

## ABSTRACT

### EXPLORING CHINA'S ONE-CHILD PARENTS' PREFERENCE OF LIVING ARRANGEMENT: AN EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

by Wenxuan Huang

As the first cohort of one-child parents approach their retirement, the question “who will take care of this aging group” has become a major concern of policymakers and Chinese families. This study explores the one-child parents’ preference of living arrangement and their perceived factors influencing their expected future caregiving arrangements. Six one-child parents living in urban areas participated in semi-structured interviews for this study. The grounded theory approach was employed to analyze the qualitative data collected from interviews. This study found that the lifelong independence facilitated by self-empowerment is the general preference the participants hold for their post-retirement living arrangement. This study also revealed that parent-child co-residence is not the preferred living arrangement; traditional belief of filial obligations is being modified in modern society. A formal system of home- and community-based services is expected to be the promising source of elder care for these participants.

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ARRANGEMENT: AN EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of Problem**

In the past four decades, China has undergone profound social changes which transformed both national demographics and family structures. Davis and Harrell identified three major determinants which shape household size and composition: demographic, economic and culture factors (Davis & Harrell, 1993, pg.50). Among various social changes, family planning policy and economic reform have played the most important roles in reshaping Chinese families. The ever-growing aging population has challenged the social welfare system and family resilience in providing sustainable long-term care resources to the aging population. It is projected that there will be 15.7% of people aged 65+ in 2030 and 22.7% in 2050. Based on 2000 census data, Zeng and Wang (2003) found that Chinese family is at the transitional stage characterized by decreased family size as well as a higher proportion of empty nest families. More importantly, the rapidly expanding oldest-old population is confronting declining support from family and inadequate substitutions from other sectors of the society (Zeng & Wang, 2003). In this case, the unmet elder care needs have drawn considerable attention from both the family members and policymakers challenged by underdeveloped social security system and collapsing family network of care resources. “Who will take care of the elder” has become the pressing issue for modern China’s society.

As the outcomes of social changes are penetrating into a larger proportion of Chinese families, the first wave of one-child parents is reaching their 60s. The uniqueness of this group lies in its particular responses to the one-child policy and economic reform. The one-child parents were born in the time range from 1950s to 1960s, and they grew up with the unprecedented social evolutions. They benefit from the economic prosperity while they are also challenged by the limitations of in-family care sources. As a consequence of one-child policy, the rapid decline of fertility rate has tremendously shrunk the household size in China, and the number of available young caregivers in the family has decreased (Chen, 2005). The existing body of research adheres to the assumption that co-residing with married children is the primary preference of older adults’ living arrangement without accounting for their reactions to specific social changes and life events. Most of the studies focused on the aging population as a whole or just the oldest-old population. The population of one-child parents has not been systemically studied to reveal the specific social changes’ influence on them while they are aging. Especially, the one-child parents’ subjective experience and interpretations of these social changes has been missing in the existing literature.

By focusing on living arrangements to explore how these social changes affect one-child parents long-term care needs and expectations, this study fills the gap of inadequate studies of this specific generation’s situations in the trend of population aging. Particularly, living arrangement is considered as the most essential institution of providing elder care and support in Chinese families (Zeng & Wang, 2003). Since the one-child parents just started to plan for their post-retirement life, this study focused on their preferences of living arrangement rather than the actual decisions. There are huge disparities of economic level and living standards between urban and rural areas. Therefore, this study only focused on the urban one-child parents who have been immersed in the influence of modernization together with population policies. The overall goal of this study is to understand one-child parents’ perceptions on their post-retirement life and long-term care plan based on their expectations of old-age living arrangements. Hearing

the voices from the one-child parents can help us better understand the nature of their long-term care needs as well as what policy adaptations will be suitable for them to age successfully.

