted that young retirees were mobilised as volunteers to provide emotional support to those older people living alone to relieve their sense of isolation in the neighbourhood. The services provided could also include shopping, concern visits to keep them company, check on them to find out their needs or carry out repair work for them, as described by the following interviewees:



Volunteers also pay visit to older people to help them purchase daily necessities...So they just rely on volunteers (Ms Chen, Beijing).

Those older people who are younger and active serve as volunteers...They are arranged to visit those who are living alone or widowed (Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou).

They (the older people) feel bored and lonely and often call us for a chat... We then arrange volunteers to chat with them (Ms Zuo, local Residents Committee officer, Dongcheng District, Beijing).

Volunteers also go to older people's homes once every two weeks to chat with them and check if they have any needs that require the volunteers' help (Ms Yang, Director of Beijing Cuncaochunhui Elderly Mental Health Service).

Some volunteers help repair the electrical appliances for older people...We have this service once a month (Ms Fu, Guangzhou).

Such voluntary work like household cleaning, repair work, shopping and giving emotional support to a certain extent help relieve the life difficulties and reduce the isolation of older people in the neighbourhood. Whether the voluntary service can be a means to support older people depends on its effectiveness to meet their needs.

### **Effectiveness of services provided by volunteers**

The difficulties encountered in the delivery of voluntary service to older people which include the lack of regularity of the service, the sufficient number of recruits and older people's reservation about receiving such service are identified in the following section.

Regarding the adequacy of the voluntary service in fulfilling the home-care needs of older people, Ms Yang, Director of Beijing Cuncaochunhui Elderly Mental Health Service, opined that the services provided by volunteers, though not frequent, were able to meet the needs of older people who did not have a high expectation of them:

In reality, the needs of older people are not that great. Their homes are not particularly dirty or untidy...Maybe volunteers doing the cleaning for them once a month is good enough.

Those older people who have to rely on the voluntary service to alleviate their home-care difficulties are likely to be unable to afford the private service and ineligible for the state support service, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. If the service is meant to benefit older people living in their own homes, it has to be provided on a regular basis. Hence the question is whether or not the voluntary service is opportune, available when older people express their need. As revealed by the interviewees, the lack of service regularity rendered this source of support unreliable or impractical since the needs of older people were supposed to be regular and continual. Ms Liu, living with her spouse in Guangzhou, raised the point that if the service was not around when needed, it could not help much:

When I need them, they cannot provide the service to us. Because they are volunteers, they can only come when they have time. They are only free on Sundays. But on Sundays, my daughter and son-in-law are also available to help us. What we need is help on weekdays.

Another factor determining whether regular service can be provided is the sufficiency of volunteers. The source of volunteers was not stable or guaranteed since volunteers might have their own preferences for the types of service they wanted to provide, as explained by Ms Wu, Deputy Director of a social work organisation in Liwan District, Guangzhou:

After working here for two years, we realise that it is impossible to recruit the volunteers who are willing to provide household cleaning services to older people once or several times per week...because the volunteers have their own jobs...their own preference. Perhaps, once a month is possible but still not too many of them (are willing to do).

These quotes reveal a gap between the expectations of the interviewees regarding the voluntary service and the realities of the volunteers who have their own service preference and time constraint. Moreover, the recruitment and maintenance of a sufficient pool of

volunteers depend whether a neighbourhood network exists. Nevertheless, as discussed in the previous section, when the population becomes mobile and individuals' daily activities are less involved in the neighbourhood, it is difficult to develop a sense of belonging among the residents. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Residents Committee relies heavily on volunteers to look after the needs of older people. The high turnover of tenants in the neighbourhood was mentioned by Ms Zuo, local Residents Committee officer, Dongcheng District, Beijing, who found it difficult to build up a support network in the neighbourhood and establish a sufficient pool of volunteers:

Since the redevelopment of this neighbourhood, there is a high turnover of tenants, they have already moved out before we have a chance to know them.

It is difficult to build up the neighbourhood network.

In the newly developed neighbourhood with high-rise buildings in Changping District located in the fringe of Beijing where Ms Li worked as a local Residents Committee officer, she said that the majority of the residents in the new neighbourhood were younger people who were away for work most of the time. This made it difficult for the staff to get familiar with them and establish the neighbourhood network.

Apart from the volunteers' inability to deliver a stable service, given the increasing concern about the law and order as mentioned earlier, the older people's hesitation to receive help from strangers was reflected by the interviewees. As an older person, Ms Chen from Beijing noted her worry in receiving voluntary service:

We are not willing to accept volunteers into our houses because we don't know them. What if something unpleasant happens?

Ms Zuo, local Residents Committee officer in Dongcheng District, Beijing, also acknowledged the older people's reservation to receive help from outsiders whom they did not know unless the service was arranged by her office:

As the law and order isn't that good, older people are very cautious about letting strangers into their houses. It is especially true for those who have mobility difficulty, they are vulnerable...Some older people simply decline the voluntary service unless it's arranged by us.

This points to the core issue that the lack of neighbourhood trust has reduced the wish of the older people to receive services from the 'strangers' unless it is endorsed by a 'formal' middleman which, here is the Residents Committee. This tells that if the voluntary service has to be effectively provided in an urban society, a better service coordination is needed instead of relying on its spontaneous arrangement.

Forrest and Yip (2007) noted that when the neighbourhood becomes more heterogeneous, there would be a declining involvement of residents in community affairs. Wong (1988) remarked that the tempo of life was much slower under the planned economy while rapid social changes after the market reform have transformed the nature of urban life in which people become busier with more personal commitments. The prevailing values such as privacy, competition and life enjoyment have affected individuals' perception of collective responsibility to help each other out. Mr Lau, Chairman of Wenchang Community Old People's Association, Beijing, also observed that the voluntary practice, to a large extent, depended on individuals' initiative and goodwill without personal benefit. He doubted if the present younger generation was prepared to provide voluntary service without reward when the virtue of mutual help faded gradually in society today. Viewing the weakened neighbourhood rights and responsibilities, the state has promoted the mobilisation of volunteer resources to serve the needy older people in the neighbourhood with an attempt to instill in them a sense of responsibility. Yet, the above observations raise doubts whether or not the existing service delivery mode can be relied on for old-age support and reconsideration of what more should be done to enhance its effectiveness is needed.

### **Development of voluntary service**

Owing to the ongoing socio-economic changes, relying on the initiative and enthusiasm of individuals to shoulder the collective responsibility as in the socialist era is no longer feasible. The over-reliance on volunteers to serve without adequate home-care service provision accounts for its limited effect. Professor Pei, Tsinghua University in Beijing, reiterated that having formal home-care provision should be the direction if the voluntary service is to be an effective means to support older people:

If volunteers are available, they can go out to provide service for older people. How about if they aren't available? But the needs of older people are continuous...If there's a system of providing formal service, then the voluntary service can serve as a supplement to it. How can we rely on volunteers if there's no regular formal service?

Mr Zheng, Residents Committee in-charge, Dongcheng District, Beijing, who recruited and organised volunteers to provide help to residents in the community, also drew attention to the importance of having formal service provision rather than relying almost solely on volunteers to satisfy the needs of older people:

The delivery of voluntary service is based on what volunteers can give but not on the needs of older persons. For example, if I (as an older person) need the service, I make a call and the service should be readily available. It's not that the volunteers can come over to help me or visit me whenever they are free...It isn't adequate to use this service mode to cope with the needs of older people which are regular...Voluntary service can't be used to replace formal service provision. They can at best be viewed as a supplement to the formal service.

The research findings indicate that a stronger state responsibility for setting up a community support service to address older people's needs is desired while the voluntary services can at best be viewed only as supplementary rather than being the mainstay. Bulmer (1987) also pointed out that the voluntary services cannot cover all the necessary services in the way the government can provide though it is often believed that they can, to a certain extent, reduce the role of the state in service provision. It is also imperative to understand the nature of the informal sector so that their potential can be developed while acknowledging its limitations at the same time (Twigg, 1989). As noted in Chapter 1, the assistance provided by volunteers or neighbours cannot meet the personal care needs of older people which is supposed to be carried out by family members or a care worker that older people are familiar or have a trusting relationship with.

Apart from the formal home-care service provision which will be discussed in Chapter 6, the following findings may give some directions on how the voluntary service delivery mode can be enhanced. The greater role of the government to coordinate the voluntary service at the local level was seen as a way to enhance its service delivery, as pointed out by Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou:

Over 90% of the older people enjoy good health...It is necessary for the government to encourage their participation in the community...The link (of young retirees) with the community is rather weak...I believe many of them are willing to serve the community...Maybe they just lack the platform or chance to participate...or maybe they don't realise they can contribute in this way.

Mr Li's observation of older people's enthusiasm in providing voluntary service coincided with older people's expressed keen attitude to make contribution to society. Ms Hu from Beijing, though having to look after the housework in a multi-generational household, spent her spare time to serve the community:

If I have spare time, I will participate in the social programmes, do something for charity...such as to guard the safety of this neighbourhood, on a voluntary basis, wear a red badge on my arm to show that I'm on duty.

Ms Ouyang from Guangzhou shared her wish to be a volunteer so that she could contribute to society:

I have the capacity to be a volunteer, because I have good health, still young, educated...I have the financial capacity, I will do something for the charity, I have the energy, I can be a volunteer, why can't we help others?

In a study about the mobilisation of older people to participate in the community programmes in four urban neighbourhoods in Shanghai, Ho and Ng (2007) concluded that the newly retirees who are in their early 60s and still enjoying good health can be mobilised to provide assistance to the local residents. Older people are more willing to get involved in

neighbourhood affairs such as neighbourhood patrol, as noted by Chen, J. (2009). He explained that there are three reasons for their participation: their steadfast adherence to the collective responsibilities, the opportunity to expand their social network and their interest in the small gifts received after providing the service. This demonstrates that the mobilisation of older people for community participation has dual benefit of connecting them to the local community while they can also serve other needy older people. In fact, mobilising 10% of the older population to serve as volunteers has been mentioned in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan on Ageing Service Development (2010-2015), as noted in Chapter 2.

Ms Zhang, Team Leader of the Home Care Support Section of an Elderly Integrated Services Centre in Haizhu District, Guangzhou, noted that sometimes, the volunteers were, in fact, the neighbours of older people:

It's easier to encourage the existing network of volunteers to continue the service provision...These volunteers are also the neighbours of some older people.

Volunteers residing near older people means that they can be more conveniently assembled to provide support to their next-door neighbours. In some way, this also implies that neighbourly help is not naturally available as in the past. The residents need to be organised and encouraged to give care and concern for their neighbours. As revealed in the previous section, the older people still find the neighbourly support valuable in case of emergency or offering them short-term support.

Other than the means to improve the organisation of the voluntary service, more financial backup has been called for if the voluntary service has to be effective. This was voiced out by Ms Yang, Director of Beijing Cuncaochunhui Elderly Mental Health Service, and opined that even though the volunteers had an enthusiasm to provide service, the government needs to finance the development of the voluntary service. Ms Chen from Guangzhou noted that the government should pay more efforts to promote the voluntary service as a means to support older people in the long run:

If the government can provide some financial support to establish some agencies to take charge of organising the voluntary service in the community...the cost won't be high, but it can provide support to older people.

It can be a long-term support plan.

Despite the state's aim to promote the neighbourhood responsibility to look after older people, such expectation cannot be met by the reliance on the irregular and unstable nature of the voluntary service when the social changes have affected the self-initiative of individuals to adopt the customary practice of mutual help. Moreover, older people, though having the expressed needs, are less likely to welcome the service provided by the strangers given the low trust level in the neighbourhood. Should there be formal service provision in the community, the volunteers can supplement it by providing short-term relief, keeping a watch on the vulnerable older people through organised visits or helping alert the organisations concerned of the risky cases in the community. To utilise the potential of the voluntary service requires a systematic plan to identify who are in need of home-care support and who can provide help. If this informal source can be mobilised or organised in an effective way, it can complement the formal service and enhance its service quality in the long run. With more state financial resources for the voluntary service development, as suggested by the interviewees, the NGOs in the sub-district can serve as a platform to coordinate the pool of volunteers and organise them to support those older people in the respective neighbourhood.

## **The Residents Committee as a local level organisation**

As noted in Chapter 2, the Residents Committee was set up during the pre-reform era. By law, it is an organisation managed by the residents themselves though it is operated under the auspices of the Communist Party. Apart from its key function of political monitoring at the local level, the Residents Committee organised residents into groups to support those with life difficulties, thus fostering the spirit of mutual support among residents. In the socialist era, the Residents Committee mainly looked after the welfare of those outside the work unit-based system. Since the economic reform, owing to the delegation of the welfare responsibility to the local government, both the Street Office and the Residents Committee



have to take up the welfare responsibility left by the work unit-based system. The Residents committee is responsible for implementing the policy in the neighbourhood when there is instruction from the Street Office.

Since the Residents Committee had been rooted in the neighbourhood for a long time, residents had trust in them and usually approached their staff for assistance, should they have any problem, as recounted by Ms Wang, local Residents Committee officer, Xicheng District, Beijing:

Whenever the residents have any problem in their daily life, they will come to us for assistance. They have a high level of trust for us. They will call us and we will try our best to help.

Mr Fan from Guangzhou noted that residents could just give a call to the Residents Committee when they had trouble and the staff would come to their assistance. Another older person, Ms Zhou from Beijing, also expressed that she always went to chat with the Residents Committee staff and came to know that they were ready to offer help to residents when the latter had any problem. Both of these older persons perceived that the Residents Committee had a responsibility in helping them though they never requested help from them. Ms Wu, Deputy Director of a social work organisation in Liwan District, Guangzhou, attributed the trust to the existence of the Residents Committee in the neighbourhood since the 1950s:

After all, the Residents Committee has existed in the neighbourhood for a few decades so that residents came to know them when they were young. So after they get old, they still have the knowledge of this committee...approach them for assistance for their everyday life matter.

Given the trust from residents and the expectation from the district government to look after the welfare needs of the local residents, how far this local-level organisation can fulfil this responsibility will be discussed in the next section.

## **The role of the Residents Committee in the support of older people**

This section discusses the role of the Residents Committee in the welfare of older people including the concern visits, organising volunteers to provide support to older people in need of home-care services as well as strengthening the family role in the care of older people through ideological education.

Ms Hong, the local Residents Committee officer in Yuexiu District, Guangzhou, explained that her office had eight staff members looking after 2,500 households totalling around 9,000 residents, of which one-third were older people. With such a small staff establishment, the Residents Committees, like the NGOs, have to rely on volunteers to help provide service to older people as well as the arrangement of concern visits to certain categories of older people. These are also understood by the older people in this research:

The staff pay concern visits to (certain groups of) older people during festive occasions, giving them dumplings (Ms Chen, Beijing).

For those older people without family, Residents Committee staff arrange volunteers to visit them and send them rice on the festive occasions. They also chat with the older people (Ms Liang, Guangzhou).

