

The Well-being of Chinese Older Adults

The Well-being of Chinese Older Adults:

Application of the Person- Environment Fit Theory

By

Zheng Ouyang

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ABSTRACT

China is a rapidly aging country. By the end of 2017, nearly 17.3% of its population comprised citizens aged 60 and above (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). This proportion is estimated to double around 2050. In addition, aging in China is a unique phenomenon because of the overrepresentation of the proportion of the old-old people (people over 80 years old), empty nest elderly, and elderly with disabilities. Population aging is particularly rapid in some of the large cities, particularly Beijing and Shanghai. The direct consequence of these demographic changes is the tremendous increase in the number of the elderly who require support and care. Thus, implementing a model of “aging-at-home” that is derived from the concept of “aging in place” may be the main approach to provide proper care and support to the elderly because many of them prefer to age in their own homes rather than in institutions.

Moreover, China is building a socialist harmonious society. The mental health of the elderly is a crucial issue for both families and society, as well as for older adults. Therefore, the well-being of the elderly has drawn the attention of a significant number of researchers. Against this background, this study aims to investigate the personal and environmental predicting factors of the well-being of the elderly living in their own homes by drawing on the person-environment (P-E) fit theory. This is the first study that integrates the concepts of complementary fit (CF) (needs supply) and supplementary fit (SF) (value congruence) in one theoretical framework to explore which fit has a more powerful effect on the well-being in later life. This study explores the mediating effect of SF between CF and well-being, and offers valuable theoretical and practical implications.

This study adopted a quantitative approach to explore well-being through a multistage random sampling method among the elderly in 31 urban communities in Beijing, China. The “Multiple Happiness Questionnaire” (MHQ) was used to measure well-being. A total of 585 participants aged 60 and above were recruited to participate. A multiple regression model was the major technique used to analyze data. The model examined the relationship among personal factors (age, sex, income, cognitive functioning, functional disability, etc.), environmental factors

(satisfaction of housing, community, safety, and transportation), P-E fit (CF and SF), well-being, and the mediating effect of SF. Findings of the present study convey noteworthy implications for theoretical, practical, and policy perspectives. First, descriptive information suggested that the participants reported a high level of well-being. Second, among the personal factors, gender and functional disability were the most important variables related to well-being followed by perceived economic status and cognitive functioning. Third, among the environmental factors, transportation and housing condition were the most important aspects that influenced the well-being of older people. Moreover, both CF and SF had a unique impact on well-being. After controlling for the personal factors, environmental factors, and SF, the effect of CF on well-being in structural and formal domains disappeared. CF showed a slight positive effect only in the informal domain. Compared with CF, SF was a better predictor of well-being. Results indicated that the overall supplementary fit accounted for a significant variance on well-being, when personal factors, environmental factors, and CF are controlled. Finally, SF mediated the effect of CF on well-being.

Based on empirical understanding, this study recommends paying more attention to the modifiable variables. For the personal factors, intervention could be implemented to promote health condition and cognitive functioning and to prevent these from deteriorating. Perceived economic status could be raised by enhancing the welfare benefit of older adults and increasing the overall income of the elderly (e.g., increasing the subsidy for and allowance of the low income elderly, etc.). For the environmental factors, the finding underscores the importance of enhancing the housing and transportation conditions. The government could develop the escort service to make it easier for the elderly who have mobility difficulties to utilize the normal public transportation system and to access all kinds of activities. Moreover, the government could exert effort to improve the housing conditions of the elderly. With regard to fit, SF showed a stronger effect on well-being than CF.

This study proposes several suggestions to enhance SF in the structural, formal, and informal domains. One suggestion is the introduction of programs in communities to educate family members and older adults on better ways to communicate with each other and improve their capabilities of handling family relationships. This program will thus promote value congruence in family. Another suggestion is the strengthening of the training of service providers with consistent values and goals, and thus, improving their capabilities of conveying the

community culture, target, and values when providing service. Another suggestion is to create a service procedure handbook. Finally, conducting the promotion program well will illustrate the purpose of every measure, and thus encourage the elderly to understand and recognize the significance of the policies. Intergeneration programs could be carried out to promote the cultural value of filial piety culture as well.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter introduces the general background of this study, which includes description of the aging population in society, causes and features of aging in China, well-being issues of the elderly, and the elderly aging in their own houses. Research questions, key research aims, and significance of this study are proposed in this chapter.