## **Literature Review**

### **One-child policy and its influence on Chinese families**

In 1973, China's government launched a nationwide family planning program to control the high birth rate by providing birth control methods and family planning services. To maintain the sustainable development of the economy, the well-known one-child policy was introduced in 1979 to further control the growth of the population. It is claimed that 400 million births have been averted since the inception of family planning program (Wang, 2011). The low fertility rate has caused both macro- and micro-level changes in society and families. In 1950, the total fertility rate in China was 5.8 children per woman; in the 1980s, the fertility rate started to fall below the replacement rate of 2.1 and in 2012 it is reported to be 1.6 children per woman (The Economist, 2011). This trend to small families has increased the percentage of nuclear family regardless of the co-residence preference (Zeng & Wang, 2003).

As a result of one-child policy, the rapidly growing aging population has been regarded as a demographic problem that entails potential reframing of the social welfare system (Leung, 1997). The decreased fertility rate has exerted profound influence on Chinese family size and structure. Because of low fertility rate, Chinese families are becoming smaller (Jiang, 1995). The mean family size has been decreased to 3.44 people per family in 2000 compared with 4.41 people in 1982. This average size of family was even smaller in urban areas. Only 18.9% families are multigenerational (Yuan, 2004). The interplay of demographic and socioeconomic changes has created atypical family patterns other than traditional multi-generational or extended family (Chen, 1985). It is predicted that when the singletons born after the implementation of one-child policy get married, they will form more core families, DINK (double income, no kinds) families, trunk families (couples living with children and one grandparent pair) and empty-nest families (Yuan, 2004). Although the shortage of urban housing cushioned the rapidly decrease of multi-generational families, the overall percentage of extended family keeps declining steadily (Logan, Bian, & Bian, 1998).

Along with the downsizing of the families, married adult children's caregiving burden has expanded significantly compared with their parents. The "4-2-1" (4 grandparents, 2 parents, and 1 child) family structure becomes prevalent especially in urban areas. In 2015, there will be 1.58 million "4-2-1" families, and this number will reach 1.85 million in 2035 (Jiang & Sa'nchez-Barricarte, 2011). When the singletons get married, they will potentially face the situation of caring for 4 parents and their only child (Zhan, 2013). The caregiving burden to their parents is not immediate in the first several years of their marriage when their parents can still maintain financially and physically independent life. As their parents are aging, the sandwich generation (adult couple) at their working age will be responsible for taking care of both their parents and children. Since burdens cannot be shared among siblings and the life expectancy of their parents is getting longer, the adult couples will face increased caregiving burden in family. It is projected that 45-year-old men will have an average of 1.4 parents to support compared with the number of 0.7 in 1990 (Jiang, 1995). It is also accused that there is rising individualistic trend that shifted the young adults' focus to their own nuclear families. Elder parents are less likely to receive support from their adult children. In contrast, the singletons have a higher chance to gain financial support from their parents. Especially in the economically better off urban families, the care sources flow one-directionally to the "1"

grandchild in the “4-2-1” structure (Chen, 1985). Nowadays, the empty nest rate is rising in both urban and rural areas. According to the statistics provided by China’s Ministry of Civil Affairs, there are roughly 40% of older adults aged 60+ who are living in empty nests (Deng, 2012).

### **Economic reform and family changes**

William J. Goode postulated that the trend of modernization enhances the formation of nuclear family, and the growing autonomy granted by industrialization breaks down close kinship in families (Goode, 1963). China’s economic reform which took place simultaneously with family planning policy reflected similar trends. The open market increased social mobility and also introduced new possibilities to Chinese families. The material wealth allows the urban residents to make preference-based rather than need-based choices. Also, the expanding job opportunities have given the young generation more economic autonomy. At the moment, China has an underdeveloped social security system and a problem with shortage of urban housing; these realities may slow down the classic trend of downsizing family and kinship, but the living patterns of Chinese families are being reshaped gradually and noticeably by all the socioeconomic changes (Zhang, 2004; Chen 1985).