According to a professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing, Residents Committee has an obligation to provide support to older people in the neighbourhood, especially in case of emergency. This is also noted by a Resident Committee Officer-in-charge in Tianjin mentioned in Chapter 2 that her office had a role to look after older people. In this research, the local Residents Committee officers indicated that they would try their best to satisfy the needs of older people whenever they put up the request. According to Ms Li, the local Residents Committee officer in a newly-developed neighbourhood in Changping District, Beijing, extra attention would be given to special categories (those who are widowed, advanced in age and living alone, disabled or sick) of older people who were vulnerable in the community:

We act according to instructions given by the Street Office, for example, arranging concern visits to special categories of older people or giving some financial allowances to them. We try our best to help them or liaise with others who can help if they express their need...such as doing housework, repair work, etc.

Mr Zheng, Residents Committee in-charge, Dongcheng District, Beijing, noted that his office formed a team of volunteers who would be organised to offer support to older people in case of need:

If those, who are living alone, have difficulty in daily routines, we will arrange volunteers, say, the younger old to help them.

Acting as a bridge between residents and the local government, the Residents Committee staff took the Street Office's instructions as their work responsibility to look after certain vulnerable groups of older people. Fulfilling one's work duties as defined by the higher level at present is obviously different from the practice in the socialist era that resources would be mobilised to support those whenever they encountered life problems. Both Mr Fan and Ms Zhou, as mentioned above, may have formed the perception since the socialist era that the Residents Committee was always a source of support for residents.

Apart from fulfilling the administrative instructions, Residents Committee, though having an obligation to look after older people, can have the discretion in discharging their work duties. This is noted by a professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing that arranging volunteers to provide support to older people seemed to be their main task but it was not their prescribed work responsibility and it was at their discretion. Ms Chen, a retiree, works as a part-time staff in the Residents Committee in Haizhu District, Guangzhou. She noted that the neighbourhood she worked at consisted of private residential buildings where the residents were mostly the flat-owners and they were educated and knew how to make service requests:

They (the residents) know how to make a request...for example, they would ask if they are eligible for the installation of safety alarm bells, and any kinds

of benefits they are entitled to...A big contrast with residents of the neighbourhood who come from the lower socio-economic strata (where I'm living in)...The staff there are just passive, since the residents don't know much of their service entitlements and don't know how to make requests.

The difference in the performance of the Residents Committee reflects that apart from fulfilling the basic task of looking after vulnerable groups of older people, there is a certain amount of leeway for them to act.

Concern visits to vulnerable categories of older people are one of the core duties of the Residents Committee. However, as mentioned by the interviewees, a key purpose of this visit is to check upon them and most importantly, to make sure that they were still all right rather than giving them any concrete support:

We mainly pay visits to those who are living alone or widowed. When we have time and our workload isn't that heavy, we will visit them...If there is an important task, like the recent handling of the dengue fever, we may not be able to visit them...If we bump into them in the street, we at least know that they are alright...To be blunt, to make sure that they are still alive (Ms Hong, local Residents Committee officer, Yuexiu District, Guangzhou).

For those older people in the empty-nest households, Residents Committee staff pay visits to them when they have time. They are afraid that the older people have passed away at home without their knowledge. They fear that once the news is reported by the media, they have to shoulder the responsibility (Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou).

Ms Wang, local Residents Committee officer, Xicheng District, Beijing, also expressed her anxiety about the risks facing older people in empty-nest households. Her constant worry over one of the older persons staying in her neighbourhood was relieved after the older person's family finally hired a care worker to look after her:

There is an older person who lives alone in our neighbourhood. I worry a lot about her for fear that she is absent-minded and forgets to turn off the gas after cooking. It will be a disaster.

The overt concern about the safety of vulnerable categories of older people reflects that it is the key responsibility of the Residents Committee acting in accordance with the instructions from the senior level to look after them. When the local Residents Committee officers were asked about the specific services they could provide to those older people who were sick and contacted their office for assistance in their daily routines, Ms Hong, the local Residents Committee officer in Yuexiu District, Guangzhou, responded that there was not much their staff could do and instead, the older people were expected to seek family assistance:

They usually contact their family members first. If they call us...we will check if they need the ambulance service...If they ask us to cook meals for them...perhaps, we will refer them to the Integrated Family Services Centre (an NGO) to see if volunteers can be arranged to help them. Or if the request is just for today, we may give them some help. If it is long term, it is not possible. But this kind of request is very rare because they know that our role isn't to help them do shopping or cook meals. Helping them to liaise with the domestic service companies may be possible.

Ms Zuo, local Residents Committee officer in Dongcheng District, Beijing, pointed out that it was after all the family responsibility to look after their older relatives. To her, there was not much her office could offer to those who lacked self-care abilities:

For those who are unable to take care of themselves and cannot afford residential care, they have to stay at home. If their children cannot come to look after them, there is no other alternative to help them.

The interviews with both Ms Hong and Ms Zuo may show that they have effectively defined their responsibilities in providing home-care support to the older people in their neighbourhoods. Though the Residents Committee bears the responsibility to look after the needs of older people, when it is beyond their capacity to cope with their needs, they

practically limit their responsibility by assuming that those older people with family will be taken care of by their children. Hence, it is not surprising that the Residents Committee was involved in providing ideological education to the family members when the latter failed to shoulder the responsibility for the care of older people, as noted by Ms Wu, Deputy Director of a social work organisation in Liwan District, Guangzhou. According to her, it was only after older people have exhausted all means of obtaining support that the Residents Committee, acting on behalf of the local government, stepped in to look after their welfare:

If they (the children) have not fulfilled their responsibilities, they (Residents Committee staff) will discuss with them reminding them of their duty to take care of their parents by law...To give ideological education to those (who do not take care of their parents)...For those who have poor relationship with their children and it is beyond the ability of the Residents Committee to mediate, then the staff will work out the ways to take care of them (older people).

In short, since the economic reform, the Residents Committee is supposed to take up an expanded welfare role to look after the needs of residents in the neighbourhood. However, the findings revealed that their services are limited to no more than concern visits or mobilisation of volunteers, with importance attached to family responsibility for the protection of older people's welfare. The following section examines the difficulties facing the Residents Committee, which may uncover the reasons for the low level of service commitment.

### **Difficulties facing the Residents Committee in fulfilling its welfare role**

Being overloaded with administrative duties, the need to attend to wide range of needs of residents in the neighbourhood as well as the lack of a well-defined scope of responsibility are the factors hampering the Residents Committee from discharging its welfare role properly.

As noted by Yip, Leung and Huang (2013), the Residents Committee, being torn between performing its role of meeting the local residents' welfare needs and administrative duties,

can hardly perform its function properly since they do not have the staff available to fulfil the duties required of them. This was also elaborated by Professor Liu from Peking University who remarked that the Residents Committee staff were preoccupied with the administrative duties assigned by the Street Office, leaving them no time to look into the needs of older people even though they wanted to do so.

Mr Ma, social worker of a social work organisation in Chaoyang District, Beijing, considered that the Residents Committee staff were faced with heavy administrative workload as well as the wide range of needs of residents. He continued to explain that its role is rather limited to providing support for older people in the community:

The Residents Committee staff are basically very busy with administrative work. Together with the team from the community service station (providing public services to the residents in the community), there is a total of 30 staff members but they have to serve several thousand of older people (within the administrative boundary). Even though they don't do other things and spend all their time on older people, there isn't much they can do. But in reality, there are still other groups of residents in the neighbourhood that they have to attend to.

The lack of an obvious scope of responsibility of the Residents Committee was a major barrier to the proper discharge of its duties, as raised by Mr Zheng, Residents Committee in-charge from Dongcheng District, Beijing:

While providing services for older people in the neighbourhood, how much should I do is considered to be enough? At the same time, the NGOs are using their own ways of providing professional service here...Then how should we position ourselves, being rooted in the neighbourhood with its traditional function? I consider the main problem to be the unclear work boundary leading to many things not being done or actualised...Who should be responsible for doing what?...It isn't clear what should be done and shouldn't be done.

The discussion reveals the difficulties facing the Residents Committee and explains why they can only offer the very basic service mainly to vulnerable groups of older people through concern visits or mobilisation of volunteers to relieve their home-care difficulties. At the same time, the Committee, being beyond its work capacity, finds the need to reinstate the family responsibility in the care of those older people who have family. There appears to be a gap between the perception of the residents about the readily available help from the Residents Committee, and the fact that the Residents Committee is unrealistically looked upon as having the responsibility in old-age care. Being an organisation rooted in the neighbourhood for a few decades, with a good knowledge of its characteristics and trust from the residents, the Residents Committee should utilise this advantage and explore more possibilities of collaborating with the NGOs, the new service partner in the community, to better support older people. One of the possibilities, as discussed in the previous section, is to collaborate with the NGOs to form a platform for recruiting and organising the volunteers systematically so that they can be a reliable source of support to serve the needy older people at the local level.

## **Policy implications**

The impact of the market reform in the late 1970s has weakened the support for older people in the neighbourhood. The help that neighbours give each other relies on the degree of bonding and trust among residents and their sense of belonging to the neighbourhood. In the Chinese case, neighbourly relations were once reinforced by the work unit-based system during the pre-reform era. The market reform in the late 1970s brought enormous changes to life in the neighbourhood. As the neighbourhood no longer serves as a focal point in modern urban life, and with the increasing mobility of its residents, an emphasis on privacy, and growing concern about security, the ties of neighbourly relationships have significantly loosened. When neighbourly relationships decline, weakening of neighbourly rights and responsibilities is the outcome. Rather than having a close relationship with neighbours, the findings reveal that older people, especially young retirees, established their social network outside their neighbourhood and would rather contribute to society as volunteers.



Contrary to the social perception that neighbourly relationships are now less valued, as revealed by Read (2000), Forrest and Yip (2007) and Dai (2008), this research shows that older people still held in high regard for the practical support and sense of security provided by their neighbours. The expression of such needs arises when older people foresee that they, in advanced age and being likely to be house-bound, will require support one way or the other, and their family members will not be around to offer assistance. Gabriel and Bowling (2004) also highlighted the importance of close relationships with neighbours when older people lack the transportation or physical mobility to visit friends living far away or when they are sick.

Older people's expectation of neighbourly support is in line with the state's endorsement of strengthening neighbourhood responsibilities through reviving the traditional spirit of mutual help and pooling volunteers in the neighbourhood to support older people. However, the irregular and intermittent nature of the voluntary services falls short of meeting the continuous needs of older people, as illustrated by the fieldwork data. The market reform has brought with it new values, and it is no longer viable to rely on the individuals' enthusiasm or initiative to shoulder neighbourhood responsibilities when society emphasises personal responsibility, rather than collective responsibility. More efforts are needed to enhance its effectiveness, as indicated in the findings. A systematic plan is necessary to identify who are in need of support and who are available to help, preferably those who live in the vicinity of those in need. Moreover, involving young retirees as volunteers can give them an opportunity to contribute to society, which is consistent with the independent self-image of older people.

The Residents Committee, serving as a bridge between the local government and the residents, has had a responsibility to gather up resources to help the needy in the neighbourhood since the socialist era. Its role has expanded to assimilate the welfare responsibilities left by the work unit after the economic reform. Nevertheless, the findings show that this local organisation does not have sufficient resources to tackle the home-care problems of older people in the neighbourhood, as has been pointed out by Read (2000), Lu (2006), Ho and Ng (2007) and Li (2010). The Residents Committee has aptly redefined its

responsibility by acting in accordance with instructions from the higher level to mainly look after special categories of older people and see family responsibility as the key source of support for those with children. This research reveals the discrepancy between the reality and the perception of the older people interviewed, who considered that this local organisation could serve as a source of support for them in case of need. This perception perhaps comes from the substantial involvement of the Residents Committee in the daily lives of individuals during the socialist era, as noted by White and Parish (1984) that the state, through the Residents Committee, exercised control over neighbourhood activities. This gives older people an impression that this organisation has a responsibility to provide support to them, leading to the divergence in the understanding of its obligations. Thus, this research adds to the understanding of how the Residents Committee staff re-define their responsibilities in the face of limited resources, and also reveals the discrepancy between the expected and the actual role in the care of older people.

Instead of clinging to conventional perceptions and keeping an undefined role regarding old-age care, a rethink of the responsibility of the Residents Committee is required. Having been in existence in the neighbourhood since 1950s, the Residents Committees have a good knowledge of the neighbourhoods' characteristics. This potential can be utilised to develop a platform to coordinate the voluntary service with the NGOs, the new social service partners in the neighbourhood, so that community resources can be more effectively connected to older people in need.

Given the growing number of older people in empty-nest households, if the informal support network in the neighbourhood can function well to provide a source of care for older people, in the long run, it can share the responsibility of looking after older people without relying wholly on state services.

## Chapter six: The role of the state in the care of older people

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### Introduction

This chapter examines how far the state's community service policy can fulfil the wishes of the older people to age in home which is also in line with the policy goal to encourage them to remain in their own home. Though the state has extended its responsibility in developing the service support for older people in the community, the findings in this research indicate that its residual welfare approach implies that a great majority of the older people has to rely on themselves or their families for support, which is against their desire not to put responsibility on the family. This chapter argues that this factor calls for a shift of policy orientation from the existing approach emphasising their reliance on the family to a policy promoting their independence and giving them choice in their life arrangement as far as they can exercise.

To begin with, the discussion on the perception towards the state's responsibility in older people's welfare exposes the different views from the older people and the stakeholders interviewed in this study. The second section gives a review of rationale behind the 9064 service framework to set the background for the discussion of the key service provisions for the older people in both Beijing and Guangzhou. It also examines the views of the interviewees towards ageing in place to see if this agrees with the state policy expecting 96% of the older people to age in home under the 9064 service framework. The third section looks at the service provisions for the 90% and 6% of older people in both cities, including the type of services available in the community, their service mission and the intended audience. The aim is to see whether the service provisions can meet the expectations of the older people as well as realising the state's aim to solve the ageing issue through 'shared' responsibilities among different sectors. The fourth section is to give an analysis of the service failures in its implementation. The policy implications based on the research findings will be discussed in the last section.

## **Views on the state's responsibility in older people's welfare**

This section discusses the views regarding the state's responsibility for the care of older people, which provides a background for understanding how the service policy for older people in the community has been constructed.

To understand the rationale underlying the arrangement of community service support for older people, it is necessary to know how the policy fits into the wider social welfare system and cultural expectation of the country concerned (Tester, 1996). Regarding the Chinese government's perceived responsibility in the care of older people, the official of the national advisory body on ageing policy interviewed in this research emphasised that the Chinese society had a rich culture with traditional virtues such as respect for older people, a strong family concept recognising the care of older people as the family responsibility and a group culture with the spirit of mutual help in the neighbourhood. This, he thought, should be strengthened and sustained. In connection with this, he admitted that the current problem of home-care support for older people was its under-developed service in the community, and therefore, he called for, apart from the state's responsibility, care responsibilities shared among family, NGOs, market, and community volunteers. The official's view reflects the neo-liberal welfare approach under the market economy that the state has rolled back its role in welfare responsibility, with an attempt to involve multiple sectors in funding and provision, as also discussed in Chapter 2.

