

HOUSING AND SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY : A CASE STUDY IN JINHUA STREET NEIGHBORHOOD IN GUANGZHOU, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the result of a research focuses on the elderly living in Jinhua Street in the city of Guangzhou, China. These elderly people are retirees who are women over 55 and men over 60 year of age. The paper will respond to some of the varied needs of the elderly. It is mainly concerned with the housing and services for the elderly in the neighborhoods.

China has the largest elderly population in the world which account for more than one-fifth of the total world elderly population. The growth speed of China's elderly population is the fastest in the world. It took over 100 years for the western developed countries to increase its elderly population from 5% to 7%. In Japan, this process took 50 years. However, it took only about 10 years in China.

The aging neighborhoods can also be found in other large cities of China, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan. This paper, therefore will be a valuable information for the renewal of the old neighborhoods and the development of new ones in China.

INTRODUCTION

Study

This is a branch of The Inner City Neighborhood Development sponsored by the CIDA. It is a case study based on questionnaires, interviews and photograph in Jinhua Street, Guangzhou, China, in 1994.

The research focuses on the elderly living in Jinhua Street. They are the retirees who are women over 55 and men over 60 years of age. With the help of the sub-district officers in Jinhua Street, 800 forms of questionnaires were sent to the elderly in May, 1994, and after two weeks 757 forms were returned which constitutes 94.6% of the total. Among them, 680 forms are valid, which is 85% of the total. The remaining 77 forms are useless because either the elderly are younger than the age of 55 (women) or 60 (men), or the elderly have not retired yet.

With these firsthand materials, the paper will respond to some of the varied needs of the elderly. It is mainly concerned with the housing and services for the elderly in the neighborhoods.

Place

The old area of Guangzhou city (the urban area which existed before the 1960s) has developed from residential settlements of the feudal era. There are four administrative districts (Yuexiu, Liwan, Dongshan, and Haizhu) in the old Guangzhou. Liwan is the second oldest district in the city. Guangzhou has become an aged city since the population of the elderly aged 60 and over was 10.97% of the total population of the whole city, and at the same time the population aged 65 and over was 7.02% of the total in 1989. Liwan is the second most aged district in Guangzhou (Table 1)

TABLE 1 The Percentage of The Elderly Population of Guangzhou in 1990

DISTRICT	TYPE	PERCENTAGE (%)
YUEXIU	OLDER AGED	13.97
LIWAN	OLDER AGED	13.94
DONGSHAN	AGE	11.17
HAIZHU	YOUNGER AGED	10.11
FANGCUN	OLDER ADULT	9.93
BAIYUN	ADULT	8.35
HUANGPU	ADULT	6.44
TIANHE	ADULT	6.06
TOTAL	YOUNG AGED	10.23

Source: Guangzhou Population Census Data of 1990.

Jinhua street is one of the administrative blocks of Liwan district. It has historically been an area with a concentration of poor and old residents. The elderly account for 14% of the total population of Jinhua Street in 1993. By the aging standards of the United Nation, Jinhua Street's aging problem is very serious.

Just outside Guangzhou's west city wall there are many temples, one of which is Jinhua Temple, after which the street was named. The name Jinhua is golden flower. It is hoped that Jinhua street will become a very beautiful neighborhood, and this research is dedicated to making this hope come true.

Purpose

China has the largest elderly population in the world. At present, the total population in China account for one-fifth of the world's population. The elderly population in China is more than one-fifth of the world's. It will increase calculably.

The growth speed of China's elderly population is the fastest in the world. It took over 100 years for the western developed countries to finish the process of increasing the growth rate of the elderly population (aged 65 and over) from 5% to 7%. In Japan, this process took 50 years. However, it will only take about 10 years in China.

A lot of aging neighborhoods like Jinhua Street can be found not only in Guangzhou, but also in Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan and many other large cities in China. We can find a lot of aging neighborhoods not only in the old area that existed before the 1970s but also in the new area emerged after 1970s.