The autonomy of family is used to describe the new trend of urban family life. With the increase of household income, urban residents are able to hire “helpers” outside of the families to take care of the young kids and elderly parents; also, modern technologies liberated people from burdensome housework. The economic prosperity provided opportunities to women, the traditional caregivers, who now have more chances to get formal education and work in professional areas (Leung, 1997). With all the opportunities, people who lived in rural areas and smaller cities tend to seek jobs in big cities to earn better salaries. Working in big cities helps the migrant workers generate more income, and they are able to offer more financial aid to their parents (Wu, Carter, & Goins, 2005). However, the responsibility of taking care of their own children has shifted to grandparents. To compensate their labor, the young couples often correspondingly provide more financial support to their parents. This form of family interaction is recognized as intergenerational exchange or interdependence rather than the traditional selfless practice of filial piety (Luo & Zhan, 2012).

Although the family wealth created by economic reform does not inarguably indicate the overall trend of the nuclearization of families, it enables Chinese families to reconsider their decisions based on their preference. Chen (2009) defined this trend of independent living arrangement as “family division” (fen jia), a practice that parents and children maintain separate households. She tested the effect of economic determinants on family division using a longitudinal data set, the China Nutrition and Health Survey. She found that the family wealth negatively affect family division which contradicts with the assertion that the family division will be enhanced by increasing family wealth. On the other hand, education, as a predictor of independent living, neutralized the effect of family wealth. The parents who have higher education level tend to live separately from their children. Family division decisions rest on the preference of family members instead of the actual or assumed needs (Chen, 2009). The nuclearization of families leads to the absence of adult children who used to provide direct care to their elderly parents. These changes and opportunities raise issues for the long-term care planning of older adults. Despite the available financial resource that adult children allocate to their older parents, there is concern over who will substitute the missing caregiving roles of only child by providing diverse affordable social services for the older parents. All of these factors can influence how people plan for their living arrangement after retirement and into later life.

## **Filial piety and living arrangement**

Filial piety, embedded in China's society as early as Former Han Dynasty (Holzman, 1998), is defaulted as the family foundation for providing long-term care to elderly parents (Zhan, 2013). The worship of and absolute obedience to parents are conceptualized as the essence of filial piety (Holzman, 1998). It is suggested that children should alter their attitudes and behaviors to ensure the well-being of their parents. Children perform filial piety by providing instrumental assistance, giving money to parents, and co-residing with aging parents. These manifestations are significantly correlated with perceived filial piety (Mao & Chi, 2011). Beside the tacit common belief in intergenerational caregiving responsibilities, China's government also reinforced this social norm by explicitly prescribing the obligations of adult children to support their parents via legislation. In 1996, "Law for Protection of Elders' Right" was passed to require the adult children to provide physical, financial and emotional support to their aged parents who are 60 and older (China Law Education Website, 2012).

The practices of filial piety mainly manifest in dimensions including living arrangement, support to parents, respect to parents and ancestral worship (Li, Hodgetts, Ho, & Stolte, 2010). Among these dimensions, adult children's co-residence with aging parents in extended households is one of the most critical components of practicing filial piety. It is regarded as a remarkable characteristic of Chinese families which contrasts with western families' preference of independence. However, Whyte (1997) also argued that urban residents' exposure to western culture might lead to the weakening of filial obligation (Whyte, 1997).

Despite of the regulation of morality and law, the belief and practices of filial piety are argued to be eroding. The modernization of society has been identified as the major cause of the declining beliefs and practices of filial piety. Cheung and Kwan's study investigated modernization's effects on filial piety through conducting surveys in 6 big cities in China. Filial piety was measured in 6 dimensions including caring, respecting, greeting, pleasing, obeying and providing financial support; while modernization is measured by three indicators: Gross Domestic Product (GDP), average annual wage and proportion of labor employed in service sector. This study found that higher level of modernization among urban residents indicates reduced filial piety and cash payment to older parents (Cheung & Kwan, 2009).