Some of the interviewees tended to agree with the above view that state was unable to take up the whole responsibility in the care of older people. A professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing opined that meeting the welfare needs of a huge ageing population required enormous amount of resources, arousing concerns about the affordability and the sustainability of the welfare system in the long run. She was of the view that although the country had grown rich, there were competing demands from different groups of people throughout the country, and thus the welfare could only be given at a low level:

The government can only provide the people with a basic protection which isn't costly...The level of welfare can't be as high as in the Western welfare states. It looks as if our economic growth is very fast, making the country the world's second largest economic system, but it has to look after 1.3 billion people with lots of needs to take care of.

Holding a similar view, a professor in Sociology from Peking University considered that even among older people themselves, there existed different kinds of needs such as pensions or the lack of financial resources among migrant workers for future retirement in the city although he also recognised the need to expand the home-care support for older people. Therefore, he maintained that the state should take a 'cautious' approach in welfare provision. Added to this point, he emphasised that if the government took up too much of the responsibility in old-age care, it would affect the sense of responsibility of the younger generation:

While considering a policy, this point will be considered...and of course, must be considered. If the government takes up all the responsibility, the family members will forget their own responsibility, then they don't care (about the older people).

In cultures where the state assumes that the family provides care to older people, it tends to believe that its intervention would weaken the family responsibility (Wilson, 2000). Wong (1988) asserted that the values and practices of the past have been mingled to form a stable pattern of expectations. This is particularly true that looking after older people is all along a family responsibility in the Chinese society that the government expects it to continue. Although the government is anxious to see the possible diminishing family responsibility when there is an increased welfare provision, other research findings suggested that the formal service provision has, in fact, increased the overall amount of care since it can encourage more family support through enhancing its functioning (Motel-Klingebiel, Tesch-Roemer and Kondratowitz, 2005; Patsios and Davey, 2005).

White and Goodman (1998) noted that the Chinese government attempts to build a negative stereotype of the Western welfare state as financially wasteful and economically unaffordable, which runs against the Asian self-reliance values. Zhang and Xu (2010) noted that there is almost a consensus among Chinese policy makers that welfare would create the dependency culture, work disincentives and financial burden, consequently leading to the economic slowdown in the long run. Zheng (2013) observed that the message of not to creating a high expectation towards welfare among the people came across in media conferences or seminars organised by the government. Professor Pei, Tsinghua University, Beijing, considered the key reason for state's heavy emphasis on the shared responsibilities in the care of older people was due to its negative perception of welfare provision:

The government is against the idea of Western welfare state which is portrayed as a system of creating welfare reliance. Especially in the 1980s, the welfare states have experienced policy retrenchment which further reinforced its view that the Western welfare system is not sustainable...Concerning the care of older people, the role of the family can no longer be sustainable. How can they (older people) be supported in the community, when the government did not mention about the allocation of financial resources to solve the problems? Instead, it only emphasised that the problems should be solved through the family, the market, charitable organisations or other channels.

The negative consequences of welfare expansion were quoted as the reason for the state to limit its responsibility to extend its support to older people. In reality, the state is expected to play a greater role when the ongoing socio-economic changes have weakened the informal sources of old-age support, as shown in Chapter 4 and 5. How the care responsibilities should be divided among different sectors remains unclear despite the government's stress on the shared responsibilities. Professor Liu from Peking University voiced out that the responsibility was actually not shared by the whole society equally. When he recounted his experience of looking after his aged relative, he felt that the family had to take up most of the responsibility:

The care of older people should be a social problem, and the responsibility should be taken up by the society as a whole. Now, it becomes a personal responsibility such that an individual has to use their own resources to solve the problem. It can't just rely on our own to take care of ourselves.

Individuals drew welfare support from the collectives in a vertically organised and centrally planned economy in the socialist era rather than relying on the horizontally organised markets with emphasis on individual choice and responsibility today (Hussain, 2002; Saich, 2008). As noted by Zhang and Xu (2010), the stress on individual responsibility for one's welfare is compatible with the market economy ideology which stresses on efficiency and self-reliance instead of state dependence. If the state service cannot catch up with service demands, individuals are expected to resolve their needs through their own means and the family has to take up the ultimate responsibility.

Since the economic reform, a majority of the urban older population have enjoyed a better financial condition. The rapid economic growth under the market reform has led to the rising living standard of the people (Whyte, 2010), which allows older people to enjoy a life with more choices, as discussed in Chapter 4. The expressed satisfaction on the living was reflected by Mr Fan from Guangzhou, a former newspaper editor receiving an inflation-linked monthly pension of about 4,000 yuan:

Compared with the living standard before the market reform, our existing living conditions have already improved a lot. You may notice that there are lots of older people in the parks doing exercises, dancing, singing...then having tea in the restaurants...This was rather unimaginable a few decades ago...The amount of pension increases every year.

Although the growing affluence and independence of older people have mitigated the negative impact of the socio-economic and demographic challenges on the life of older people, this does not preclude them from demanding a stronger state responsibility to look after them. Some of the older people in this research voiced out their expectations for state's responsibilities to support them in their old age. They considered that the government should look after them or improve the facilities so that they could age in their own home. Ms Liu

from Guangzhou considered that her past contribution gave her the right to claim the state's support:

Of course, the government has responsibility. We have served the country for so many years. So when we are old, we should enjoy the benefits or welfare...The government should show more concern, not only verbally, but also in practice.

As discussed in Chapter 2, individuals contributed their labour and remained loyal to the Communist Party and in return, the state provided them with welfare support in the socialist era. The market reform has transformed the state-society relationship that individuals are required to participate to earn the benefits and take up more responsibility for their own well-being. The older people feel that their past labour participation has a role to play in the rapid economic growth today and should share the economic prosperity. This is echoed by Ms Ouyang from Guangzhou. She considered that she was entitled to enjoy the fruits of economic growth and a better living standard, thus the government has a role to enhance their living in their old age:

The government has a role to play in supporting the living of older people, doesn't it? If the country wants to improve the living of the people in general, and now there is an increasing number of older people, then undoubtedly the government needs to do something (for us).

Foreseeing the need for home-care support in their old age, the older people in empty-nest households, like Mr Guo from Guangzhou with her only daughter and son-in-law in Canada, considered that those having one-child was destined to be alone. To him, when the family could not take care of older people, the state had a responsibility to look after their needs when they turned old:

At least in the home-care aspect, certainly (we) require someone to take care of us...This depends on the benevolence and generosity of the state, just like doing charitable work (for us).



The decline of family support as a result of the one-child policy is also a challenge to older people who may need external support in their old age. Ms Wu, Deputy Director of a social work organisation in Liwan District, Guangzhou, considered that the state should extend its responsibility to look after those older people who complied with the one-child policy as a compensation for the limited care they could draw upon today. Chen and Yang (2014) commented that this one-child policy has undermined the family capacity in the care of older people and the state should have a responsibility to support them when they get old. Though appreciating the state's efforts to enhance the living standards of the population as a whole, Ms Hu from Beijing, with a monthly pension of about 2,000 yuan, said that she foresaw her future need for residential care when her health deteriorated and the family could not look after her. She, therefore, hoped that the state could build some residential homes for those with a small amount of pension.

At the same time, some of the older people in this research considered that they had a responsibility to pay for the service fees:

Paying for it (meal service) is acceptable. It still costs you money even you make it at home (Ms Zhou, Beijing).

Of course, we need to pay for the service...the fee should not be too high above the average price range (Ms Liu, Guangzhou).

Ms Wang, local Residents Committee officer in Xicheng District, Beijing, who was in-charge of the older people's welfare in her community, also added that to her knowledge, the older people would not mind spending a little more money if the support service was convenient for their use.

The state perceived the care of older people as 'shared' responsibilities among different sectors. The older people perceive that the state has a responsibility to support them in their old age based on their past contributions to the country, the right to share the economic prosperity and their foreseeable needs for home-care support in the future. Seeking state intervention by older people may indicate their perceived incapacity to rely solely on their own to meet the challenges resulting from the demographic and socio-economic changes in

the transitional economy. Through the review of the existing 9064 service framework for older people in Beijing and Guangzhou, it may give answer on how the ‘shared’ responsibilities among different sectors actually works to meet the new expectations of older people, as discussed in Chapter 4.

## The 9064 service framework for older people

This section discusses the rationale behind the 9064 service framework. As noted in Chapter 2, according to the principle laid down in the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan that home care as the basis, community service as the support, and residential service as the supplement, most of the provinces or cities have adopted the 9064 or 9073 service framework for developing the old-age support services at the local level. Regarding the rationale behind this service framework for older people, a professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing explained that the local government, based on the population projection, figured out the proportion of older people requiring home-care support and residential care. Gui (2015) noted that the construction of this service framework is based on the statistical information on the care needs of different groups aged 60 or above. He also pointed out that although there is diversity of the health-care needs even among the same age group, meaning that those in the age group of 60-70 may need home-care support while those in their 80s require no help, the statistical information can still provide a basic reference for service planning.

Table 7. Self-perceived health status and self-care capability of those aged 60 or above in China.

Age group	Healthy	Not healthy, but capable of self-care	Incapable of self-care
60 - 69	90.7%	8.2%	1.2%
70 - 79	77.2%	19.3%	3.5%
80 or above	51.4%	29.2%	19.4%
Overall	83.2%	13.9%	2.9%

(Source: Jiang and Du, 2013, based on the China 6<sup>th</sup> National Census in 2010)

Table 7 shows that above 95% of older people on average perceived themselves to be capable of self-care though among them, about 14% of them considered themselves not healthy. For those who perceived themselves to be incapable of self-care, the percentage increased from 1.2% of those in the age group of 60-69 to 19.4% for those who were 80 or above.

Table 8. Percentage (%) of the different age groups in relation to the total older population aged 60 or over in China.

Year / Age group	60-69	70-79	80 or above
2015	61.6%	27.7%	10.7%
2030	56.5%	31.9%	11.6%
2050	42.5%	33%	24.5%

(Source: World Bank, 2016).

Table 8 shows that the percentage of those who are in the 60-69 is forecast to drop from 61.6% in 2015 to 42.5% in 2050 while that of the 80 or above is predicted to rise from 10.7% to 24.5% over the same period. According to the National Baseline Survey of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) in 2011-2012, less than 10% of those aged below 60s needed assistance in daily activities; however, the percentage rose to over 25% for those in their late 70s and over 50% for those aged over 80 (CHARLS Research Team, 2013). This will imply that when the proportion of those 80 or over increases in future, as indicated in Table 8, more service support is needed to assist them in their self-care routines.

Different levels of care are required to meet different needs of older people (Wright, 1982). The 9064 policy framework has three levels of support catering for different needs of older people. It is a continuum which represents a transition from home care to residential care when older people's health deteriorates. Since the 9064 or 9073 service framework is constructed based on the population data, theoretically, the policy can be adjusted to meet changing needs of older people. Chapter 1 mentioned that there is inter-provincial difference

in terms of the ageing level so that the provincial or local government can decide the service level according to their population profile.

Both Beijing and Guangzhou enacted the laws and regulations to guide the service provision for older people in the community by adopting the 9064 service model. Beijing has adopted the 9064 the framework, as indicated in the 'Opinions on speeding up the services for older people' issued by the Beijing Municipal Government in 2009 (China News, 2009) while Guangzhou also adopted this framework in 2013 (CNCA, 2013c). Under this framework, by 2020, both cities aim at establishing the service support system so that: 90% of the older people can remain in their home either supported by their families or using their personal resources to obtain services in the market, home-care support will be provided to 6% who need extra support in their daily routines while the 4% lacking self-care abilities will receive residential care (Yu, Rosenberg and Cheng, 2015). Since this thesis concerns about the home-care support for older people, the discussion will be chiefly on the services provided for the 90% and 6% of the older people who age in their own home.

Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou, noted that the current older population was mainly composed of a majority of 'younger old' who required no home-care support at present. Under the 9064 framework, the government expected that 90% of the older people were expected to age in their own home utilising their resources with the support of their family, should they require home-care assistance. He predicted that the service demand would be huge when they entered advanced age requiring some degree of assistance:

90% of the older people have to rely on the family...But it doesn't mean that they necessarily have to live with their children. It means the family has to bear the ultimate responsibility...the government won't allocate much resource or subsidy for this group...This 90% can still enjoy the free transportation for older people...joining the social programmes in the centres...because of its huge size (90% of older population), it will entail a great sum of money (if service support is made available for them), which isn't like the resources put

on the other 10% (6% requiring extra home-care support and 4% of those requiring residential service).

Another 6% of the older people include the vulnerable categories to be eligible for state subsidy defined by the respective local governments, and those who need extra home-care support can utilise the day-care or meal service to enable them to remain in home. Although Table 7 shows that above 95% of older people on average perceived themselves to be capable of self-care, Li, F. (2013) pointed out that there are over 50% of older people in empty-nest households at present and among them, some may require a certain degree of assistance in their daily routines. These older people face higher risks since they do not have family members around to provide them with assistance. Service shortage is expected when the state only aims at supporting 6% of the older population. Thus, this service policy effectively limits the state's responsibility in old-age care.

Concerning the service provision for 6% of the older people, there is no indicator such as the amount or types of support services that should be provided for them in the community (Zheng, 2013). Pan (2015) expressed that if the service has to effectively meet the needs of the older population, it should be clear who the 6% of the older people are and the criteria for identifying them as well as the relationship between the 90% and 6%. This concern was also raised by Mr Zheng, Residents Committee in-charge, Dongcheng District in Beijing that there was no means of differentiating the 90% and 6% of older people in the community and there is no official document or clarification from higher level on how to identify the 6% of the older population except having the criteria on defining the vulnerable categories of older people by the local government.

## **Ageing in place**

Before the discussion on the types of services provided under the 9064 framework in Beijing and Guangzhou, the views of the interviewees on 'ageing in one's own home' have to be understood first. The findings in Chapter 4 revealed that as long as their health permitted, a majority of the older people interviewed showed a strong preference for ageing in their own homes. Other stakeholders in this research also supported that staying in one's own home was a desirable living arrangement for older people. Ms Chen, Officer-in-charge of a social

work organisation in Shijingshan District, Beijing, noted that a majority of the older people preferred to live in their own homes since they were familiar with the neighbourhood. She furthered that if they were admitted into a residential home, they could not build up new relationships easily when their old personal ties were cut off. Houben (2001) noted that 'ageing in place' can be understood as creating an environment so that older people can stay at their own home without ending up in residential care prematurely.

Cutchin (2003) saw the advantage of ageing in place as representing independence and control over the environment by older people. Ms Yang, Director of Beijing Cuncaochunhui Elderly Mental Health Service also noted that being familiar with the environment of one's own home could give older people a sense of control and security:

Older people have a better life by staying at their own homes because they are familiar with it (the home environment)...they can move around easily...having no stress to make adjustments. This definitely contributes to their psychological well-being.