We can see in **Table 2** that 9 out of 12 neighborhood are aged.

So the research in Jianhua Street will be a valuable information for the renewal of the old neighborhoods and the development of new ones in China.

TABLE 2. Population Composition by Age of the Neighborhoods in Some Cities

Neighborhood, city	Total Population	Aged Population	Percentage (%)
Huangshi, Wuhan	1513	177	11.7
Heping, Wuhan	1856	220	11.9
Ruijing, Nanjing	2297	124	5.4
Caoyang, Shanghai	6614	842	12.7
Mingyuan, Shanghai	3856	386	10.0
Jingan, Shanghai	4700	686	14.6
Baokang, Shanghai	6163	896	14.5
Beiwanzhuang, Beijing	2518	160	6.4
Shuguang, Beijing	2355	227	9.6
Yongan, Beijing	933	145	15.5
Xinlou, Beijing	1390	206	14.8
Shouchen, Beijing	2159	262	12.1
Total	23354	4323	11.9

Source : Residential Planning and Design, 1985

RESPONDENT

Age and Gender

The age range of the elderly spans well over 30 years. In this paper the elderly were divided into five groups. According to the random sampling survey, 56.3% of the elderly are 60-69 and 27.1% are 70-79. More than half of the elderly are younger elderly (younger than 70). Their average age is 68. There are 57.1% women and 42.9% men in the sampling.

Table 3 shows that the sex ratio in the total elderly population of the sample is 1.33. Those elderly who are either younger than 55 or 90+ are all women.

Marital Status

Table 4 shows that women outnumber men by three to one in the widowed elderly population of the Jinhua sample. Thus women will live longer than men and a majority of old women are without spouse during their old age and live alone or with relatives.

TABLE 3. The sex ratio of Jinhua elderly sampling

Age Group	55 - 59	60 -69	70 - 79	80 - 89	90-	T
Ratio, F/M		1.14	0.96	1.21		1.33

TABLE 4. The Sex Ratio of Marital Status (F/M)

AGE GROUP	55 - 59	60 - 69	70 - 79	80 - 89	90 -	T
NEVER MARRIED		0.50	0.50	1.00		0.71
MARRIED		0.90	0.52	0.10		1.01
WIDOWED		2.91	1.82	2.63		2.56
DIVORCED		0.40				1.00
SEPARATED		1.00				2.00

Education

The elderly were all born before liberation (1949). They did not have many chances to get higher education. Less than half (46.5%) of the elderly in the Jinhua sample have only graduated from primary schools, and 23.4% of the elderly are even illiterate. The sex ratio of the illiterate elderly is about 5.0 (exactly 4.85). So most of the illiterate elderly women are unemployed and have been housewives all their life. Only 17.8% of the elderly have graduated from high schools, and the number of men are higher than women. Only 5.7% of the elderly have graduated from colleges, and most are men.

Occupation Before Retirement

More than half of the elderly were workers before retirement. The percentage is 52.5%. Their occupation was related to their education levels, and they generally have a low standard of living.

PROBLEMS OF THE ELDERLY

Health

The elderly are usually afflicted with chronic diseases. In the sample, more than 70% of the elderly suffer from one illness or more, such as rheumatism, arthritis, heart disease, and high-blood pressure. Both the male and female elderly in Jinhua Street have the highest rate of rheumatism. It reaches 26%.

Arthritis is the second most common condition, it is 19%. The sum of the two numbers is 45%. Of course, some elderly suffer from both of them. Their diseases are related to the local climates. The most prevalent disease of the elderly in Wuhan city in 1987 was arthritis. It was 30.3%. But the primary disease in Guangzhou in 1994 is rheumatism, because of high air humidity in Guangzhou between spring and summer. In Wuhan, it is very cold without heating in winter and it is too hot to stay at home without air conditions in summer. In the average worker's family, their living conditions are poor protection against the damp and the cold environment.

No matter whether one is in China or North America, in coastal cities or inland, the heart and blood vessel disease patients are mostly elderly. The diseases relate mainly to the aged of the individual.