Multiple studies have found that the declining parent-child co-residence rate is especially prominent in urban areas. Moreover, the older adults have also adapted their beliefs regarding parent-child co-residence. Summarizing the modernization theorists' view toward the power of cultural norms and power of modernization, Logan and Bian(1999) stated that the culturally normative values may not be as influential as practical conditions in determining people's behaviors. Choices are strategized according to the actual situations rather than prescribed by the traditional norms. By analyzing the data derived from 1987 Nine-city Aging Survey, they found that both preference and actual living arrangement were based on rational evaluation of life conditions. Co-residence might not necessarily be the outcome of following traditional norms, given the realities of modernization (Logan & Bian, 1999). The availability of housing in big cities and the adult children's career choices have created a level of inconvenience associated with co-residing with their parents. Alternative caregiving methods are now employed to substitute for the absence of the direct care from adult children (Li, Hodgetts, Ho, & Stolte, 2010). Urban Chinese families are adapting to the social changes and new forms of practicing filial piety are emerging. For example, "filial piety at a distance" (Sung, 1998) is very prevalent in modern Asian societies for the adult children to support their aging parents and maintain the

kinship bonds. In addition, the modern telecommunication technologies also enable the parents to stay in touch with their children distantly (Sung, 1998).

### **Types of living arrangement of China's older adults: co-residence and other alternatives**

With the alteration of filial piety and its corresponding practices, the well-being of older adults could be undermined. Variable living arrangements determine parent-child proximity and differentiate the caregiving patterns. In the following paragraphs, different types of older adults' living arrangement in contemporary China's society and their outcomes will be illustrated. According to the previous literature focused on living arrangement of Chinese family, decisions about living arrangements are a synthesized outcome of cultural and practical constraints (Zhang, 2004). Care needs, financial constraints, cultural norms and the modernized attitudes all interplay together in affecting family's decision of living arrangement. Because of the complication of these determinants, no single reason of the choice is considered as the sole predictor.

### **Parent-adult child co-residence**

The multigenerational family is the dominant living arrangement by which the majority of support and care are provided under the cultural norm of filial piety. This form of living arrangement is depicted as a mutual support network which is critical for both parents and children to gain intergenerational care resources (Chen, 1985). The high level of parent-adult child co-residence may not necessarily indicate the dependent roles of the elderly parents. In some of the cases, young and unmarried children still live with their parents to obtain care and support (Whyte, 2005). The roles of caregivers are shifting among family members through their life course. It is not a matter of time that shifts the caregiving roles; rather, the needs of caregiving determine the direction of the flow of resources (Leung, 1997). Zhang (2004) also found the pattern of alternating roles of support in family. Economically secure middle-aged parents still provide resources to adult children to meet their needs. However, the oldest-old parents are more likely to gain support from adult children in extended families (Zhang, 2004).

Several surveys conducted among the urban residents showed consistency that the co-residence level remains high in big cities. This form of living arrangement stays stable to fulfill the caregiving obligations even in the context of emerging social changes. However, evidence shows that the economic transitions do influence the living arrangement choices and decisions of the older adults. Increasing material wealth enables families to make the decisions according to their preferences rather than the constraints of resources. At the same time, economic prosperity has enhanced social mobility while altering family stability (Zhang, 2004). Although there are certain constraints such as shortage of housing and financial resources of holding nuclear families, the attitude toward co-residence changed tremendously in the last few decades. In modern society of China, the proportion of the older adults living with their children dropped constantly. Moreover, the national survey also showed that the married young people living in cities prefer to live separately from their parents; the parents who are physically and financially independent also prefer to live by themselves (Leung, 1997).