1.2 Aging in China

1.2.1 The Elderly and the Aging Society

The aging of the population and aging problems are global issues. The two main criteria in the definition of the elderly refer to citizens who are 60 or older and those who are 65 or older. The Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging (1983) considered 60 years old as the dividing age for defining the elderly. The United Nations defined the elderly as a person over 65 since 2002, which is the traditional definition of an elderly person (Orimo et al., 2006) as well.

The definition of the elderly varies with the actual situation. With the development of the social economy and longer lifespan, the criterion may also change. At present, some scholars argue that the age criterion for the elderly could be raised from 65 to 75 years old. The reason for the change is the rise in the physical activity of healthy elderly people and functional independence of elderly people in the past 10 years (Orimo et al., 2006). According to the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of the Aged* (National People's Congress Standing Committee of the People's Republic of China, 1996), "the elderly discussed in this law refer to citizens over 60 years old." Since the subjects of this study are the elderly in Mainland China, this study adheres to the definition of 60 years old as stated in the law.

The aging of the population refers to the phenomenon and process in which the proportion of the elderly population in a country or region keeps rising within a period. When the elderly population aged 60 and above accounts for 10% of the total population, or the population proportion of the elderly over 65 years old exceeds 7% of the total population, this region is said to be an “aging society” (United Nations, 2010).

1.2.2 Aging Population in China

The Fifth National Census Data Report of China (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2000) stated that the population of the aged over 60 reached 10.2% in 1999, which makes China an aging society. The 2005 National 1% Population Sample Survey Bulletin of Main Data (NBSC, 2006) showed that the population of citizens above 60 years old increased to 144.08 million or 11.3% of the total, and the population of citizens above 65 was 100.45 million or 7.69% of the total population (Du & Guo, 2000). At the end of 2017, the population of citizens aged 60 and above in China rose to 240.90 million or 17.3% of the total population. Moreover, the population of citizens aged 65 and above was 158.31 million or 11.4% of the total population. At present, China has the biggest elderly population, with the population of citizens aged 60 and above occupying one-fifth of the global population aged 60 and above. This number is equivalent to the total population aged 60 and above of the entire Europe.

According to the Sixth National Population Census Main Data Report (NBSC, 2011), with the zero hour of November 1, 2010 as baseline, people aged 60 and above comprised 13.26% (177.65 million) of the total population. The population above 65 years old was 118.83 million, which comprised 8.87% of the national population. Compared with the Fifth National Population Census in 2000, the proportion of citizens aged between 0 and 14 dropped by 6.29%, whereas the proportion of citizens aged 60 and above rose by 2.93%, and the proportion of those aged 65 and above increased by 1.91%.

According to the projections of aging in China (United Nations Population Division, 2007), the population of the aged will reach 450 million by 2050, which will account for 31.27% of the total population, and the number aged above 65 will rise to 334 million, which will account for 23.7% of the total population. Hence, the number of aged people and the degree of aging in China will soon increase to an

unprecedented level. China has stepped into and will be part of the aging society for a long time (CNCA, 2006). Moreover, the aging phenomenon in China will be fastest before 2030. Between 2030 and 2050, China will face serious challenges posed by an aging population.