Income

Most of the elderly in China live with their retired pensions or depend on their children. In 1988, 18% of the elderly had an average income of less than 50 yuan a month. 46% received 50 to 100 yuan. 19% were over 100 yuan. And now, the retired pensions of most of them are increasing. It is 150 to 250 yuan month, or 23 to 40 Canadian dollars a month. 82.1% of the elderly depend on their retired pensions. It is very low compare to the

average of 500 yuan plus. Some 23.2% of the elderly depend on their children and since they have never worked at any work unit before, they will not receive any retirement pension.

In order to increase their living financial levels, 30.7% of the elderly continue working. The problem is that the increase of their pensions are slower than the increase of the prices. As a consequence, they have to tighten their money and have to live frugally. As the Chinese goes, "Kan-Cai-Ci-Fan". It means that one should fit the appetite to the dishes.

Housing

One problem with housing is that the elderly do not have enough living space. About 27.5% of the elderly live with their family in space with less than 6 square meters. Whereas 29.1% live in 6 to 9 square meter housing. Only 12.8% of the elderly families have more than 20 square meters of living space per person. The number of elderly families who lack living space is more than double of elderly families with enough space.

Another problem is that the elderly family houses do not have basic facilities, such as kitchens and bathrooms. Less than half (48.7%) of elderly families have their own kitchen and bathroom. It means that the remainder have either their own kitchen or bathroom, or neither.

It is a very poor condition to live in, especially for the elderly. But 21.8% of the elderly families have lived for more than 30 years, some even 80 to 100 years or more.

In traditional Chinese families, especially in the countryside, most of the elderly live with their children. A daughter will depart from her parents to live with her husband's family after she gets married. In other words, if the parents raise sons, then when the sons grow up and get married, they will be provided for in their old age. There is a popular saying in China --- "Yang--Er--Fang--Lao". It means that parents raise sons for their old age. So more than half of the elderly people live with their son's

families. About 15% of the elderly live with their daughter's families. Jinhua Street is still a very traditional neighborhood.

But now more and more nuclear families are emerging. The traditional family structure is changing. Most elderly couples prefer to live separately from their children. So do the children. The reason why they are still living together is that they do not have enough space to live separately. There are many reasons why they share one apartment.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR THE ELDERLY

It is extremely urgent for the government and the whole society to develop some solutions to the aging problems that the report of the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has clearly indicated that "we must pay attention to the tendencies of the aging population and choose a correct strategy to cope with it in time" for nine years. This was the first time that the Party in power put such problem on the agenda. It was stressed again in the report of the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1992. The government reaffirmed that we must devote much more attention to researching of the aging problems of the population and deal with them conscientiously.

The government and the local office have identified five aspects of concern to the elderly: work, education, livelihood, health care, recreation for the elderly.

Work of the Elderly

The government encourages the retired elderly to continue working and energetically initiate economic opportunities for themselves. It provides the elderly more and more opportunities to continue working. On September 11, 1992, the first labor market for the elderly was inaugurated in Guangzhou. Five thousand elderly people attended on the first day. The scene was very moving. In the survey, 11.5% of the elderly currently continue to work, 26.3% of the elderly want to work again either part time or full time. Most of them prefer to do odd jobs such as

entrance guards, volunteers, bicycle parking keeper, and vendors.

There is an elderly person living in Xinggi Li in Jinhua Street. He is 77 and has taught English to School students courses at home as a volunteer for 30 years.

Education for the Elderly

The Elderly College of Guangzhou was first established in China in 1984. It was named Ling Hai Elderly College. In 1994, it celebrated its anniversary of the founding of the college. About 10,000 elderly students have graduated from either the head college or the branch colleges in the past 10 years. There are many kinds of lectures, reports, and correspondences for the students. The courses involve a lot of modern science and culture fields, such as health maintenance, nursing, computer science, stock transactions.