### **Institution dwelling**

Compared with western countries, nursing home residence remains an uncommon living arrangement for the oldest-old in China who need advanced instrumental support. There are sparse studies examining different dimensions of institutional care in China. With the rapid increase of the aging population and the decreasing capacity of nuclear family in providing in-home support, nursing homes and other forms of services have been brought to long-term care

market in China. Nowadays, about 1.5% older adults in China are living in nursing homes and elderly apartments which are mainly provided by social and medical system. The older adults living in these settings are often the ones who are least likely to be taken care of by their families. To be eligible for government-sponsored nursing homes, old adults have to be “5 nil” (no child, no regular income, living alone, widowed or never married) (Chu, FRCP, & Chi, 2008).

The stereotypical impression of China’s nursing homes is that these facilities are the least desirable living arrangement and the last choice of older adults. Placing older adults in institutional settings is considered to contradict the traditional belief of “filial piety”. Also, it is a “stigma” for the older adults who have capable living children. A qualitative study which interviewed nursing home residents, family members and staff reinterpreted filial piety in the context of nursing home placement. There is a shared perspective among the interviewees that nursing home placement does not necessarily relate to non-pious practice; as long as the nursing home residents are better-off than living in family environment, the placement is considered as a good practice of “filial piety” (Zhang, Feng, & Luo, 2008). With the decreasing number of family caregivers and the prosperity of economy, the need for building more affordable nursing facilities is expanding (Arnsberger, Fox, & Gui, 2000).

### **Living alone**

In addition to dwelling in extended family and institutional environment, another major form of living arrangement for older adults in China is “living alone”. This pattern of living arrangement is often associated with inadequacy of family support. The older adults who are living alone are often unmarried, childless or widowed (Chen & Short, 2008). Chou and Chi’s study examined the difference between the older adults living alone and living with others. They found that the older adults living alone are more likely to have poorer self-rated health and a higher level of financial strain; they receive less instrumental and emotional support. The life quality of the “living-alone” older adults deserves the attention of the society (Chou & Chi, 2000). Chou’s study focusing on the scope of depression and living arrangement indicates that “living alone” is also a risk factor contributing to depression among Chinese older women (Chou, Ho, & Chi, 2006).

Nowadays, living alone is less associated with the limitation of family support and resources; rather, independent older adults are actively choosing to live by themselves. Since the 1990s, older adults are more likely to live alone or with their spouses apart from their children. Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey showed that “living alone (or with spouse) and children living nearby” is the secondary preference compared with co-residence, the most desirable living arrangement. In this survey, 35.93% respondents reported that they prefer to live separately from their children (Sereny, 2011). Physically and financially independent older adults are more likely to choose live separately from their children (Leung, 1997). As the number of the available children declines, the one-child parents seem to reconsider their preference of living arrangements in their old age. If the living conditions and their financial status permit them to live independently, older adults will not adhere to the traditionally desired co-residence.

### **Home- and community-based services for older adults**

Home- and community-based care and services are still underdeveloped in China and they are considered to compensate the decline support and care from family (Chu, FRCP, & Chi, 2008). Responding to the expanding needs of elder care outside of family, developing new models of home- and community-based long-term care has gained wide attention across the

society. Shanghai is one of the major cities that have already taken actions to establish home- and community-based care system. Based on the analysis of the existing home- and community-based care providers located in Shanghai, the researchers found that these services are still at the primary stage of the development; diversity of functions, implementation of quality management and government funding are considered to be necessities to support the sustainability of this model (Wu, Carter, & Goins, 2005). This new trend provides older adults with opportunities to rethink their living arrangement with the possibility of gaining assistance outside of the family at affordable price. As the service system is still immature, relevant studies on the feasibility and the strategies of administrating organizations are still rare.

According to the previous studies based on the analysis of survey data, some major predictors are identified to be crucial in determining older adults living arrangement. Age, gender, marital status, health and socio-economic status are used for building the model predicting the preference of living arrangement choices (co-residence, living alone and institutionalized residence). The results shows that the respondents with lower socioeconomic status prefers to co-reside with their adult children (Sereny, 2011). Research using CLHLS data also explored the effects of different living arrangement. It found that living alone is associated with poorer self-rated well-being and co-residing with immediate family (spouse or children) is positively related to subjective well-being (Chen & Short, 2008). Most of the studies focused on the “oldest-old” population who are the major recipients of family care from younger generation. The oldest-old is defined as an individual who is older than 85-year-old (Suzman & Riley, 1985). The emerging cohort of one-child parents who are approaching their retirement age (60-year-old for men and 55-year-old for women) remain comparatively understudied in the existing body of literature.