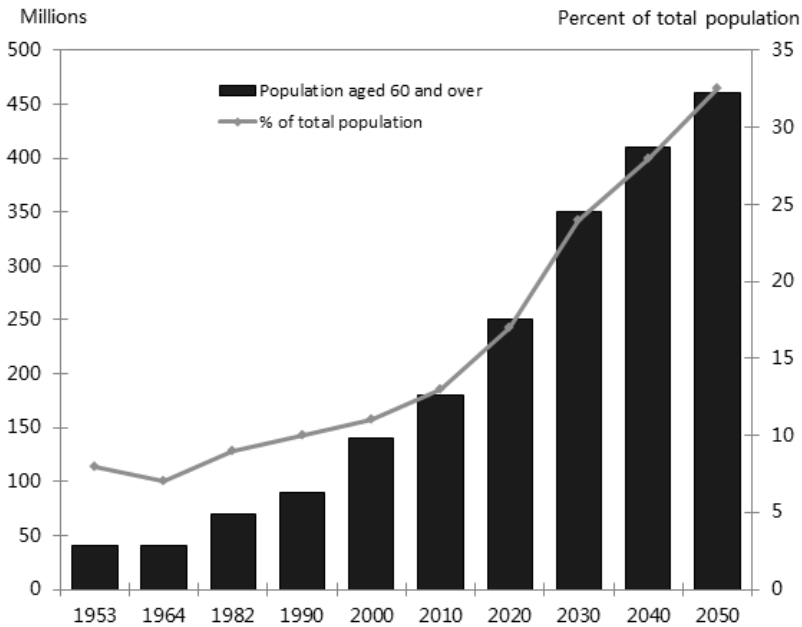


Figure 1.1 Proportion of population 60 years or older: China, 1953 to 2050

Note: Intervals between the census years of 1953 and 2000 are not even.

Sources: For 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990, and 2000, China State Council and National Bureau of Statistics, 1982, 1985, 1993, and 2002; for 2010 to 2050, U.S. Census Bureau, 2006.

Figure 1.1 presents domestic and overseas representative schemes on population and aging prediction for reference.

1.2.3 Causes of Rapid Population Aging in China

The entry of China into an aging society is happening quickly. This development is a result of the large decline in fertility and mortality rates

and the lengthening of the lifespan of the Chinese (Chong, 2009; Flaherty et al., 2007).

Table 1.1 Prediction of China's Aging by the United Nations (2006 mid-year scheme)

Unit: Hundred million, %							
Year	Total population	Population aged 60 and over	Proportion of the total	Population aged 65 and over	Proportion of the total	Population aged 80 and over	Proportion of the population aged 60 and over
2000	12.70	1.28	10.1	0.87	6.9	0.114	8.9
2005	13.13	1.44	11.0	1.00	7.6	0.154	10.7
2010	13.52	1.69	12.5	1.13	8.4	0.195	11.5
2015	13.89	2.10	15.1	1.34	9.6	0.243	11.6
2020	14.21	2.43	17.1	1.69	11.9	0.285	11.7
2025	14.46	2.90	20.1	1.97	13.6	0.328	11.3
2030	14.58	3.48	23.9	2.36	16.2	0.416	12.0
2035	14.58	3.93	27.0	2.86	19.6	0.573	14.6
2040	14.48	4.07	28.1	3.22	22.2	0.667	16.4
2045	14.31	4.18	29.2	3.28	22.9	0.823	19.7
2050	14.09	4.38	31.1	3.34	23.7	1.030	23.5

Source: *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision*, United Nations Population Division, 2007.

1.2.3.1 Change of Fertility Rate

Total fertility rate was as high as 6 during the 1950s and through to the early 1970s. However, after the famous “one child” policy or the “family planning policy” was launched in 1979, fertility rate sharply dropped to lower than 2 in the 1990s (Zhang & Guo, 2010). From 1969 to 1979, the birth rate dropped from 34.11% to 17.82%, and the population was reduced by nearly 200 million. These results accelerated the change in the age structure of the population.