Holland *et al.* (2005) stressed that familiar places can give older people a sense of security which can compensate for their hearing or vision impairment. Whether or not older people can age in their own place, to a certain extent, depends on the service support in the community that older people can access. The survey carried out by the Capital University of Economics and Business in Beijing, China in 2010 with those who were aged 60 or over indicated that two-thirds of the interviewees considered that the lack of convenient and affordable services in the community was the biggest difficulty facing them if they had to remain in their home (Wang, J., 2012). Ms Wang, local Residents Committee officer in Xicheng District, Beijing, also noted that a good range of support services readily available and easily accessible was necessary if older people had to live in their home. As noted by a professor in Sociology from Peking University, whether or not older people could lead an independent living in the community depended on the presence of the support services:

Whenever older people have problems, there should be someone who can follow up their needs such as home-based care....If the community has better

support services with sufficient staff and organisations, there will be no problem, of course...(they) can stay at home.

Ageing in one's own home can bring advantages to older people including a sense of security, autonomy in their life routines and support obtained from their established tie in the neighbourhood. Staying in one's home can only be realised when there is provision of a range of services bearing the features of easy accessibility and availability in times of need. The support in general of older people's ageing in their own homes is in line with the state policy which expects about 96% of the older people to remain in home.

## **Key service support at the local level - Beijing and Guangzhou**

As noted in Chapter 2, in response to the rapid ageing and decline of family capacity to take care of older people, the state has, in fact, extended its responsibility through developing the community services at the local level. This section examines the extent to which the key community support services in both Beijing and Guangzhou under the 9064 policy framework can, in practice, meet the expectations of older people to help the latter stay in home. Before going into details about the service provision, how the government has involved the NGOs as a service provider or giving the subsidy to encourage the market to provide services for older people will be examined first.

The NGOs had no role to play in welfare provision during the pre-reform era and there were regulations to tighten its establishment in the early period of the market reform, as discussed in Chapter 2. This was also explained by a professor in Gerontology from Renmin University, Beijing:

In order to set up an NGO, formerly one had to seek a work-unit which allowed the organisation to be affiliated to it. Then, registration with the MCA was the second step. Since it's very difficult to find that unit, it is almost impossible to proceed with the registration.

Since the market reform in the late 1970s, the emergence of social problems such as urban poverty and unemployment has led to much social unrest, calling for increasing service

provision. The involvement of the NGOs in service provision in the community was a pragmatic measure to meet the growing welfare demands when the government realised that, as noted by a professor in Sociology from Peking University:

In recent years, the government has become aware that these organisations can help solve the social problems and therefore recognises that their existence is needed to take up the role of service provision.

The Service Purchase Scheme, started in the late 2000s, has encouraged the setting up of NGOs to obtain the funding contract from the local government. A professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing noted that because of the government's Service Purchase Scheme and the relaxation of the NGO registration procedures, these organisations have developed rapidly. Successful bidding for a government contract could make it easy for the NGOs to provide service in the community, as noted by Mr Bian, Director of Qilerong Mental Health Centre, Beijing:

Some organisations (previously) had difficulty in gaining access to the community to deliver their service. However, if they secure the funding contract, which represents the endorsement of the local government, (they gain convenience).

As noted in Chapter 2, the MCA has enacted several regulations including 'Notice on the promotion of the development of non-governmental social work organisations' (2009), 'Opinions on speeding up the development of services for older people' (2012) and the 'Guiding opinion on the Government Purchase of Social Work Services' (2012) (Leung and Xu, 2015). All these aim at promoting the purchase of social services from the NGOs and encouraging the establishment of social work organisations (SWOs which are NGOs) to provide services staffed by social workers. The functions of these social work organisations will be discussed in later sections.

Despite encouraging the NGOs in service provision, the government still exercised great caution to keep these organisations under check for fear of political upheaval, as pointed out by a professor in Sociology from Peking University:



The background of these organisations can be very complicated. Some are good while some are not. Therefore, if we don't have a good understanding of their backgrounds, it will be problematic...We can't say that it (the government) has not encouraged their development but it is just cautious...It's afraid of having sort of chaos and unrest. The country is so big.

Since the government still adopted a cautious attitude towards the NGOs by requiring them to apply for funding on a yearly basis under the Service Purchase Scheme, this requirement affected the long-term development strategy or survival of these organisations, which was raised by Mr Bian, Director of Qilerong Mental Health Centre, Beijing:

As we need to submit funding applications every year, service innovation is needed in order to bid for the funding successfully. Our survival will be jeopardised if we fail to get the contract...At present, we rely wholly on the government's financial support.

Although NGOs were increasingly involved in providing services for older people in the community, they were still limited in number or scale according to Mr Zheng, Residents Committee in-charge from Dongcheng District, Beijing, who expressed that these organisations usually provided service in one community this year and moved to another community the next, resulting in service disruption. Professor Pei, Tsinghua University, Beijing, criticised that the NGOs were expected to share the welfare responsibilities, but did not receive adequate state support. She noted that the service continuity had been affected when the NGOs could not keep running but had to close down.

The State-NGO partnership emerges when the NGOs are involved in delivering social services and their survival relies heavily on the state's financial support. The number of NGOs has grown but the scale is still constrained, patchy and localised (Duckett and Carrillo, 2011). Leung and Xu (2015) pointed out that support to those NGOs will be given as long as they do not pose a threat to the political leadership. Through the strategies to keep the NGOs under check, the government has successfully got them to go along with its service direction and suppressed those NGOs advocating political reforms or human rights (Ma, 2016). Though the state has involved more NGOs in service provision, there is still a lack of

an effective system to monitor their operation or to ensure their service quality (Wang, 2013). After all, whether or not the NGOs can take up a greater responsibility in service provision for older people depends on the state's financial commitment as well as its political views on their expansion in terms of number and scale and on a system to regulate and help them develop into mature organisations.

## **Services for older population as a whole**

In the following, the services provided by the social work organisations under the Service Purchase Scheme in Beijing and Guangzhou mainly serving the social and developmental needs of older people are discussed.

### ***Social Work Organisation in Beijing***

In Beijing, the local government started the Service Purchase Scheme in 2010 (Li, 2011). Under this scheme, social work organisations have been established to provide services. There were about 70 social work organisations in different districts in Beijing, as informed by Professor Sun, China Youth University of Political Studies, Beijing, when I collected the data in May, 2014. The service targets of these 70 centres are different, which can be older people, children, youths, women or migrants. As reflected by the interviewees, if the centres set older people as their service target, they mainly provided them with educational and social programmes. For those older people expressing to have home-care needs, the social workers would help liaise with their families to work out a care plan or mobilise volunteers to offer help since the centres did not have the resources to fulfil their needs:

Organise social programmes, pay them home visits, sometimes with the volunteers...If they have home-care problems, we'll see if they have children...and first, we have to get in touch with their children, to see how the home-care problem can be dealt with, say, by hiring a domestic helper, or we'll try to arrange a volunteer to see what can do to help (Mr Ma, social worker of a social work organisation, Chaoyang District, Beijing).

For those older people requiring support in daily routines...services provided by the social workers are relatively basic such as chatting with them, bringing

volunteers to visit them...the centres don't have care workers...At present, there is no policy to take care of older people (in general) and they only rely on their children to take up this responsibility. What the children can do is to hire domestic helpers to look after them (Professor Sun, China Youth University of Political Studies, Beijing).

Since these centres are not assigned the responsibility for providing practical home-care support to older people, reliance on family or voluntary service in the neighbourhood remains the means to solve older people's home-care issue. Despite the fact that these centres are to provide social support to older people in the community, the small number or coverage of these centres has limited their effectiveness. With only 70 social work organisations in over 2,900 communities in Beijing, each centre has to take up several sub-districts, under which there are several communities each. Moreover, not all these 70 centres serve older people. It is not surprising that four out of the six older interviewees from Beijing seemed to have no idea of what such organisations were although the other two praised greatly the programmes offered by these centres as well as the concern from the staff there.

Added to the limited number of organisations, there was a problem of uneven locational distribution so that older people in districts with better economic resources could have access to better services, as indicated by Ms Yang, Director of Beijing Cuncaochunhui Elderly Mental Health Service:

Its distribution is not equal. Chaoyang district (one of the districts in Beijing) has the greatest number of these organisations since it has more economic resources to purchase the services...As a rough estimate, each organisation can serve 10,000 older persons at most. Beijing has around 2,600,000 older persons now, needs at least 270 organisations, but now it has only 70 and not all of them serve older people.

Regarding the variation in the resources of different districts, a professor in Gerontology from Renmin University in Beijing explained that in theory, those communities with fewer resources would receive more financial support from the government, yet, there still existed variations among the districts or communities. She further explained that for example, in

Xicheng District (one of the districts in Beijing) where there were a lot of banking or financial institutions, apart from the financial input from the higher government level, the local government also had better economic resources to provide more subsidies to its residents and purchase more services for the older people. In other words, under the Service Purchase Scheme, the amount of social service purchased depends on the financial capacity of the districts. This implies that whether or not older people have access to the service depends on the economic performance of the districts they are living at. To balance the market efficiency and social equity, the government has started a plan for the equalisation of basic public and social services for everyone by 2020 to reduce the impact of regional disparities on the service provision (Wang and Herd, 2013; Zhang, 2013). This policy, to a certain extent, can redress the imbalance among provinces but the variations in service delivery within the province itself still exist (Wang and Herd, 2013).

In sum, these social work organisations serve to establish new networks for older people, which is important when changes in neighbourhood life have upset much of older people's social ties there, as discussed in Chapter 5. However, the findings of this research indicate that their small number and uneven distribution have limited their effectiveness. The discussion below shows another service model in Guangzhou which can together provide insights on how to enhance the support for older people.

### ***Integrated Family Service Centre in Guangzhou***

Guangdong Province was identified by the MCA as the key location for the development of the social work organisations in 2009 (Leung and Xu, 2015). This explains why Guangzhou, the largest city in Guangdong Province, has witnessed a sharp rise in the number of social work organisations from a few in 2008 to 217 in 2013 (Liu, 2014). The integrated family service centres have been operated by the social work organisations (NGOs) on a trial-run basis in 2010 and have covered all sub-districts since 2012 under the Service Purchase Scheme (Liu, 2014). At the time the research was conducted in Guangzhou in July and October 2014, there were over 150 integrated family service centres in 120-130 sub-districts, from the information given by Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou. There is one centre in every sub-district or two centres in those sub-districts

covering a wider geographical area. Each of these centres provides services to three target groups such as the family, the older people and the youth. To some older people in this research, these centres represented the state's increasing responsibility towards their life which was enriched through their participation in the social programmes there:

This reflects that the government has made changes. When we are old, the government provides us with this venue so that we can learn, develop ourselves and communicate with others. We feel happy (Ms Liang, Guangzhou).

There is improvement in the services for older people compared to those in the older days...just like this centre. The government has shown concern for us, they (the centre staff) also visit the older people regularly, providing us with a venue for participating in social activities. It's good. We didn't have this before. We just stayed at home with no place to go (Ms Ouyang, Guangzhou).

The establishment of these centres is the state policy to provide older people an opportunity to connect with the community after their retirement. Nevertheless, Ms Chen from Guangzhou expressed that these centres, with its small numbers, could not do much to support them:

There is only one centre in every sub-district...The sub-district is so big, has several communities under it. I don't know when the centre has the time to look after the needs of our community, and my needs.

The insufficient staffing was given as a reason by the service operators for failing to offer much practical support to older people in their service areas:

We have four social workers providing intensive service for around 200 older people while there are still many thousands of them in the sub-district served by our centre. There is staffing shortage....We just mobilise other older people who are active...are willing to serve as volunteers to visit those who are living alone or widowed (Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou).

We now focus on a special category of older people, those who are 80 or above, just narrow the service coverage, because it's impossible to serve all in the whole sub-district. It's just empty words....(If they have difficulty in their daily routines), there is not much practical assistance we can offer to them...We can help them call their family (Ms Wu, Deputy Director of a social work organisation, Liwan District, Guangzhou).

To a certain extent, the provision of the social programmes has reflected the increasing recognition of the new social needs of older people whose life focus has gradually moved away from the family domain. The discussion on the operation of the social work organisations in Beijing, however, reveals its limited effectiveness because of its small number or insufficient coverage. Since Guangzhou has begun operating such service at an earlier stage, its service network is better developed with at least one centre in every sub-district serving several communities. Despite having a better service network, Guangzhou, like Beijing, faces similar drawbacks such as insufficient resources, as commented by both the older people and the service operators in this study. This may reflect that community facilities for older people are insufficient to meet their needs. The service mission of these centres is not to provide home-care support to older people but they are still looked upon as having such a responsibility when older people are their service targets. The social workers can only mobilise volunteers to provide help, liaise with their family or help explore the private service if the older people need home-care assistance. However, it is unrealistic to expect that this arrangement can support the older people, given the declining role of the family and the irregular nature of the voluntary service as explained in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

When about 96% of older people are expected to live in their home, a good network of home-care service support should be made available in the community. Ideally, there should be at least one social work organisation in every sub-district. Apart from serving the developmental needs of older people, these centres can also serve as resource points to provide information on the local home-care service. This arrangement can resolve the issue of service coordination mentioned by Ms Zhang, Team Leader of the Home Care Support

Section of an Elderly Integrated Services Centre in Haizhu District, Guangzhou. She noted that the lack of service coordination at the local level confused older people when they sought community services:

There are several old-age related service units such as the Integrated Family Service Centre, Home-based Service Centre, Residents Committee, Street Office...Older people often have no idea of what these centres or offices are. When they want to seek services, they are likely to go to the Residents Committee first since they are more familiar with it. From there, the older people may be directed to the Integrated Family Service Centre for help. But if the staff there are unable to help, they then direct the older people to try another service unit...There is no coordination for the dissemination of service information to older people. In the end, the older people don't know where and what they can get to solve the problem.

When the service units do not even seem to have a good knowledge of the service provision in the community, they cannot offer timely assistance to older people when the latter need support and especially when their children are not around to help make enquiry for them. Therefore, if social workers of these centres can serve as the resource persons, they can help improve the accessibility of service information to older people.

### **Services for older people who need extra home-care support**

This section discusses the service content for the 6% of the older people under the 9064 service framework. It includes the state support to the vulnerable categories of older people, as defined by the respective local governments and two other key types of service support - meal service and day-care service for any older person who needs relief to their home-care difficulty.

#### ***State support to special categories of older people***

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan on Ageing Service Development (2006 - 2010) stipulated that more support should be given to special categories of older people. In line with this development plan, policies have been formulated at the local level. Among the

6% of the older people, there exist certain categories of them who are defined by the local government deserving extra help.