Moreover, the existing body of literature was based on the analysis of survey data. These studies have portrayed the big picture of structural transitions occurring in Chinese families in the backdrop of multiple social changes. However, the subtle changes of family dynamics and intergenerational caregiving patterns are difficult to be captured in survey data. Surveys can measure older adults’ and their family members’ attitudes toward future living arrangements, but there is a barrier to examining the intersection and fluid nature of these ideas and concepts. The qualitative method is best suited to investigate people’s experience and cognitive interpretations as it allows the respondents to speak out their own perceptions rather than reply to the pre-outlined thoughts. This study conducted semi-structured interviews among one-child parents to describe the understanding of living arrangement preferences and determinants responding to the major social changes brought by one-child policy and economic reform. The exploration of their perspectives of living arrangement will provide the government and social entities some insight into how to reach the concordance of their preference and the actual choices. Also, their opinions regarding the services outside of their families will shed light on the formulation of the blueprint of the home- and community-based care system. This study mainly answered these two questions below.

## **Research questions:**

1. What are the one-child parents’ perceptions toward their living arrangement in old age?
2. What are the perceived factors that influence one-child parents’ decisions of living arrangement in old age?

## Chapter 2: Methodology

Since little is known about the topic of Chinese one-child parents' perceptions and preferences of living arrangement, an exploratory qualitative research was appropriate to identify the concepts responding to the research questions. To organize and analyze the qualitative data collected from the interviews, this study built the methodological framework on the basic ideas of grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is an approach which focuses on generating new knowledge and presenting it in a conceptual framework or developed theory (Birks & Mills, 2011). Although the goal of this study is not to generate an explanatory theory, the data analysis methods of grounded theory enabled the researcher to integrate the conceptual elements logically to answer the research questions with the theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978). Different from the traditional studies using grounded theory approach, this study mainly used the three-step coding scheme (open-axial-selective) proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) to analyze the interview data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Figure 1 illustrates the step-by-step pathway of the methodology applied in this study.

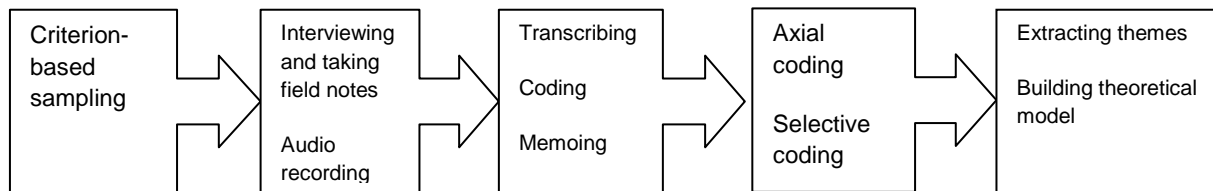


Figure 1: Step-by-step methodological procedures

### Participants and recruitment

Since social changes influence urban and rural areas differently, this study only sampled from one-child parents living in urban areas; this strategy was chosen to exclude the confounding effects of urban-rural differences in the level of modernization. The income disparity between urban and rural areas largely determines the living standards. The scope and development of long-term care is differentiated between rural and urban areas due to distinct levels of economic prosperity (Chu, FRCP, & Chi, 2008). The contextual background of this study is the implementation of one-child policy. To make sure that the participants are influenced by the social changes including one-child policy and economic reform, a criterion-based sampling strategy has been employed to reach the participants who meet the two standards. Firstly, they have to be currently living in urban areas; secondly, they gave birth to their only child after 1979, the year that one-child policy was strictly implemented. A criterion-based sampling approach allowed the study to explore the participants who have certain features that are related to the research questions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