In 1991, the first neighborhood elderly college was set up in Jinhua Street in Guangzhou. The college is open on Thursdays. All students have their registers, study plan, and notebooks in the individual bags that are stored in the sub district office. There are more female students than male students, because the college is very close to their home, and it is easy to look after their household. There are a lot of courses which appeal to women, such as cooking, health, calligraphy, paper-cutting, dress-making, dance, and Guangdong opera. It lifts their spirits and allows them to enjoy life more fully.

Public Health Services for the Elderly

The 107th Government Document of The National Public Health Ministry dealt at health for the elderly in the 8th Five Year Plan in 1990. It pointed out that: "to develop the health plan of the community is an important way of dealing with the health protection and nursing services for the elderly. We must accumulate a wealth of experiences for the cities and countries of our whole country".

The government has promoted the development of aged professional clinics and an increase of aged wards in the hospitals by

administrative means in Guangdong. Since the aged professional clinic of Guangdong Renming Hospital opened in 1990, the number of the elderly clinic patients has increased.

Most of the elderly have public health services. About half of the sampling are free to go see a doctor and get treatment. A quarter of the sampling enjoy more than half of the public health services. Of courses, we must realized that 22% of the elderly have to pay by themselves or through their families, which is very difficult and expensive for the average families.

Support for the elderly

The retired pensions of the country have been mainly supported by work units (enterprise support), because the retired workers have worked in the same unit all their life. Their pensions are affected by the economic benefits of the enterprise. In 1989, the average living expenses of each citizen in Guangzhou amounted to 197 yuan (\$30 Canadian Dollars) per month. But the standard of the retired pension of the enterprise of Ownership By The Whole People is 147 Yuan (\$23) per month. The standard of the retired pension of the factory of Collective Ownership is 136 yuan (\$21) per month. The lowest pension level is 110 yuan (\$19) per month.

The sub-district office and the neighborhood committee mainly organize a series of programs to assist the elderly. Every September 9th is defined the National Respect Day in China. The 25th of every month is the Jinhua Respect Day. The Jinhua sub district office dealt with more than 60 projects for the elderly in 1993.

Entertainment for the Elderly

The government realizes that it is very beneficial for the elderly to take an active part in appropriate recreational activities. The monthly park pass for the elderly is 1.50 yuan in the park of Guangzhou. It is basically free for the elderly. And a cup of tea is provided free of charge when they have breakfast at restaurants in the early morning before 8:00 o'clock. The elderly usually get up early at

6:00 o'clock every morning. They prefer to go to the park for morning exercises first and then they have a cup of tea and breakfast. Of course some elderly like to have breakfast before exercising. After finishing their early morning activities, they will chat as they play cards and majiang (mahjong) with their friends in the parks every day, just as they went to the work unit before retirement.

The elderly get up before daybreak and then take 15 minutes walk to Liwan Lake Park in crowds. The number of elderly is more than 1,000 every morning. They play Tai-Ji-Quan (Tai Chi), exercise Qi-gong, dance, perform a sword-dance, play badminton, and so on. Some elderly spend the whole day in the park.

Retirement is an important reason why the elderly have so much leisure. In their survey, their most prepared activity is watching TV. The percentage is 36%. The second is playing mahyong (25%), and the third is chatting with the friends of the same age (19.4%). The TV program "The Red Setting Sun" is shown three times a week especially for the elderly throughout the country.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE ELDERLY

Moving After The Renewal

In the renewal of Jinhua Street, an important problem appeared. It is that the very closed community which had existed 30 to 50 years or more had been broken. Some of the original residents could not move back for many reasons. Although the young people do not mind it, the elderly miss the old and familiar neighbors very much. I heard it directly by talking with them. Not only have they lost the contact with their closest friends, but they have also lost their psychological balance.

The new apartment buildings of Jinhua Street are mostly nine stories without any elevators. Most of the elderly expect to live lower than the third floor. 30% of the elderly would have chosen the ground floor if they had been moving into a new apartment. 20% of the elderly would have chosen the second floor.