A home-based service centre has been established in every sub-district to provide home-based care support to several categories of older people. In Guangzhou, the policy document 'Means of implementing home-based support services for older people in the community' was enacted in 2008 which stated that free home-based services should be provided to six categories of older people aged 60 or above including (Guangzhou Municipal Government, 2008):

- i) The Three Nos (people with no working capacity, no source of income and no family)
- ii) Those without self-care abilities and now receiving social assistance or having low income
- iii) Those residents who are awarded the honour in labour contribution by the district or higher level of government and who have no self-care abilities
- iv) Those aged 80 or above either living alone or with severely disabled children
- v) Those receiving social assistance or having low income, and who are either living alone or with severely disabled children
- vi) Those aged 100 or over.

The interviewees gave the following account of its logistic arrangement. The Street Office in each sub-district allocates an amount ranging from 200-400 yuan per month to each older person belonging to these categories. The entitled amount depends on which category an older person belongs to. This financial subsidy is spent on home-based support services which charges about 15-20 yuan per service hour. The types of services provided include meal delivery, household cleaning, laundry, shopping, bathing, rehabilitative training, escort for medical consultation or emotional support in the form of chatting or concern visits. The home-based worker will discuss with the older people the frequency of visits and the kinds of service they need.

The older people included in these six categories showed that the government's responsibility is limited to support the disadvantaged in the society such as those in



advanced age, with low income, lacking self-care abilities, having a disabled family member or living alone. According to Ms Zhang, Team Leader of the Home Care Support Section of an Elderly Integrated Services Centre in Haizhu District, Guangzhou, the amount of service support to these special categories of older people was low and the service coverage to older people in one sub-district was very limited, reflecting the government's approach in providing only minimum level of protection to the vulnerable groups:

Because the government only provides the deprived categories of older people with minimum service...because of the limited financial support, some of them can only receive service once a week...Besides, it only serves about 500-600 older people in a sub-district but there are several tens of thousands of older people in one sub-district. The coverage is very small.

Moreover, these six categories of older people to be eligible for the home-based support service needed to have no family support, as Ms Wu, Deputy Director of a social work organisation in Liwan District, Guangzhou, emphasised:

This service is for those older people who have no one to look after them. That means they are without children. They have to live alone. If a couple live together, they won't be eligible. Those who have severe illness still have to meet the criterion of having no family members. Even though their children are working in another city, living far away from them, it is still not possible...They (the children) can't just give the excuse that they have to work and can't take care of them (parents) unless they have disabilities.

Those older people expressing that they had home-care problems but not in the above categories would be referred to the integrated family service centre to see if volunteers could be arranged for them as Ms Hong, local Residents Committee officer in Yuexiu District, Guangzhou, pointed out:

Let me give you an example. Once there was an older lady who was nearly 80, living alone and needing home-care assistance. But the criteria set for the service are that they must be at least 80 years old and living alone...So, she

was not eligible...We then referred her to the integrated family service centre to see if volunteers can help – most likely to be university students – to provide, say, cleaning service for her on Saturdays and Sundays.

The above quotes reveal the problems that services for vulnerable categories of older people are kept at low level and there is a lack of flexibility to consider those not meeting the criteria for service entitlement in Guangzhou.

Similar to Guangzhou, in Beijing, the policy document 'Means of providing home-care services to older people and disabled persons in the community' in 2009 stated that those older people who are between 60 and 79 years old and suffer from severe disabilities or those who are aged 80 or above will receive a monthly cash coupon of 100 yuan (Central People's Government, 2009). The older people can use the coupon to purchase services to relieve their home-care difficulties from the contract service providers in the market with state subsidy. The services include meal provision, a wide range of home-based care such as bathing, hair-cutting, home repair, household cleaning or rehabilitative care. These vouchers are also accepted in fast-food restaurants or supermarkets.

The cash coupon is given out to relieve the older people's home-care problems, yet, it turns out to be a universal benefit for those who are 80 or above. Professor Pei, Tsinghua University, Beijing, commented that allocating resources in such a manner could not help those older people who were in need but did not meet the criteria of age or the level of disabilities:

For those who have reached 80 or above, you will give them a cash coupon, 100 yuan, 200 yuan...But we know that a majority of the urban older people have pensions. Some of the retired civil servants even have 10,000 yuan a month. If you give them 100 yuan, what's it for? But we have some older people who are living in poverty but have not reached the age of 80...and have the (home-care) need, but they are not eligible...It is ridiculous, isn't it?

The above quote brings to the attention of two issues. Firstly, like the arrangement in Guangzhou, there is a lack of flexibility in providing services to those who fall outside the

defined categories but are in need of support. Secondly, when resources are not unlimited, targeting the needy is necessary. Aged 86, Ms Lu, a former professor in Peking University with a monthly pension of 6,000 yuan, noted that she was capable of self-care and required no home-care service at present, thus simply using the coupon for shopping in the supermarket. Ms Lu's case illustrates the point that the universal benefit may not be required by those aged 80 or above with sound financial status.

A research conducted in three districts in Beijing in 2010 on the utilisation of the cash coupons among those aged 80 or over showed that their utilisation rate was high, reaching 98% (Zhang, Kui and Xu, 2012). Yet, over 90% of the older people indicated that they used the coupons to purchase food or daily necessities and less than 10% used them on home-care services such as laundry, doing household chores, or hair-cutting (Zhang, Kui and Xu, 2012). Being capable of self-care, the insufficient network of the contract service providers or the unsatisfactory service quality are the reasons for them not to use the coupons on the home-care services. This reflects the issue of resource targeting, the need to improve the service network as well as monitoring the service quality of the providers with state subsidy.

Moreover, the small amount of state subsidy per person cannot meet the needs of those older people with severe disabilities, requiring a higher level of service support. Professor Sun from China Youth University of Political Studies, Beijing, was of the opinion that more state support should be given to those with severe disabilities:

The government should pay more attention to those with severe disabilities or dementia with financial problems, especially if their children aren't living with them. For those who are over 80, now they are just given cash coupons of around 100 yuan or 200 yuan each month...not enough at all.

The above discussion on the home-based support services for special categories of older people in both cities reveals that there exists the problem of targeting, inadequate support for those with severe disabilities, lack of flexibility to assist those outside the categories, limited service coverage and insufficient monitoring of service quality. Confining its responsibility to support certain categories of older people means that the family has to shoulder the care responsibility when older people cannot solve their home-care problems themselves but are

not eligible for state support or the services fall short of their needs. This puts the older people in a dilemma that while they are not willing to add trouble to their children, they have to if there are no alternatives to resolve the problems themselves.

The limited service availability has in effect defined the personal and family responsibility in shouldering the welfare of older people. Patsios and Davey (2005) noted that the government can determine who should have the 'need for service' such that those without informal support would receive home-based care whereas those who have greater needs but having family support are not eligible for the state's provisions. In this regard, Twigg (1989) also noted that when the care-givers are often seen as the key support for their disabled relatives, no practical help is available to them when they can still manage the home-care tasks. In the Chinese context, the selection mechanism of the policy as discussed above reflects its cultural value that 'family' remains the cornerstone in supporting older people. Although the rights of older people to receive care have been stipulated in the 'Welfare Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Older People' (1996), they are seen as the guiding principles without specifying the mandatory service provision. Rather, the family is heavily seen bearing the key responsibility in the care of older people in the law. The message of family responsibility is reinforced through legal means, limited service provision as well as media coverage of the speeches of government officials, as discussed in previous chapters.

### ***Home-care support services in the community***

#### **Day-care service centre**

The day-care service is to support those older people who have difficulty in managing their daily routines at home. Their daytime routines are taken care of in the day centres with provision of meals, personal care or social activities. As informed by Ms Wu, Deputy Director of a social work organisation, Liwan District, Guangzhou, the day-care service centres are operated by the NGO or the Street Office. Some centres are situated in the residential homes or in the integrated family service centre. The older person, like Ms Hu from Beijing, welcomed this type of service in the community where older people could have meals and enjoy the social activities there. Professor Sun from China Youth University of Political

Studies in Beijing also noted that this service was important to those who needed support in the daytime when the family was not available.

However, there comes the question of who can benefit from the day-care service. Those who use this service usually suffer from different degrees of disabilities and need someone to bring them to the day-care centre. In other words, it may only benefit those who have someone to take them to the centre, possibly those who still live with their families. In reality, there are fewer and fewer older people living with the younger generation. These inherent difficulties of access to service were further elaborated by the following interviewees:

When this service was first introduced ten years ago...the older people told me that if they had good health, they would stay at home...didn't want to lose freedom. But if they were having some sort of mobility difficulty, there was no transportation arrangement for them to go to the centre (A professor in Gerontology from Renmin University, Beijing).

But they (the day-care centres) are in a difficult position to operate since not too many older people use their service...Those who are healthy and can move about will not go there. Those who are frail can't go there since they don't have the ability to do so....It depends on whether the family members can bring them to the day-care centre...(that means) at least the family members have to live with them (Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou).

As set by the local government, by 2015, there will be at least one day-care centre in every sub-district covering several communities. The day-care centre must be very convenient to older people. For example, it should be near the block they live in...It is only under this condition that older people can use it. If they even have to cross the road (to reach the centre), they aren't willing to use it (Ms Zhang, Team Leader of the Home Care Support Section of an Elderly Integrated Services Centre in Haizhu District, Guangzhou)

Ms Zhang further pointed out that their centre was newly established but encountered tremendous difficulty in encouraging day-care service utilisation even though they extended the service hours from early morning till late evening so as to give the children the convenience to escort their parents to receive the service. Because of its relatively remote location and lack of transportation arrangement, their centre, she said, proposed to the district government that they would make their own transportation arrangement so as to help older people use their service. Yet, this proposal was turned down on account of liability issue in case of traffic accident. To boost the utilisation rate, her centre has to accept any older person to use the service in order to fulfil the statistical targets for the number of users. As observed in my two visits to this centre in July and October 2014, it was either empty or attended by a group of older people with an active and healthy look who were obviously not the targets of the day-care service. This illustrates that when there is service provision but without the supportive measures to facilitate its usage, inefficient use of services is the outcome since it cannot benefit those who need the service but is taken up by those who do not need it. This may reflect how the government perceived the meaning of community when designing the service. But it may not reflect the wish of older people who dislike travelling a long distance to receive the so-called community service even though it can be reached by public transportation (Means, Richards and Smith, 2008). As discussed in the previous section, from the perspective of the interviewees, convenience is an important factor in their use of the service. Even though the government has provided the service in the community and achieved a certain number of users, it does not necessarily mean the service has benefitted the needy persons until an understanding of its operation has been made.

Concerning the remote location of the service unit, Ms Zhang explained that the properties near residential areas were usually the commercial premises, the rentals of which were very expensive. Therefore, most of the newly established social service units can only take up the less favourable locations. Since the economic reform, the local government has the autonomy in allocating land resources and the accessible locations are mostly taken up by the commercial sector which can afford a high rental (Cheng, 2012).

The lack of skilled care workers to provide service in these centres was another concern raised by Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou, which led to the outcome that some categories of older people who had the greatest need were excluded:

Since the care workers providing day-care service don't possess the right professional skills, the centre operators would exercise great caution when they admit their service users. For example, they will assess if an older person suffers from illnesses, dementia...If an older person under their care has run away from the centre, the organisations have to shoulder the responsibility. Or if they admit an older person with dementia, they need to arrange one-to-one care support. The staffing cost will be very high.

Professor Liu of Peking University remarked that it was easy to improve service facilities but human resource training took a relatively long period of time. To him, there were not enough professional care workers especially those having the skills to look after those older people with dementia. Regarding this, a professor in Sociology from Peking University also recognised the lack of professional staff team as a key problem hindering the service development in the community despite the presence of infrastructural facilities:

The government has made investments such as building residential homes or developing facilities for older people in the community. But the problem is the lack of professional staff; we need different types of professionals such as care workers, therapists, counsellors, social workers. It requires a multi-disciplinary team to support the service. Now, we don't have this.

According to a China Youth Daily news report (2016), the existing care workers working in old-age related services were less than one million, of whom only 2% having received training, which is short of the ten million workers required for the whole industry. The staff shortage is mainly due to its tough job nature, low wage and social status and the nature of the existing pool of care workers, who are mainly composed of the lay-offs or rural migrants, and who are characterised by their high job mobility, lack of skills or low educational level (Wang, H., 2012; Welfare China, 2013).

The discussion in this section highlights the importance of service accessibility and the demand for skilled staff to support the day-care service provision.

### **Meal service**

The provision of meal service in a canteen or meal delivery to those with mobility problem can relieve the difficulty of older people in shopping for food or preparing meals. The discussion brings out the importance of state subsidy so as to keep the price at an affordable level as well as improving its service accessibility.

Ms Zhou from Beijing noted that meal service could meet the needs of older people while at the same time, she also brought out the problem of service continuity:

Staying in one's own home with community services provided such as a canteen for older people...the problem of meal preparation can be solved...In our community, there was a canteen. Perhaps it was for profit; it closed after operating for a while, now it comes back again. But before that, there were many canteens that have been wound up.

Whether or not the service can benefit older people depends on their motivation to use it. Its affordability has to be taken into consideration. On top of this, the state's financial subsidy to the enterprises is crucial to ensure service continuity, as emphasised by the interviewees:

It is rather difficult for enterprises to maintain the service. If the price of the meals is set at a costly level, the older people can't afford it. If it is priced too low, they (the restaurants) can't maintain their business (Mr Zhan, project-in-charge of a NGO providing emotional support to older people in Beijing).

In fact, there are meal caterers in the communities but older people don't want to spend money. When they know that it costs 10 yuan per meal but they can make it themselves, say, at 8 yuan, then they are not willing to spend 10 yuan...the enterprises need to have profits but it is difficult to change their habit of spending money. Therefore, the government is now giving subsidy to these meal caterers so that they can continue providing the service at a lower



cost in the community (Ms Yang, Director of the Beijing Cuncaochunhui Elderly Mental Health Service).

The above quotes indicate that the meal service provision mainly relies on state's subsidy which should be maintained. Accessibility is also an important factor affecting the meal service utilisation, as with the day-care service. Mr Li, Deputy Director of Kaixin Family Services Centre, Guangzhou, mentioned that the locational inconvenience was the key reason for the low service utilisation:

The government has required every sub-district to establish the canteen for older people. However, they are still very few in number...the older people are not aware of their existence. Besides, there is only one in every sub-district...The administrative boundary of a sub-district is very extensive, if they have to travel a long distance, they are not willing to go.

When the older people interviewed in Guangzhou were asked whether they knew about the meal service, Ms Liu said that she was only aware of a canteen for older people in Liwan District where there was a relatively high proportion of older population. However, she had no idea of whether there was one in her community in Haizhu District which was also an old district with a high percentage of older population. Mr Fan from Guangzhou living in Yuexiu district with a high concentration of older people said that he never heard about the meal service in his community. This situation was similar in Beijing. All the six older people interviewed indicated that they had heard about the meal service in other communities but were unsure where to find such service or, more accurately, if there was such service provision in their own communities. This may indicate that the number of such establishments is, in reality, very small or the older people lack access to information about the service facilities.