A convenience sample was selected from the researcher's social network. After gaining the approval from Miami University's Institutional Review Board, the researcher started to contact the children of the potential participants to collect their contact information. Although the data analysis framework was based on the grounded theory approach, the theoretical sampling was not conducted due to the accessibility of the participants. Theoretical sampling in grounded theory indicates that each new participant is selected based on the emerging concepts and the

variations among each data collection event (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, a homogenous convenience sample including 10 potential participants was recruited before the interviews were conducted. However, the logic of accumulating theoretical clues illuminated the interview process. Directed by the emerging concepts and theories (Strauss, 1987), each interview was built upon the previous one(s) to elicit further information and capture potential concepts contributing to the answer of research questions. The interviews stopped at the sixth participant when the theoretical saturation point was reached through constant comparison of the codes generated from each transcript. Theoretical saturation is achieved when no further data can contribute to the extracted categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). At the original stage of research design, marital status was considered as an important sampling criterion. However, this criterion was dropped when some barriers occurred in the process of reaching divorced one-child parents. The unmarried one-child parents refused to answer the interview questions regarding their family life in detail especially when the topic of relationships was involved. Therefore, the unmarried participants were excluded from the final record of the interview data. Table 1 demonstrates the basic characteristics of the participants. All the participants are living in cities in northern China.

Table 1: Description of participants' characteristics

<b>Age</b>	Range (47-57)
<b>Gender</b>	2 female 4 male
<b>Education</b>	Range: middle school- bachelor's degree
<b>Marital status</b>	All married
<b>Working status</b>	3 are working 3 are retired and doing a second job

### Data collection

After formal consents were obtained from the participants, semi-structured interviews were conducted by telephone. Because the Chinese one-child parents' perception on post-retirement living arrangement is an understudied topic, the depth of understanding and richness of information are the primary concerns of data collection. Since qualitative interviews are appropriate "when the purpose of the research is to unravel complicated relationships and slowly evolving events" (Rublin & Rubin, 1995, pg.51), this method of data collection was used for this study. Qualitative interviews allowed the researcher to interactively elicit the information responding to the research interest from the participants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Because the research questions focus on the future rather than the current situations, a timeline was designed as an elicitation tool to help the participants organize their thoughts and statements during the conversations with researcher. A timeline is often used in interviews to visualize the interviewees' stories in time sequence (Gramling & Carr, 2004). In this study, the researcher borrowed this idea to formulate the interview topic guide to elicit the information from the participants, as depicted in Figure 2.