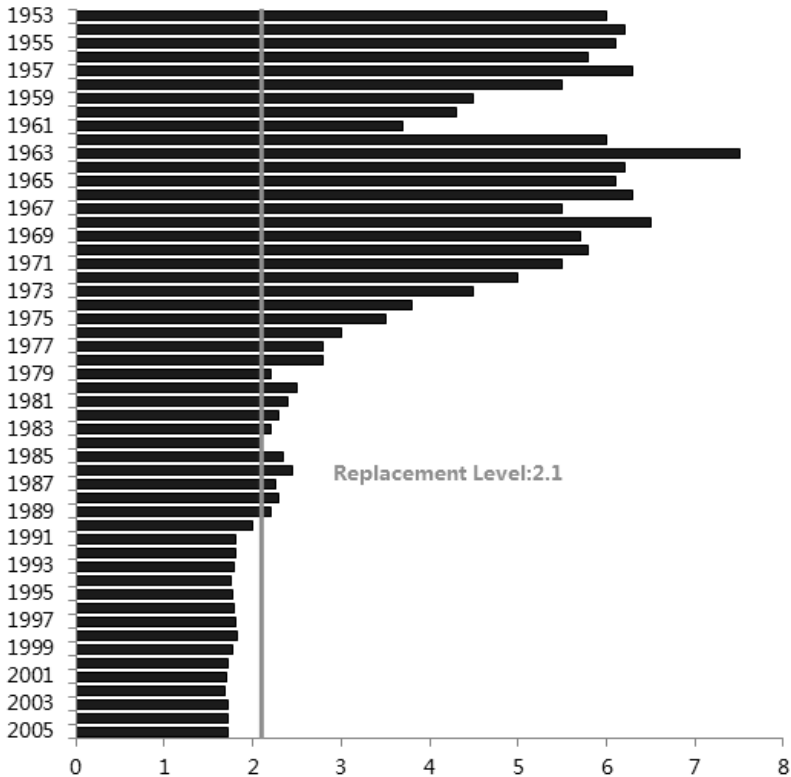


Figure 1.2 Total Fertility Rates: China, 1953 to 2005

Sources: For 1950–1959, Banister, 1987; for 1990–1995, U.S. Census Bureau, 2004b; for 1996–2005, U.S. Census Bureau, 2006.

1.2.3.2 Decrease of the Mortality Rate

Another factor is the steadily decreasing mortality rate. With the enhancement of the medical and health levels, the mortality rate dropped from 18% in 1950 to 7.6% in 1970, and to less than 7% after 1977. These numbers remained at the low level of 6 to 7 per thousand (Zhang & Guo, 2010).

1.2.3.3 Increase of Lifespan

The lifespan of the Chinese people has increased at a high rate. Figure 1.4 demonstrates that life expectancy has expanded by nearly 6 years, from 67.8 to 73.0 in the past 20 years (Zhang & Guo, 2010; Chong, 2009; Flaherty et al., 2007).