Demands for community services will change in time. Older people in their 80s who have gone through the hardships in the past are used to a thrifty way of life. However, those who are now in their 60s have experienced the economic growth with improved living standard. Their spending pattern will be different from the past generation as they are more willing to spend money to satisfy their needs. Also, the service demand is expected to grow when the

number of empty-nest households is increasing. To cope with this, the role of the state in providing financial support is essential to ensure the service continuity and to encourage more establishments to provide meal service in the community.

As a summing up of the key home-care support services at the local level, there are social work organisations and integrated family service centres catering for the social needs of the older population and organising volunteers to offer home-care support to those who express their need. The extra home-care support targeting the 6% of the older people included the assistance given to special categories of older people and day-care and meal service offered in every sub-district. Put it simply, when an older person requires home-care support and does not belong to the 'deserving' categories, one can make use of the day-care or meal service in the community. If the services are not available and the older person cannot afford the private service, one can only seek assistance from the NGOs or the Residents Committee to arrange voluntary service or rely on the family for support. Though the state policy is to encourage older people to age in home with community service support, nonetheless, in practice, the fieldwork suggests the service provisions are still very limited. The problems include understaffing, uneven and limited service distribution, lack of accessibility and misdirected resources. To a certain extent, the following two surveys also illustrate the problems in the service provision and delivery in the community. A survey conducted in Guangzhou in 2015 found that only 27% of the residents were satisfied with the home-care provision for older people (Gan, Liang and Wu, 2015). The residents in the above survey indicated that the service priority should aim at providing home-care, rehabilitative care and psychological support for older people, but the existing service was on meeting their social needs, being supplemented by the private domestic household services. Another survey conducted by the Capital University of Economics and Business in Beijing in 2010 with those who were aged 60 or over showed that only 13.7% and 8.5% had knowledge of the day-care service centres and cash coupons respectively while 58.3% expressed that they did not know much about the home-care services available in their community (Wang, J., 2012).

## **Problem with the policy implementation**

Though the expansion of community support services for older people has signified the increasing state responsibility, the discussion above has highlighted the gaps between the provision and meeting the expectations of older people. The following discussion attempts to uncover the problems leading to service failures in its implementation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the central government defines the social policy framework while the local government is responsible for its implementation. Chan, Ngok and Phillips (2008) noted that the social policies, instead of being regulated by law, are formulated by directives, decisions, opinions and circulars so as to give flexibility to the local government. Since then, the central government can no longer ensure the service standards and outcomes. A professor in Sociology from Peking University explained that variations in service outcomes could be due to the lack of sufficient monitoring from the higher level:

Owing to the vast size of the country, it is difficult for the central government to monitor how the policy is implemented. It has to rely on the local government to do the job. The central government can only give instructions through the documents or send some officials to the local level to randomly check the work progress.

When the central government is confined to giving policy direction with limited capacity to monitor its implementation and with the absence of users' feedback, the outcome will be the weak policy compliance at the local level (Cook, 2011). Lacking the financial commitment from the central government, the quantity of service provision is highly dependent on the ability of the local government to generate sufficient income to support the services, which explains variations among different districts in the service output (Leung, 2005; Chan, Ngok and Phillips, 2008). Guan and Xu (2011) was of the opinion that if the local government is left to bear the financial responsibility, variation in the service output will be the outcome, leading to the existence of a gap between the policy goal and implementation. Under the 9064 policy framework, apart from the eligibility criteria of the special categories for home-care support, there is no indicator showing types of services or the amount of care that should be provided to those older people expressing home-care difficulties. It may be due to the reason that the

amount of services provided has to depend on the economic resources of the local government.

Chan, Ngok and Phillips (2008) noted that since the government ministries can easily propose new measures to address welfare problems within short notice, local officials may find it difficult to understand the policy rationale and implement them. The lack of understanding of the policy aim among local government officials is another factor related to the variation in service outcome, as raised by Mr Zheng, Residents Committee in-charge from Dongcheng District, Beijing. He gave an example that the meaning of community care involving the concept of 'care in the community' and 'care by the community' was subjected to the interpretations of local officials. He opined that if officials were not certain of the policy rationale or direction, they did not know the amount of service that should be delivered to meet the needs of older people:

No matter how it is interpreted, the fundamental issue is related to what the function of the community is. Now, it means the voluntary service...Having a clear distinction between the service concepts of 'care in the community' and 'care by the community' is very important when we implement the policy at the local level. Who is responsible for doing what? What is the role of community?...We have no idea...we just do something we think it's right, depending on our own interpretations.

As explained by Walker (1982) and Harding (1996), 'care in the community' means that formal services are provided in the community to meet the needs of the people. On the other hand, 'care by the community' implied that the care is rendered mostly by informal sectors such as the family, friends or neighbours in the community. The review of the 9064 service framework in both cities shows that the concept of 'care by the community' has been adopted with limited formal service provision and reliance on the family and the voluntary service to support the older people. Without a system in place to specify the types or the amount of care to be provided, it is likely to result in the irregularity and variation in service provision in different communities, sub-districts or districts.

Professor Pei from Tsinghua University also attributed the randomness and irregularity to the lack of a proper policy-making process which should define clearly the policy scope and plan. It should also consider how the needs can be met, building a legal foundation to back up the policy and involving the service users to express their policy views:

The policy implementation is random, there is no system in place which states what basic things they have to provide and to what extent it should be done... The policy-making process here is very different from that of the Western countries where it has to go through the process of needs assessment, parliamentary debate, pass the law...and then have the implementation guidelines, allocation of budget...then set up legislation to state what older people are entitled to. But we don't have this...There is no public monitoring...China is not a democratic country and there are not many channels through which older people can voice their opinions. Even the media is state-controlled...There is internet but it's not the means older people commonly use to express their concern.

In short, the lack of an effective monitoring system from a higher level of government and from the service users, insufficient understanding of the policy goals as well as the absence of a proper policy-making process has inevitably resulted in a policy which is unresponsive to the needs of older people.

As a summary of this chapter, with over three decades of economic reform, the country has sustained a fast economic growth. Though the development of the support services for older people has, to a certain extent, reflected increased state responsibility, the review of the home-care support services under the 9064 framework indicates their deficiencies rather than their ability to assist older people to age in place. Although the state has policy to encourage both the NGOs and private sector to provide service in the community, they still need more input and support from the state in order to play a bigger role in service provision. Under the disguise of 'shared responsibilities' among different sectors in the care of older people, the very limited home-care support service has in effect shifted back most of the

responsibility to the family. The state seems not paying enough attention to the new expectations of older people who desire autonomy and are reluctant to rely on family support.

## **Policy implications**

The state has perceived the care of older people as a 'shared' responsibility among different sectors: state, family, community, NGOs and market. This is in line with the welfare approach of 'small government and big society' since the market reform, with emphasis on multiple funding sources and involvement of different sectors in service provision (Xu and Chow, 2011; Wong and Leung, 2012; Lei and Walker, 2013). Both the literature review and this research show the state has: involved NGOs as service partners; given financial subsidy to private enterprises to provide service locally; enforced family responsibility through legal means; promoted voluntary service to serve older people in the community, in order to join up with other sectors to support older people.

Bringing together the formal and informal sectors to provide care for older people is necessary. Yet, the findings reveal that the 9064 service framework has put heavy emphasis on older people's personal responsibility, while the family remains the ultimate support for them. The service delivery is laden with problems such as: inaccessibility, limited coverage, insufficient skilled workers, fragmentation and misdirected targeting. Even though the government has limited home-care support to about 6% of older people, only a low level of service provision was given to the vulnerable categories of older people, and the types of service or its coverage in the community for their use is very limited. For those who fall outside the defined categories and are in need of home-care support, if the existing service cannot meet their needs, they may seek voluntary service, private service or their family for assistance ultimately. The welfare philosophy of avoiding cultivating state-dependence remains the core principle that underlies the Chinese policies for older people (Saich, 2008; Zhang and Xu, 2010; Zheng, 2013). This also leads to a policy contradiction in that the policy response to reduced family capacity in the care of older people actually heavily relies on family for support. The state has defined its limited responsibility expecting other sectors to fill the gaps. This apparently falls short of the expectations of the older people because some of them believe the state has a responsibility to look after them in their old age.

The state's policy framework attaching importance to the family may reflect its insufficient understanding, or attention given to the emerging needs of older people whose perception of the rights and responsibilities regarding family care has changed. This research reveals that older people, in fact, expect less filial responsibilities from the family and turn to be more independent when their improved financial condition gives them more choice in lifestyles. Their changing perception regarding family responsibility also brings about changes to their expectation of the state's responsibility, as reflected by the quotes such as 'should show more concern' or 'need to do something'. They are more ready to assert their rights to state care when they witness the substantial economic growth and they have contributed to the economic success, thus having a right to share the prosperity. The older people's assertion of the right may also reflect their insecure feeling in the transitional economy when they find that informal sources of support are not reliable and they need to seek an anchor to fill the gap. The literature review did bring out views on who should share the care responsibility for older people. This research shows the changing perceptions of the older people about their rights and responsibilities towards old-age care, and enhances our understanding of the reality which has policy implications. In theory, older people have a moral and legal right to family care. In practice, it is unrealistic to exercise this right when social changes have greatly weakened the family's care capacity.

The independence and autonomy in old age, as valued by the older people in this research, points to the argument that the government, rather than seeing older people as dependent members in the family, should recognise them as independent individuals in the society and possess a policy to support their independence. Given the share of the older population reaching one-third of the total population by 2050, and the increasing share of those 80 or above in the aged population, as highlighted in the previous section, it is foreseeable that the demand for home-care support will increase tremendously in the next one or two decades if they have to 'age in place'. A new balance in 'shared' responsibilities in old-age care should reflect the changes in views towards the rights and responsibilities associated with different types of old-age support in the contemporary society.

Since the government's policy is to encourage about 96% of the older people to age in their own home, it has a responsibility to establish a service network in the community to support this policy. Zheng (2013) explained that although the social insurance and social assistance schemes can give a great majority of the older people in urban areas financial protection, there is a lack of home-care service in the community. He noted that even though older people can afford private services, they cannot easily obtain it from the market. This may explain the willingness of the older people in this research to pay for improved home-care service in the community. Johansson and Sundstorm (2006) noted that old-age care provision is very much a sense of security, which can be boosted when older people understand that a formal service is readily available when needs while the actual use of such service may be low. If there is adequate home-care support, older people can have more confidence to remain at home without ending up in residential care prematurely, which is a personal and social strain.

A range of home-based and community-based support services should be provided to meet different levels of needs of older people. To increase service types and service coverage, both the NGOs and private enterprises should be given more financial support to expand the provision. By encouraging more of the existing enterprises to participate in service provision, it can easily increase the service supply within a short time. Apart from being a funder, the government should also be a regulator to develop a monitoring system to improve accountability in use of public money. Feedback from both older people and their family should be collected and monitored.

About the service content, a few interviewees highlighted the importance of home-based medical support by state provision in Chapter 4, since it could not be obtained in the market. As informed by the interviewees, like Ms Zhang, Team Leader of the Home Care Support Section of an Elderly Integrated Services Centre in Haizhu District, Guangzhou, provision now is very scant and random since it has to depend on the arrangement by the community hospital to make visits to older people. Such provision needs a greater role from the local or district government to coordinate or mobilise the medical resources in the community to provide this service.



To support the service provision, the findings also bring out the importance of having a professional staff team to provide the continuum of service from home-based care to residential care. When the 'old-old' category is expanding, there will be an increasing number of older people who are likely to suffer from chronic illness or dementia, requiring a paramedical team such as therapists or psychologists to provide the complexity of care. This involves human resource planning through the expansion of training institutes, incentives to encourage people to join the care profession, and the provision of in-service training to enhance the professional competence of the existing pool of care workers.

When the service network has been established, another concern is who should be eligible for the service. Offering universal welfare benefits is not sustainable in the long-run when the issue of equity has to be considered in the context of competing social demands in a transitional economy, and where there is still a significant proportion of the rural population living in poverty. If the welfare system is to be sustainable, rationing of resources is necessary. When services are provided, older people should be made responsible for payment, especially when a great majority of this generation of older people have pensions and enjoy a greater purchasing power today. In fact, some of the older people in this research expressed their willingness to pay, given that the price level was not beyond their means. For those who can afford the service in the market, they should be encouraged to make private arrangements themselves to assist their daily routines, such as employing a live-in or part-time care worker.

State support should still be provided to the special categories of older people. However, the relative standardisation of benefits in the current system lacks flexibility to cater to those who need a greater amount of care or those who fall outside the categories but demonstrating the service need. Therefore, the local government should devise an assessment system to assess the self-care abilities of older people, so as to ascertain their home-care needs and determine the types or the amount of care they should receive. A clear indicator of the amount of care allocated to older people with different levels of needs will facilitate the targeting of resources upon those in need. Moreover, discretion should be exercised to support those who are outside the defined categories but express to have financial difficulty.

Having family support should not be a factor that deprives older people of financial assistance to obtain the service.

In brief, the state should be responsible for: building a service network and setting up a system to monitor the service provision; assessing the needs of those who seem to have home-care difficulties, and continuing assisting the special categories of older people. Under this improved framework, older people can have access to service when they desire to age in their home and exercise choice if they do not wish to rely on the family or when the family has no capacity to support them. The welfare philosophy should be adjusted to reflect the demographic and socio-economic reality which demands greater state responsibility in a transitional economy. Given that the future generations of older people are more educated and are also growing in number, they are more likely to make their voices heard in regard to public policies or issues that affect their lives. Rather than adhering to the impression that Chinese older people are dependent, the state may look more at the advantages of promoting an active and independent life among older people so as to utilise their resource potential to make contribution to the society, which in the long run can save on social costs.

## **Chapter seven: New roles of different types of old-age support**

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### **Changing support for older people**

The demographic challenges and socio-economic changes in China since the market reform started in the late 1970s have aroused much social concern about the sustainability and practicality of relying on informal family and neighbourhood support for old-age care in the transitional economy. The care of older people has often been seen as a family responsibility where Confucian teachings, emphasising filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity, give older people the right to family care. However, increasing population mobility, the small family size, and multiple roles of the younger generation in the market economy serve to weaken the capacity of families to render support to older people as in the past. Among all the factors, the one-child policy has been seen as a key factor making reliance on family support unviable.

Moreover, urban re-development and frequent turnover of residents have upset the established social ties of older people in the neighbourhood which used to be another source of support when neighbourly rights and responsibilities were once respected. Instead, a new set of values, such as privacy, personal leisure outside one's neighbourhood, and increasing social stratification under the market economy, serve to distance the relationship between individuals. Collective responsibility is no longer a norm which can provide reliable support to older people.

The state shouldered a high level of welfare responsibility for urban workers during the pre-reform era. After retirement, older people were still looked after by their work units. Adopting the neoliberal welfare approach emphasising personal responsibility since the economic reform, the state, restricting its responsibility to that of mainly looking after deprived groups, has relied more on the responsibility of the family or the neighbourhood in the care of older people. Whichever party played a bigger role, these three key sources of support – the family, the neighbourhood and the state - functioned in balance in a stable society with little population mobility, and with sustainable co-residence living arrangements in big families. Facing the declining role of informal care and the ongoing socio-economic changes, seeking

a new balance among these three sectors in sharing the responsibilities in old-age care has become a national concern.