21% of the elderly chose the third floor. Few elderly like to live above the fifth floor.

The elderly also desire to live separately from their married children in order to reduce family quarrels, especially between the mother and daughter-in-law, but most of the elderly live with their son's families in the traditional style. 9% of elderly families have family quarrels. There will be more harmony for the elderly and the married children if they live separately rather than together. Unfortunately, the apartments that the government and work units can provide are limited.

Community Services

There is a gap between community facilities and the expectations of the elderly. Bank, grocery, and primary school are the main community facilities in Jinhua street. The percentages are 52%, 45.7%, 45%, respectively. But the community facilities that the elderly expect are a park, medical station, and recreation house.

Urban land is limited and park is in great demand. The elderly want to go out for walks but there is no park in Jinhua Street, they have to cross a city street to Liwan Lake Park on the other side of the street without the zebra lines for pedestrians. 31.3% of the elderly feel it is dangerous to cross the streets.

It is difficult to see a doctor, to be in hospital, and to recover. The government has thought of a way to solve the problem, but demand exceeds supply. The elderly want to have some community medical station as a supplement. The elderly not only need the community medical station, but also they expect to have some daily help at home, such as looking after them when they fall ill, doing household duties for them, chatting with them, even shopping and refilling up the coal gas. It is difficult for the elderly to look for a young housekeeper, because either they do not have enough money or few young housekeepers want to do the job.

The elderly also like to walk on the streets and lanes of Guangzhou. Some 80% of the elderly

want to go out for walks. Half of them go to the park and the other half do not have a place to go. They want to have a community recreation house in which to spend their leisure time. Out of the expected 30% of the elderly who did not answer this question, only 5.7% of the total sampling have no leisure. The rest and the most of the elderly usually have 3 to 4 hours of leisure a day.

Individual Life

The marital problem of the elderly is serious. 34.8% of the sampling have no spouse because they either never married or are widowed, divorced, separated. 24.1% are female (**Table 4**). 20.2% of the elderly feel lonely. The traditional attitude toward marriage in China is that marrying only once is best. Only 20% of the total elderly sampling answered the question of why they could not marry again even if they wanted. 44% of the respondents feared public opinion. About 20% said they had not found a suitable partner in marriage. The gravity of the situation may be seen in the fact that 19% of the respondents could not get married again because of their children's objection.

61.2% of the elderly are most concerned with their health. 45.1% of those who answered fear accidental diseases coming on. 35.6% of the elderly are concerned about the future of their children.

Most of the elderly do not have any special wishes regarding their future life. They only expect to spend their remaining years in happiness and peace. 40% of the elderly think that they will continue performing household duties in the future. 27.2% of the elderly will just muddle along. The elderly expect that government and social organizations will be concerned with the life and health of retirees.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Most of the elderly are healthy according to our random sampling survey in Jinhua Street. The largest age group is the young elderly. They can basically support themselves and

take care of themselves. However, we must notice that most of the elderly are afflicted with many kinds of chronic diseases. Their most important concern is with their own health. They expect to spend their remaining years in happiness and peace.

Pension benefits do not keep up with rising prices. The government and work units try to improve their living resources, but the elderly who were workers before retirement still live in bad conditions. With the impending reform of the public medical system, it is particularly important to institute medical insurance for the elderly.

Social ideology and moral concept are helpful in respecting the elderly and taking good care of children. "Family" and "I" are synonyms in Chinese culture, but "family" is different from "I" in North America. The government vigorously pursues family care policy. On the other hand, it is inconvenient for the elderly who cannot be looked after by their families because of the lack of old folk's homes.

It is important to set up and develop community services for the elderly as a necessary component of family care. The elderly especially healthy ones, depend on the community and the neighbourhood. They like having the sense of a home to return to and a sense of familiarity. They do not like to live in an old folk's home. They only expect to get help from the neighborhood when they need it. They expect to have some places to go for enjoyment. They expect to have some friends to chat with if they want.

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