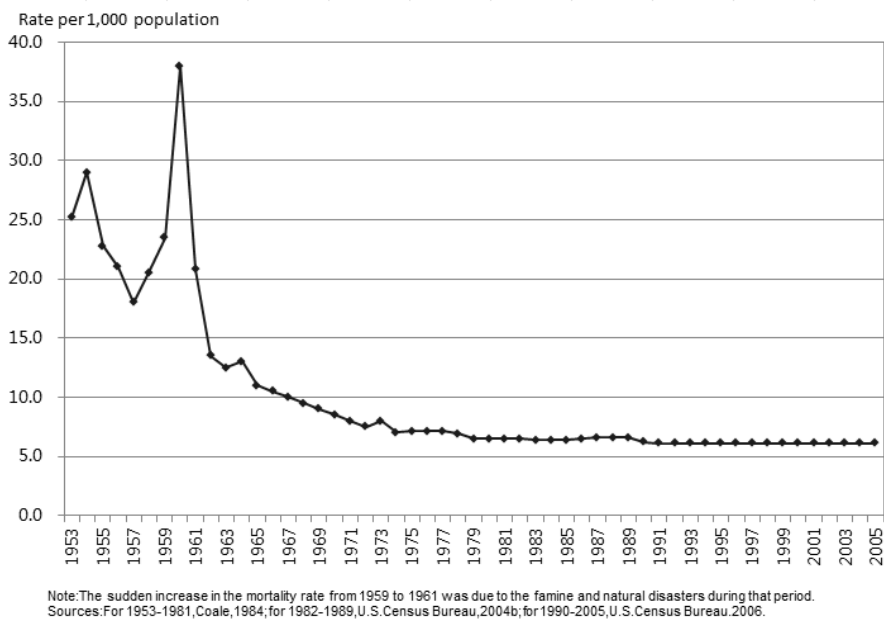


Figure 1.3 Crude Death Rates: China, 1953 to 2005

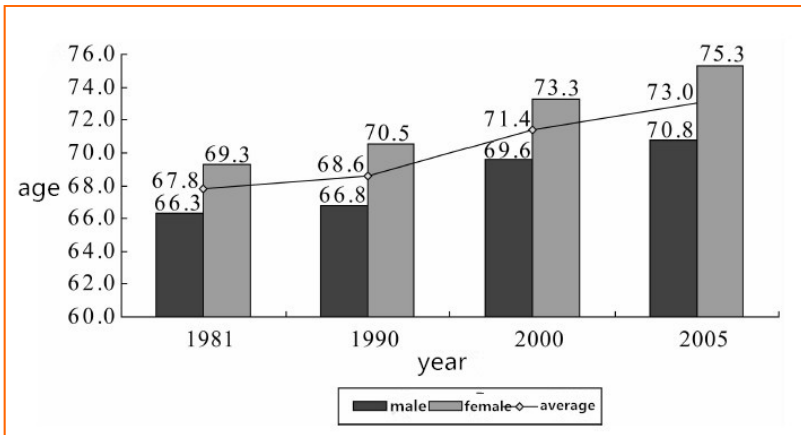


Figure 1.4 Life Expectancy in China by Sex, 1981 to 2005

Source: The sixth times of Reporting the 30-year Reform and Opening up: *The All-round Improvement of the Population Quality; The Multiplied Increase of the Employed Population*, National Bureau of Statistics, Nov. 30, 2008.

1.2.4 Features of Population Aging in China

The features of aging in China are discussed in the following sections.

1.2.4.1 Speeding Up of the Change of the Population Structure

Since China entered the stage of an aging society, the growth speed of the elderly population has been steadily rising and has increased rapidly. Thus, the tendency to age has sped up. Based on the new born population, the newly increased total population, and the new population aged 60 and above since 1999, the population aged 60 and above in 2008 was bigger than that in 2007 by 6.49 million, whereas the growing rate was close to the increase in total population, which is 6.73 million (Zhang & Guo, 2010). Although the newborn population remains stable and the death rate increases, the elderly population is increasingly approaching the total of the new increased population. As a result, China's population is gradually stepping into a period when the growth

of the absolute number and the relative number of the elderly population is faster than the growth rate of the total population (Zhang & Guo, 2010).

Compared with the growth rate of the total population, the growth rate of the population of 60 years old and above as well as that of 65 years old and above has increased evidently (CNCA, 2010).

1.2.4.2 Exacerbation of the Aging of the Elderly Population

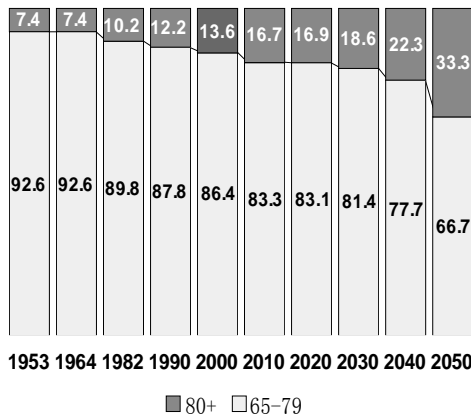


Figure 1.5 Situation and Trends of the Population Aged 80 and Above (%)

Source: Five population censuses between 1953 and 2000. Population Division of Economic and Social Council of UN, 2007.

The degree of aging has become more serious, and the tendency of the aging process has become noticeable. Toward the end of 2009, China had 189,900 old-old people (people over 80 years old), which accounted for 11.4% of the country's total population, and this figure will increase significantly from 25% to 30% in 2051 (CNCA, 2010). The elderly population aged 80 and above continues to increase. Compared with the elderly population aged 60 and above and 65 and above, the elderly population aged 80 and above has increased rapidly by 61.3%. The proportion of the population aged 60 and above continued to rise and occupied 11.3% at the end of 2008. Based on the 1999 data, these figures represent an increase of 27% or 6.86 million. With the development of

the social economy and lengthening of the average lifespan, the elderly population aged 80 and above will continue to increase and the speed will remain high.

1.2.4.3 Seriousness of the Empty Nest Phenomenon

The empty nest of older adults is a big issue in China. Living alone or with only a spouse became more common after 2010 when the first single-child parents entered old age (Chong, 2009). The elderly in China mainly grow old at home, and only 1% of the elderly live in various social welfare institutions. Thus, the empty nest has given rise to several aging issues, such as health care and leisure activity, among others.

The national survey of older people in urban and rural in 2015 showed that the proportion of urban elderly empty-nest households rose to 51.3%, with an increase of 1.6% compared with that of 2006. The proportion of suburban elderly empty-nest households was 51.7%, with an increase of 2.8% compared with 2006. The increase in the number of empty-nest families reflects the development of the Chinese economy. This development resulted in the reform of the housing system, which improved the housing conditions of the elderly. Consequently, the number of elderly empty-nest families increased.