To study changing perspectives on different types of old-age support, 39 qualitative interviews with key stakeholders (older people, academics, officials and local Residents Committee officers and NGO staff) were conducted in two Chinese cities, Beijing and Guangzhou. The formulation of an old-age support policy involves an understanding of the interpretation of the rights and responsibilities underlying the individual and collective decisions about how the care of older people should be delivered in the society. Since older people are facing a transition from the pre-reform era, which stressed collective responsibility, to a market economy era which is characterised by new values on issues such as personal responsibility, privacy, autonomy or life enjoyment, it is necessary to understand how older people respond to these changes and understand their new expectations, especially since the empty-nest household has become a common contemporary living arrangement. To study this topic, three research questions were set: 1) In what ways have the inter-connected roles of the family, the neighbourhood and the state in support of older people changed following the market reform? 2) How do the older people interviewed perceive the gap between their expectation and the reality of care provision? 3) How do the older people interviewed interpret the rights and responsibilities associated with receiving care from the family, the neighbourhood and the state? What are the implications for a good policy framework?

### **New balance of welfare mix in the care of older people**

How far this study has answered the three research questions will be revisited in the following. This research demonstrates how the impact of market reform has redefined the role of the family, the neighbourhood and the state in old-age care. The older people's perception of the gaps in care provision has been brought to light which provides insights into possible policy directions. Most importantly, this study draws attention to the ways that older people's shifting perception of the rights and responsibilities in informal care by the family and neighbourhood affects their views of the rights and responsibilities of the state sector.

Contrary to the stereotyped image of reliance on family by older people in the Chinese society, and their having a 'good life' being closely related to family-based relationships, as portrayed in literature (Zhang and Yu, 1998; Chan, 2005; Mao and Chi, 2011; Sereny, 2011), a great majority of the older people interviewed for in this research expressed their desire to lead an independent life and rely less on family. This arises from their improved financial conditions since the market reform, which allow them more choices to experience the world beyond their family and the neighbourhood and serve to draw them away from the family sphere.

Interviews with the older people manifest their conflicts and struggle in coming to terms with the reality of family care, reflecting their adherence to traditional family values, but at the same time, new values such as autonomy, privacy and life enjoyment are affecting their perceptions of the rights and responsibilities in family care. They value family life, but in reality, they have to free their children from family responsibilities and to allow them to pursue their own goals in the competitive economy. In principle, older people have the right to children's reciprocity based on cultural norms and legal means (Liu, 1998; Yan, 2003; Tao, 2004; Fan, 2007). But this turns out to be impractical given that the younger people's life goals of career success and devotion of resources to nurturing one's only child have already taken priority. The older people are no longer at the centre of attention in the family. This shows a gap between their expectation and the reality in family care provision.

To the older people in this research, their adjusted expectation of filial responsibilities implies a wider understanding of what contemporary family responsibility entails. It has changed from daily practical assistance to diversified forms of relationship, with more emphasis on emotional support. They do not disengage themselves from the family wholly. Perceiving the gaps between the expectation and reality in family care, the older people in this research take a positive approach to actively seek alternative means to secure a fulfilling retirement. Their life domain has moved from the family base to the wider community, showing their resilience in meeting their social and emotional needs through other channels. To them, a 'good' retirement means to be financially independent, have autonomy in life decisions and maintain an active social life. Their changing view of the meaning of a 'good' life is the

outcome of their shift in their perception of the rights and responsibilities in family care under the prevailing new values in the transitional economy.

The findings of this research, apart from showing that the lack of service provision has reinforced older people's reliance on family for support, as discussed in literature (Zhang, 2004; Timonen, 2008), also bring to attention the dilemma for some older people, against their wishes for autonomy and reluctance to add to family responsibility, to still have to seek support from their children when they themselves cannot resolve problems and when there is no service provision in the community. In this regard, the future policy direction should reflect the values held by older people who are yearning to lead an independent lifestyle and are unwilling to put their children to trouble. The gaps in the alternative care options identified in this research that older people increasingly have to rely on demonstrate that service improvement at the local level is needed to support older people to age in place when their self-care abilities deteriorate. This calls for a greater state role.

The neighbourhood used to be a source of support for older people based on collective values and the spirit of mutual help (Chen, 1996; Lu, 2006; Luova, 2011). This research indicates that socio-economic changes and urban development have broken those neighbourhood ties. Today, older people's social network comprises their former colleagues or friends they know in the community centres, rather than from their neighbours. This is a big contrast to life under the socialist era when their daily routines revolved round their neighbours (Dai, 2008). The market reform has transformed social values, which now focus on personal responsibility, rather than cherishing collective obligations to help each other out. As collective responsibility is no longer the norm in the neighbourhood, the practice of mutual help cannot rely on the self-initiative, altruism or enthusiasm of individuals. This further brings difficulty in maintaining voluntary services, which are looked upon as a source of support for older people in the neighbourhood, as revealed in this study. In addition, the Residents Committee, a residents' self-organised establishment set up during the pre-reform era and a source of help for older people in the neighbourhood all along, has been expected to take up the welfare function left by work units since the market reform (Chan, 1993; Chen, 1996; Xu and Jones, 2004). However, the findings indicate that this local organisation, due to

its very limited resources, redefines its responsibility mainly to look after the most vulnerable groups of older people in the neighbourhood. This unveils the gap between the reality and the perception of the older people in this study that the Residents Committee has a responsibility to look after older people.

While the neighbourly relationships are generally thought of as less significant in the life of residents, as shown by Read (2000), Forrest and Yip (2007) and Dai (2008), some older people in this study still value the support that neighbours can provide in times of need, especially as a majority of them are in empty-nest households and the family cannot offer immediate help. As documented by Yuan and Ngan (2012) and Yip, Leung and Huang (2013), rebuilding the social ties of older people, especially those with limited mobility who spend most of the time in the neighbourhood, is necessary to reduce their social isolation. Given the importance of informal neighbourhood support in instrumental and psychological aspects, as perceived by the older people in this research, more efforts to organise community resources and coordinate service delivery to older people are needed.

The concept of 'shared' responsibilities among different sectors: the state, the family, the community, the NGOs and the market in the care of older people has been emphasised by the official interviewed in this study, which is also in line with the welfare approach adopted in the market economy (Xu and Chow, 2011; Wong and Leung, 2012; Lei and Walker, 2013). As a policy response to the ageing problem and the reduced capacity of the family, the development of support services in the community has illustrated the increasing state responsibility in the care of older people. A close look at the policy documents and the actual service implementation in the community, as shown in this study, suggests that emphasis on older people's personal responsibility with the family bearing ultimate responsibility for their welfare, are the implied principles. Avoiding dependency culture remains an important cornerstone of welfare policy in contemporary China (Saich, 2008; Zhang and Xu, 2010; Zheng, 2013).

Seemingly, the responsibility of the state in old-age care falls short of the expectations of older people. Some of the older people in this research perceived the state as having the responsibility to look after them in their old age to honour their past contributions to the rapid

economic growth at present, and thus they have a right to share the prosperity. The state's emphasis on family responsibility reflects its insufficient understanding given the new needs and preferences of older people in the transitional economy, when their perceptions of the rights and responsibilities in family care have changed. This changing perception has brought about changes to their expectation of the state's responsibility and their assertion of the rights to state care. This reflects the insecure feeling of older people in the face of future uncertainty should the function of the family and the neighbourhood continue to decline and there is insufficient service provision in the community to meet their care needs.

This research reveals the complexity confronting the provision of care of older people in a transitional economy, when the deep-rooted cultural values and expectations inherent in informal care, and the new values prevailing in the market economy, are affecting the perception of the rights and responsibilities in old-age care. Informal support with the family once as the chief care provider, neighbourhood networks as a supplementary source of help, and the state providing a safety net, should now move to a new balance to meet the emerging needs of older people associated with the demographic and socio-economic changes. While informal sources remain important to support older people, they will become secondary to more formalised services in the community.

### **In search of a new balance in 'shared' responsibilities in old-age care**

The research findings reshape our understanding of the changing perceptions of the rights and responsibilities in different types of old-age support. Recognising the complementary functions of both the formal and informal sectors, supporting the social norms of family care, and promoting neighbourhood responsibility, as well as ensuring an adequate service support locally, should be the policy direction. This seemingly needs much greater state involvement to redistribute social resources.

To support the policy of encouraging 96% of the older people to age in home, the state has to establish a comprehensive home-based and community-based service network by mobilising support from both NGOs and private enterprises. Apart from being a funder, the



state has a role to monitor the service quality and formulate human resource plans to back up the old-age related service. A needs-assessment system to ascertain the level of older people's home-care needs and the allocation of service types and amount of care to those in need should be established. Given the improved financial conditions of older people and their willingness to pay for services, as indicated by some of the interviewees, fee-charging should be applied to the services rendered in order to increase funding going into the services. There should be a system to waive or subsidy service fees for deprived categories of older people. The absence of a family should not be made the key criterion for assessing the eligibility for state assistance.

With back up from the local government, both the Residents Committee and the NGOs (social work organisations or integrated services centres) can serve as platform to tap the volunteers and organise them to support older people in empty-nest households. More encouragement should be given to promote young retirees to participate in voluntary service by helping them maintain an active life and make them feel valued by having a role to play in the society.

Family still serves as a source of emotional support for older people. When the state wishes to reinforce family responsibilities, there should be policy in place to support younger people to fulfil their filial responsibility. Family-enhancement measures can include: sponsoring enterprises to grant leave to younger people to attend to their parents' needs; flexible employment policies; or incentives to encourage intergenerational residence. If the family resources can be effectively drawn upon, the family can remain as an effective partner with the state to share the responsibility in the care of older people in the long run.

Welfare provisions should be adjusted according to the ongoing changes in the society so as to reflect the social expectations and the challenges facing the traditional means of support for older people. The state should move away from its limited responsibility based on a residual welfare approach and leaving the neighbourhood and family to take up most of the care responsibility. To reflect the demographic and socio-economic reality involves the extension of the state's role as a funder to establish a service network and formulate measures to strengthen family functioning, a regulator to set up various systems to monitor

the service implementation, as well as a coordinator to lead the service units to better organise the community resources.

As demonstrated in the findings, the current generation of older people attaches more importance to autonomy in their life arrangements. Although a majority of the older people in this study are educated and relatively well off, their views may not be taken as representative of the whole older population. Nevertheless, the findings have highlighted an emerging culture in the major cities in China. The future cohorts of older people making up about one-third of the total population in 2050, will be more educated and more likely to voice their needs. In this regard, the state should look at the benefits of promoting the independence of older people, who can be a resource to make contributions to society rather than reinforcing their 'dependant' image of relying on the family's support.

## **Contributions to knowledge**

This research provides insights into changing perspectives on different types of old-age support, which has contributed to knowledge in the fields of Social Policy and Gerontology in the following aspects.

Firstly, a 'good retirement' has a changed meaning for Chinese older people, moving from deriving their life satisfaction mainly from their family, to a desire for independence from it by drawing support from the wider community to meet their needs. Contrary to the literature mostly focussing on the stereotyped image of family reliance among older people, and their rather passive coping responses towards the diminished family support (Zhang and Yu, 1998; Chan, 2005; Mao and Chi, 2011; Sereny, 2011), this research shows that older people, under the influence of new values, have taken a positive approach to construct their lives. Through this research, policy-makers are shown that the desire of older people for independence and autonomy in life choices will not be realised unless there is a shift in policy objectives from reinforcing their reliance on the family to recognising them as a separate entity from the family and supporting their independence in society.

Secondly, using the concepts of the rights and responsibilities in assessing the different types of old-age support under the state-family-neighbourhood framework enhances our understanding of the changing social perception towards the care of older people in the transitional economy. Since this research is grounded on older people's perspective with data supplemented by other stakeholders, the empirical findings are valuable. It can show the discrepancy between policymakers' perceptions of the responsibilities of the family and neighbourhood and older people's views on their limitations in reality. Since there is no existing literature that systematically examines the rights to and responsibilities for old-age support under this framework, this study is a contribution to knowledge showing the values of utilising the concepts of the rights and responsibilities to work out a new balance in the welfare mix in supporting older people.

Given China's particularities posing obstacles for the government to tackle the ageing issue, this research can also provide relevant knowledge to other Asian countries, among which some will experience in the next one or two decades.

## **Future research direction**

This research focussed on home-care support for older people. On top of the service provision, creating a barrier-free urban environment is also a vital factor to enable older people to move around easily and independently. A recently published 'Report on the development of a liveable environment for the elderly in China (2015)' highlighted the need to create a barrier-free environment to increase the mobility of older people by providing more sitting-out areas or improving the transportation network to encourage their usage of community facilities (Chinese Social Sciences Net, 2016).

Though lift service is mostly available in new buildings, the installation of lifts in the future re-development of the existing several-storeys buildings should be considered to improve the mobility of older people. Also, home adaptations such as the installation of facilities for older people like handrails and alarm systems connected to an emergency call centre, or some high technology gadgets to monitor the activities of older people for safety, are of importance to facilitate their independent living in their own home. Above all, maintaining good law and

order in the community can give older people the sense of safety in participating more fully in their social life, as noted by Holland *et al.* (2005). The above highlights are essential elements to promoting the independent living of older people in the community and deserve further research.

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## Semi-structured interview guide

### (For older people)

#### Background information

- **Demographic data**
  - Age
  - Marital status
- **Socio-economic characteristics**
  - Education level and occupation  
(Will encourage the older people to talk about their younger days so as to explore their life experiences, political events they have experienced)
  - Financial conditions, e.g. pension

(Remarks: Will ask for information about their spouses if appropriate)

- **Accommodation**

(Will observe the neighbourhood environment)

  - Type of neighbourhood (old, redeveloped or newly-developed)
  - Type of household e.g. empty-nest or multi-generational
  - Ownership: self-owned property/property owned by children /rented

#### Three key sources of support – family, neighbourhood and state

##### *Family support*

- **Comparison between the traditional family support and the current support for older people**
  - What are the differences/changes observed? Quote the Chinese old idiom 'yang'erfanglao' (raising children to provide security for one's old age). Is it still practised nowadays?
  - What are the reasons behind the changes/differences?
  - Have these changes affected you? In what ways?
  - How do you feel about it?
- **Living arrangement**
  - Empty-nest households - why living apart from your children?
  - Co-residence – why living with the children?
  - What is your preference?

- **Self-care abilities**
  - Can you and/or your spouse manage the household chores? E.g. grocery shopping, cooking meals, laundry, household cleaning, minor home repairs, personal care, etc.
  - How do you perceive your/your spouse's health status/self-care abilities?
- **Kind of support given by the family**
  - What kind of help can your family provide to you?
  - Do you think your children can support your home-care needs?
  - If yes, how often can they do it? In what ways?
  - What is your expectation about family support?
  - Apart from family support, are there any other people who have provided you with help?