1.2.4.4 Increase in the Population of Those Who Cannot Take Care of Themselves

Besides the empty nest issue, the problems of functionally disabled elderly people should not be ignored.

Surveys revealed that by the end of 2015, the number of disabled elderly people in China reached 40 million, of which 18.3% comprised people aged 60 or older (CRCA, 2016).

With more than 85 million disabled people and 40 million elderly people who need nursing care and assistive devices, China has the largest demand for assistive products and is a huge potential market for the industry,

1.2.5 Summary

The increasing seriousness of the aging problem in China requires more attention and reflection. The direct consequence of these changes is

the difficulty of providing support and care for the growing number of the elderly. Thus, the problem of how to manage the service support for the elderly in this country that has the biggest population in the world has drawn widespread attention.

1.3 Research Target: Well-being of the Elderly

1.3.1 Well-being Issues of the Elderly

Scholars in psychology and social work assume that the definition of well-being has multiple dimensions, including physical, behavioral, emotional, psychological, and social dimensions (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). This study focuses on the mental representations of well-being.

As they grow older, the elderly leave their job positions, and they have to face the problems of fewer interpersonal communications, lower income, and worsening health. Naturally, some become pessimistic, negative, and even world-weary. Previous empirical studies reported high depression rates among the Chinese elderly (e.g., Feng, Jia, Hu, & Wang, 2005). A study on the elderly in Liaocheng indicated that 18.7% of the elderly had depression, among whom, the morbidity of those aged between 60 and 75 was 20.94%, and the morbidity of those aged over 75 was 8.97% (Zhang & Cui, 2005). These psychological problems that the elderly contend with add to the difficulty of achieving the feelings of happiness and satisfaction. Consequently, the elderly might get hurt physically and psychologically, which could result in various behavior problems and the surfacing of latent trouble to the family and even to society. Due to the lack of monitoring of their psychological health state, the psychological problems of the elderly have been neglected. Thus, the elderly fail to avail of the necessary treatment, which, in turn, may bring more serious and hard-to-cure outcomes.

When people get older, the feelings that are described subsequently may arise.

1.3.1.1 Declining Self-esteem

Due to their major achievements when they were young, the elderly may have strong self-esteem. This trait is supported by the traditional value system, which specifies that the senior and the elderly deserve

respect. The sense of self-esteem may help the elderly strengthen their ability to live independently and to be less dependent on others.

However, the non-satisfaction of their self-esteem needs, a physical defect resulting from disease, loss of power after retirement, and so on, may result in the acquisition of a sense of self-abasement (Havighurst, 1972). The elderly may feel upset when they realize their declining strength, waning seeing and hearing abilities, and failing memory. In this situation, they could only express their weariness with the fact that they are “too old to be useful” with a sigh. This sensation may result in self-suggestion, that is, the sensation may repeatedly suggest that they are old, and consequently, the effects of aging are hastened. Low self-esteem diminishes the self-confidence of the elderly and leads to isolation and denial. As a result, their social communication is reduced.

1.3.1.2 Feeling of Loneliness

The absence of definite engagements in activities after retirement, which creates longer idle hours, may make the elderly feel empty, particularly if they fail to adjust their schedules and make good arrangements. The feeling of emptiness is likely to bring about insomnia and disturbance, which adds to the disinterest, disappointment, and pessimism of the elderly.

The feeling of loneliness results from the reduction of social communication, especially upon the death of spouses, relatives, and friends. Thus, the empty nest may leave the elderly alone over a long period of time. With no one to talk, the elderly may find shrugging off bad moods a more difficult process. Long moments of loneliness may affect the physical health, and give rise to depressive symptoms (Cattan, White, Bond, & Learmouth, 2002).

1.3.1.3 Feeling of Anxiety

The dramatic change of roles increases the number of factors that may cause the feeling of anxiety. The elderly may worry about their health or a definite diagnosis. They may struggle to obtain the understanding of their children for their actions. They may lose confidence. They may experience the inability to make timely adaptations and adjustments and to deal with new situations. Further, a reduction in their income after retirement may negatively affect their

dignity. All these possibilities could lead to psychological anxiety, which seriously affects the psychological health of the elderly (DeBeurs et al., 1999; Bourland et al., 2000).

1.3.2 Causes of the Psychological Change among the Elderly

Basically, the following factors lead to the psychological changes among the elderly.

1.3.2.1 Physical Factors

Physical senility is initially presented as the decaying of sensory organs, which may lead the loss of interest and desire. The bluntness of the sensory organs and the slowness of their reactions may affect the social activities of the elderly; thus loneliness sets in.

In addition, diseases may also lower the ability to adapt to the environment. The elderly might feel scared, sorrowful, and desperate, and the anxiety of death may bring them more psychological problems (Robert & Neimeyer, 1999).

1.3.2.2 Retirement

Retirement affects the elderly in two ways. On the one hand, their income is reduced. Retirement means retreating from economic activities and not enjoying employment welfare, and generally, retirement pension is less than the employment pay (Havighurst, 1972). In Western countries, the elderly usually receives only two-thirds of their salary after retirement (Fox, 1979; Mayring, 1990). The same situation exists in China. Furthermore, due to the imperfections of the social security system of China, many are not rewarded with retirement pension. Thus, they are more likely to suffer from shortage of money, and feel that they cannot effectively manage and control their lives. On the other hand, retirement significantly affects the social life and social participation of the elderly. Retirement means the reduction of social contact, loss of interpersonal relations, and cessation of the recognition from the society and the family for their contributions through their jobs and to the household. In this situation, the elderly can hardly make any money for themselves and their family through employment, which affects the acquisition of self-confidence. All these limitations may cause the elderly

to feel that they are no longer useful and have are isolated from the society.

1.3.2.3 Loss and Reconstruction of Their Role

When people get old, they face increasing risks concerning losses in physical health, social contact, and means of income (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2000). In essence, the elderly gradually retreat from their previous social activities and social sphere as they get older. Thus, they no longer assume their former roles, thereby losing an important way of keeping their self-esteem. To the elderly, the most typical is the loss of the employment role that results from retirement. In addition, in the organization of the community, elderly activities, and family life, the elderly may face the problem of loss of role. For example, when they have problems with finance, health, or care, family members may treat the elderly in a different way. The elderly may be treated as if they are no longer self-sufficient family participators, instead of family members who need care, have lost abilities, and have no social life.

Similarly, the elderly may retreat from society and lose their roles because of retirement. However, this situation does not mean that the present lifestyle of the elderly is suddenly a complete turnaround from their former lifestyle. As far as the elderly are concerned, retirement does mean the loss of employment role because they can play other social roles after retirement. In the family, they may do housework and take care of the grandchildren; in the community, they could participate in community activities or community management affairs; they may also join an elderly organization or volunteer activities to continue the realization of their value. Therefore, the elderly should also reconsider their abilities and re-recognize their roles, through such endeavors as actively participating in social activities.

1.3.2.4 Dependence

“Dependence” on others may reinforce the feeling of loss and helplessness. When the elderly need their children to provide financial support and health care, they may think that they can no longer control themselves and the surrounding environment. Further, the elderly will think that they have become passive subjects who need care. When they lack knowledge about aging and the subsequent psychological and

physical problems, the elderly are more likely to adhere to negative feelings. With the deepening of “dependence,” the elderly may keep internalizing such negative feelings. Consequently, their self-esteem decreases and they experience feelings of loss and frustration, which may eventually lead to feelings of helplessness and weakness.

Generally however, society takes care of and supports the elderly. The important consideration is for society to refrain from stereotyping the elderly.

1.3.2.5 Stereotype Image and Discrimination against the Elderly

The discrimination against the elderly is irrational and unfair. The stereotype image imposed upon the elderly may also intensify existing discrimination. Prejudiced views include the thinking that all the elderly are in poor health and need care, are slow and can hardly be communicated with, cannot learn new knowledge and skills, and are always incapable and dependent on society and family. These stereotype and discriminatory images could be internalized by the elderly as a kind of self-image, which is difficult to change.

Moreover, the current social environment may also, to some extent, affect the psychological health of the elderly. Prejudice and discrimination as well as disrespect and maltreatment directed at the elderly may result in pessimism.