### ***Neighbourhood support***

- **Neighbourly help**
  - How do you describe the practice of neighbourly support nowadays?
  - As the Chinese saying goes, 'Neighbours are better than distant relatives living apart'. Do you think it is still true today?
  - If yes, can you give me some examples? If no, can you tell me the reason why?
  - How do you describe your relationship with the people in the neighbourhood (neighbours, friends)?
  - Can they be a source of help to you?
- **Voluntary service**
  - Have you heard of/received the services provided by volunteers to older people in your neighbourhood?
  - If you have heard of it, what types of services provided to older people do you know about and how were they arranged? Do you think it is a source of support for older people?
  - If you have used such service, how do you find it? Has the voluntary service met your needs? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- **Residents Committee**
  - Is there a Residents Committee in your neighbourhood?
  - As far as you know, what is the role of the Residents Committee?
  - If you have any home-care needs, can you approach the Residents Committee for help?  
If yes, what kind of help can this organisation provide?  
If no, what are the alternative means by which you can obtain support?

## ***State support***

- **Community support services**
  - Do you have any idea of the community services provided in your neighbourhood? Have you ever used them?
  - If yes, how do you find them in terms of quality, price level and accessibility?
  - If no, why not?
  - What kinds of services should be provided in the community so that older people can live independently in the community?
- **Expectations about the state support**
  - I believe most people would think that the state has a responsibility to take care of older people, right? Why do /don't you think state has this responsibility?
  - What is your expectation about the role of the state?

## ***Future care arrangements***

- Before retirement, how do you envisage your retirement life? What did you expect from your children?
- Have you discussed the future care arrangements with your family? What are their views?
- Have you given thought to these future care arrangement options? E.g. co-residing with the children, leading an independent living, hiring a care worker or relying on the community support services, or residential care.
- What is your preference? What's the reason for your choice? Will your spouse support this?

## **(For the officials/ local officers/ academics/ NGO staff)**

### **Questions common for all**

- The ageing issue is widely reported in the media e.g. newspapers, magazines, television. Why is ageing such a big issue in China?
- Can the traditional means of support such as from the family and the neighbourhood still offer protection to older people as in the past?
- Quote some Chinese old idioms 'yangerfanglao' (raising children to provide security for one's old age), 'shouwangxiangzhu' (spirit of mutual help), 'yuanqiburujinlin' (neighbours are more important than relatives living far away). From your observations, are these concepts still practised? Why/Why not?
- Do the care expectations of older people remain the same as before?
- In your view, what is the ideal care arrangement for older people?

## **For government officials**

- What is the state approach to tackling the ageing problem? What are the underlying principles in it?
- What is the purpose of the recently revised law – requiring children to pay regular visits to parents? Do you think it can solve the problem or meet the home-care needs of older people?
- Apart from this legal means to strengthen the family responsibility, what else has the state provided for the home-care support for older people?
- Given the impact of the demographic and socio-economic changes, has the role of the family become less important in the care of older people? Do you think that the state has a greater responsibility to extend the care to older people?
- If yes, in what ways?
- If no, why not? Then who should have the responsibility to look after the older people?
- How can the needs of older people be better met?

## **For the local Residents Committee officers**

- Can you describe the profile of this community? Is there a high proportion of older people? How about the empty-nest households?
- What is the role of the Residents Committee in the support of older people at the local level?
- How many people are there in your office? What is your daily work routine?
- How is the relationship between the Residents Committee and the local residents?
- If the older people in your community express home-care needs, e.g. when they feel unwell, and would like to have assistance in shopping, can your office offer help?
- If yes, what kind of help can your office provide? If no, what other resources are available for older people to obtain assistance?
- Can the family still be a good source of support for older people? What changes have you observed about the family's role? Have you heard from older people talking about the changing family role?
- As far as you know, what services are available in the community that provide home-care support to older people? Are they favoured by older people?
- What services are lacking in the community which are crucial for older people to lead an independent living?
- Facing the demographic and socio-economic challenges, have you witnessed any change in the state's policy and approach to meet the growing needs of people at the local level? What are they?

- In your view, what should be improved to enhance the independent living of older people?

### **For the NGO staff**

- Can you tell me something about your organisation, e.g. history, mission, source of funding, targets serving?
- What is the rationale for choosing a particular group of older people to provide service for? Any reason to choose the existing district/sub-district/community to which your organisation provides service?
- Does your organisation have any collaboration with the Residents Committee in providing services to older people? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- If older people have home-care needs, e.g. feeling unwell and cannot cook the meals themselves, can they approach your organisation for help?
- What other support services are available in the community that provide home-care support to older people?
- Facing the demographic and socio-economic challenges, have you witnessed any change in state policy and approach to meet the growing needs of people at the local level? What are they?
- In what ways has the state encouraged the NGOs to provide service to older people in the community? Do you think the state has done enough? What kind of support do the NGOs need if they want to improve their service for older people in the community?

### **For the academics**

(Remarks: the following questions would not apply to every academic since it depends on their expertise.)

- What are the key principles underlying the current Chinese Welfare system? Are there any changes in the welfare philosophy since the market reform?
- What is the policy direction towards providing care to older people?
- What is your view towards the recent law revision?
- The country has sustained rapid economic growth since the economic reform, is there a possibility that it would follow the pathway of the Western countries to become a welfare state, i.e. to increase the welfare provisions for the population as a whole?
- In your view, as the demographic and socio-economic challenges have undermined the informal care support for older people, do you think the state should shoulder a greater responsibility to alleviate the problems to fill the gaps in the informal care support?



- What are the problems underlying the current care provision for older people? How can they be resolved?
- What is the ideal service delivery system at the community level so that older people can age in their own homes?



## **Research Ethics Committee (REC) Application Form**

*Please complete this Ethics Application form in conjunction with your supervisor. You will both need to sign it and submit a hard copy to the SSPSSR General Office in Cornwallis North East.*

**Name of Applicant:** Pui Ling Ada Cheung

**Name of your Degree:** (e.g.PG/UG degree title) PhD in Social Policy

**Campus:** Canterbury

**Name of Supervisor:** Dr. Lavinia Mitton, Dr. Joy Zhang

**Title of Project:** Community care for older people in Urban China

**Please provide a brief jargon free background to the project in no more than 150 words:**

The traditional family system in China emphasizes filial piety as a core family value which has its roots in Confucianism. For centuries, the non-state sectors such as family and community have played a key role in providing welfare services to the older people where mutual help is encouraged and dependence on the state is discouraged. Hence, the traditional value of filial piety has been actively reinforced in the Chinese culture and family co-residence is considered to be the ideal living arrangement where the older people are taken care of. Nevertheless, traditional family-based welfare has been threatened by demographic and socio-economic changes with the emergence of the older people living alone in recent decades. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine how the community care provides the needs of the older people that live alone by looking at the transition of family support, the changing needs of the older people and ideology of the Chinese welfare system.

**Research Methods:**

**A) Selection & number of interviewees/participants:**

The research site will be in Shanghai, China. The targets are the older persons who are 60 or above who are living separate from their children. Those without children will be excluded from this study. The participants will be drawn from Jingnan and Hongkou districts of Shanghai which will include only those with local urban permanent residence permits. Those with a temporary residence permits or without registration status would be excluded from the study as their entitlements to welfare benefits are different from the local residents. Besides, those who are having apparent cognitive impairment will not be selected for this study. The older people are planned to be reached through the community centres where services are provided for them. The number of participants will be around 50.

**B) How will your project comply with the Data Protection Act? *I.e. how much personal data do you plan to collect from respondents? How will you ensure that data is kept securely? Do you plan to destroy data after the project is completed?***

Regarding the personal data planned to collect from the participants, please refer to the attached Question Guide for details.

The personal information of the participants will be kept separate from the transcripts and will be stored either in password protected computer or in a locked cabinet where it can only be accessed by me. The data will only be shared with the supervisors of this research project. Interviewees will be given the option of full anonymity and the data will be destroyed 6 months after the submission of the thesis.

**C) Anticipated start date & duration of data collection:**

The interview is scheduled to be taken place in June, 2014 and the duration of data collection is about 5 months.

**D) Details of payment, if any, to interviewees/participants?**

No payment will be given to the participants. But small presents, e.g. cakes, will be prepared for them as a token of thanks for their time and efforts made for the interviews.

**E) Source of funding (if any):**

Nil

**F) List questionnaire and other techniques to be used: *N.B do not forget to attach these to your application***

In-depth interviews will be conducted for the participants. For details of the interview questions, please refer to the attached Question Guide.

**Ethical Considerations:****A) Indicate potential risks to participants (e.g. distress, embarrassment) and means adopted to safeguard against them:**

The potential risks will probably arise when the topics involve the disclosure of the past negative experiences of the participants. In this study, the older persons are required to talk on the existing living arrangement which may arouse their unhappy feelings if living alone is not their own choice. After the interview, they are left alone to face the unpleasant feelings being stirred up during the interview. I need to be sensitive to their emotional reaction or any signs of discomfort throughout the process. If it does happen, I have to check with their willingness to continue and emphasize that they can stop the interview anytime without any consequence.

Sometimes the older people may appear comfortable, calm and active to share their thoughts on this topic and then regret having been so open later on. It is because the older people may have talked about the unhappy familial relationship but later find guilty of speaking ill of the family members. They may worry that such information will be recorded in the findings and their family members will have a chance to read them. Therefore, it will be necessary for me to stay after the interview to see if they still have other concern, want to have further conversation on the discussed topic, need any kind of emotional support and check again if they want to withdraw their data in the interview.

Throughout the process, I should avoid taking the professional role of being the counsellor. Instead, I can leave the information about the community resources or offer to talk to someone on their behalf or to support them in seeking help in case of need. Besides, I can spend some time to chat with the older people so as to establish relationship and gain the trust from them before the start of the interview. This will help them get relaxed and give them a chance to ask or clarify the details of the research study with an aim to prepare them better to participate in the interview.

**B) What confidentiality issues might arise during data collection, analysis, and dissemination of results? How do you plan to protect participants' anonymity?**

While collecting the data from the participants in the interviews, I have to make sure that there is privacy in the venue and the conversation will not be heard by a third party. If there is a need to use the interpretation service or contract out the task of data transcription, efforts are needed to ensure that the interpreters or the data transcribers will pay attention to the issue of confidentiality. Moreover, I will try the best to protect the participants' identity by making their personal data anonymous so that they could not be identified in the research findings. Yet, I have to be aware that their sharing of the personal lives and experience is very unique and by quoting what they have said in the findings will possibly lead to the disclosure of identity.

Moreover, if pictures are to be used in the thesis, it needs to be careful as it can lead to easy identification of neighbourhood where the participants stay.

Based on the assumption that participants do not want their identity to be disclosed, yet, it is not certain if all of them want to be treated anonymously. Some participants may want to be identified if they consider it as a privilege to participate in the research. Likewise, the officials of the district where the research is undertaken may wish to be acknowledged in the research findings. Under such circumstances, there is a possibility that the interview subjects would be identified if the research location has been made public. Therefore, all interviewees will be asked to specify their preference of anonymity. Those who indicate their wish to be identified will only be considered as long as it will not jeopardize the confidentiality of other participants.

**C) What difficulties might arise (e.g. regarding power and/or dependency imbalances between researcher and participants) and how do you safeguard against them?**

In this regard, the participants should not be given the impression that they are required to participate. It is particularly true when the older people in this study are likely to be contacted for research purpose by the service units in their neighbourhood. Such contact may lead them to think that they are obliged to participate in the research. Therefore, they should be made known that the participation is voluntary and they can opt out of the study anytime during the process without any consequence. If they decide to withdraw, any data relating to them will not be used.

**D) How will the project take into consideration cultural diversity (e.g. through provision of interpreters where necessary)?**

Despite being a Chinese sharing the same ethnicity with the participants, I am still an outsider coming from a different socio-economic and cultural background and should be aware of the differences in perception and principles around certain issues such as meaning of aging in another Chinese community. In order to reduce the potential cultural gap, a preliminary trip to Shanghai, the fieldwork site, has been made so as to familiarize myself with the local culture. This is helpful to understand better of the living conditions of the older people there which will facilitate my communication with the interviewees when the fieldwork is done.

**E) Why, if at all, are you paying participants? What is the potential impact on them of such financial inducement?**

N/A

**F) What provision are you making for giving feedback to participants about your findings?**

Upon the request of the interviewees, I can provide them with their share of

the data or even the full thesis or other publications on the condition that the confidentiality of other participants is not at risk.

**G) What other ethics review procedures has this project already undergone (e.g. with funding bodies)?**

No.

**Consent:**

**A) What procedures are you using to secure participants' informed consent (please append any forms etc. use for this)?**

Written consent will be obtained from the participants. They will be explained of the objectives of the research study, the time involved, the level of involvement required of them, the ways the collected data will be used and the means to ensure its confidentiality. For those older people who are illiterate or have difficulty in comprehending the content of the document, the consent form will be read to them to make sure that they understand it well before giving permission to participate.

In some occasions, if asking the older people to sign a consent form, it may reduce their willingness to get involved in the research study. This could be true especially among the older people who are conservative and consider the signing of any paper will imply legal implication. Therefore, oral consent can be considered as a means to obtain their consent to the research study if they have reservation towards the written consent.

Therefore, if the written consent is not possible or not desired, I will digitally record the consent process and record the verbal consent.

For details, please refer to the attached written consent form.

**B) What procedures will you use with participants unable to give their own informed consent?**

The older people who are having apparent cognitive impairment will be excluded from the study. Therefore, all the participants are supposed to be able to give their own informed consent.

**C) Explain, where applicable, why the informed consent of the participants is not being sought?**

This section is not applicable as informed consent will be sought from every participant.

**Researcher, please sign, print name and date to testify the accuracy of this completed application:**

Sign:

Print Name: Pui ling Ada Cheung

Date:

**Supervisor, please sign, print name a date to testify that you have seen and approve this Research Ethics Application:**

Sign:

Print Name: Dr. Lavinia Mitton

Date:

**Please submit your application including your questionnaire and consent form to:**

SSPSSR Ethics Administrator

Cornwallis North East

University of Kent

Canterbury

Kent

CT2 7NF

### Information on the minimum wage and average monthly wage of 2014 in Beijing and Guangzhou

City	Minimum wage (yuan)	Average monthly wage of employee (yuan)
Beijing	1,560 <sup>1</sup>	6,463 <sup>2</sup>
Guangzhou	1,550 <sup>3</sup>	6,830 <sup>4</sup>

(Sources: <sup>1</sup>Beijing Statistical Information Office, 2014, <sup>2</sup>The Beijing News, 2015,

<sup>3</sup>Yang Cheng Evening News, 2015, <sup>4</sup>China News, 2014)

The Chinese currency is in *yuan*. The exchange rate was approximately £1 = 10.4 yuan (as at June, 2014).