The negative disposition of the elderly may damage their physical health, affect their living, hinder their interpersonal communication, and lead to behavioral deviations to some extent. In this regard, this study may help the elderly to step out of their negative mood, and encourage them to participate actively in social functions. These measures are important tasks that the government and society could consider.

1.4 Elderly Aging in Their Own Homes

This study focuses on the elderly who are aging in their own homes only, as this group constitutes the majority of the population of elderly people.

The home plays a critical role in the lives of the elderly (Pynoos & Nishita, 2008). Mynatt et al. (2000) and Pynoos and Nishita (2008) claimed that, not only out of economic consideration for the elderly and national financing, in-home solutions that increase the length of time that

individuals can avoid nursing home care are economically feasible for a wider spectrum of the elderly in the long term.

In the context of China, aging in place is, and will be, the most important aging model for the present and the future. The reasons are presented in the subsequent sections.

1.4.1 Chinese Culture in Support of the Elderly

A famous anthropologist stated that “culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871). Hence, the definition of culture in support of the elderly may be understood as the ideas of people, the social ethics, values, and rules adhered to by the family or society to provide the elderly with economic support, life care, spiritual comfort, and other resources (Li, 2001).

The culture of Confucianism and the value of filial piety compose the core culture of family members in relation to their support of elderly relatives.

Past research on the philosophy and the behavior associated with filial piety in the Chinese community showed that the Chinese traditional philosophy of filial piety is still acknowledged and worshipped by the majority of modern people.

Filial piety is defined as a fundamental and family-centered Chinese cultural, which guides older adults’ children’s attitudes and behaviors toward their parents, and then to sustain parental well-being (Lai, 2010; Zhang & Goza, 2006). The moral principle of filial piety remains greatly valued by the Chinese (Yang, Ye, & Huang, 1991; Zhuang & Yang, 1991).

Family can be regarded as the central position of the Confucian social theory and it ensures stability, continuity, and perpetuation through generations (King & Bond, 1985). Taking care of the elderly is one of the traditional Chinese values that are respected and upheld by most people in China. The strong commitment to caring for the elderly in Chinese families is probably related to the strong influence of Confucianism that can be traced back to the origin of Confucianism in the Han Dynasty about 2,000 years ago.

The father-son relationship that is bound by filial piety is considered to be one of the most important relationships in Chinese families. This relationship enables the extension of the generation. The construction of

filial piety in Confucian teachings reinforces the message of caring for parents in Chinese families. Thus, family members are expected to be respectful, caring, and obedient to the elders of families or tribes. The traditional concept of filial piety is considered as the “the root of all virtue” and is believed to be an important component for binding the Chinese familial system of care (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003).

Filial piety illustrates the relationship between intergenerational harmony and the formation of mutual assistance. Based on the stable intergeneration mutual relationship, we can develop a simple pattern in which parents bring up children, and children support their parents (Yao, 2001). This pattern means that parents have the obligation to raise their children and to provide assistance in all aspects. In return, children should take responsibility for the elders when they have grown old.

Based on this harmonious intergenerational relationship, family is the carrier of the support for the elderly through which material and spiritual support is provided to help them enjoy their old-age years.

In sum, aging in one’s own home is in line with Chinese traditional culture. In China, the family plays a fundamental role in the support of the elderly. The relationship between the family and the elderly is very close. For the elderly, family is an indispensable part of life. The elderly attach great importance to the security and trust that home brings.

1.4.2 The Wish of the Elderly

Aging in ones’ own house is the strong desire of the elderly. Attachment to home reflects the emotional, cultural, and spiritual connection between a person and the environment (Shenk, 2004). For some elderly widows, leaving home means leaving behind the marital relationship (Shenk, 2004). As a result, many elderly choose to live in homes alone or with families to maintain an independent and more dignified lifestyle (Gurney & Means, 1993). The 2000 America Association of Retired Persons (AARP) survey claimed that more than 80% of respondents aged 45 and above agreed with the statement, “What I’d really like to do is stay in my current residence for as long as possible” (AARP, 2004). Some studies conducted among Chinese elderly showed that 80-85% of elderly people chose to be cared for at home, while only a small amount (e.g, 6–8%) were willing to enter residential homes (Mu, 2012).