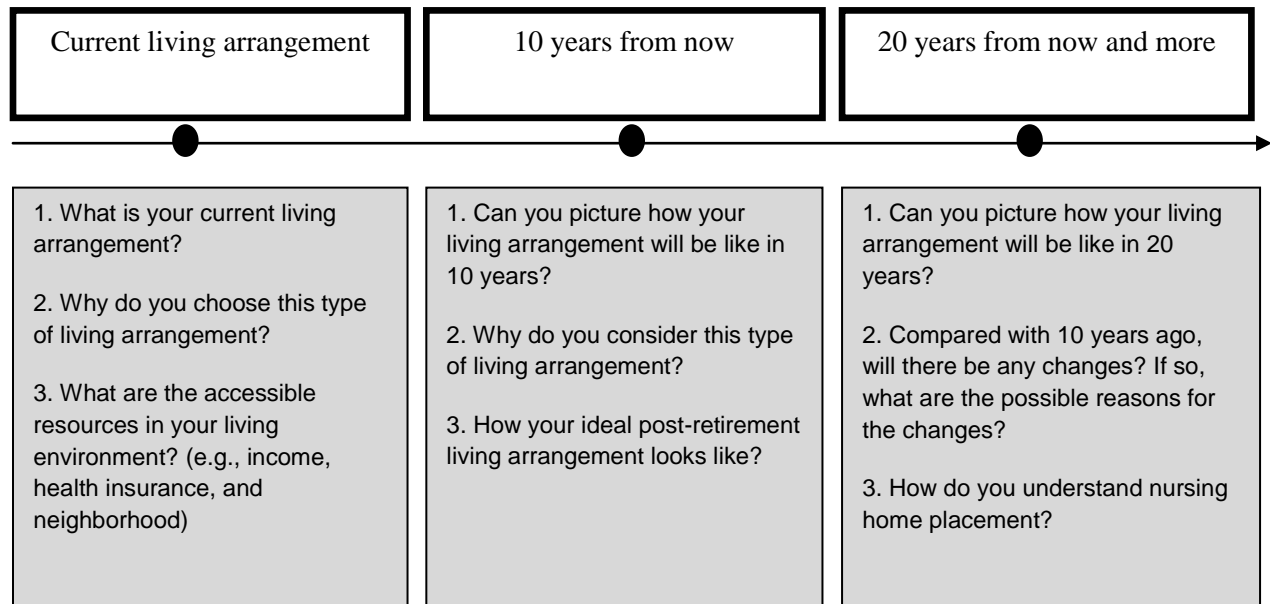


Figure 2: Interview topic guide

Apart from asking direct question regarding living arrangements, the questions on their attitudes and opinions toward one-child policy and filial piety were asked to obtain rich contextual information. Collecting this information helped the research understand how the social changes and its outcomes have influenced one-child parents' family value.

#### Sample questions:

1. How do you think one-child policy has affected Chinese families?
2. What are the challenges for the traditional value of filial piety?

Following the interview topic guide, the first interview was conducted as the pilot interview which tested the appropriateness of the interview questions and the effectiveness of the probing questions. The researcher took field notes after the first participant's responses to further refine the interview questions. In each following interview, the researcher paid closer attention to the concepts emerging from the previous one(s) in order to probe for more detailed statements.

The time spent for each interview ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. During each interview, an electronic voice recorder was used to document the interview content. Each interview was transcribed right after it was done to assure the accurate account of the information. This strategy allowed the researcher to familiarize with the raw data immediately. All the interviews were conducted and originally transcribed in Chinese. In order to keep the original meaning of the discourses, the transcripts were not translated into English in the process of data analysis. Finally, the researcher only translated the quotes included in the findings into English for data presentation.

#### **Data analysis**

The data analysis followed the coding paradigm put forward by Strauss (1987). A three-step coding including open, axial and selective coding was conducted to develop the conceptual

model responding to the research questions (Strauss, 1987). In accord with the inductive process, the raw qualitative data in the interview transcripts were gradually reduced to concepts and themes. In the initial coding stage, open coding was started after the first interview was transcribed. Open coding was used to index the intensive raw data into codes which are captured for potential “conceptual possibilities” (Birks & Mills, 2011). Descriptive and conceptual codes are the two basic types of codes captured in the initial coding. The codes derived from open coding were displayed in a table by each participant so that constant comparison can be conducted. Constant comparative method enables the comparison of the categories coded from a different set of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The codes appeared repeatedly were marked down to develop further categories. Memoing is a key tool for mapping the research activities. The researcher constantly compared the codes to detect where the data converge and themes emerge by writing ongoing memos (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008). In this study, memos were written to keep track of the relationships between categories and the theoretical reflection on the emerging themes.

Axial coding was applied in the second round of coding to relate the categories and subcategories around axis (Strauss, 1987). The preference and the determinants contributing to participants’ attitudes and thoughts were integrated into major categories at this stage. In the selective coding process, the peripheral codes were excluded from further analysis. The peripheral codes are considered as the ones of low relevancy to the system of main concepts. For instance, the “attitude of family education toward only child” could not be directly linked to the answer of how one-child parents conceptualize their living arrangement preferences. Only the categories which were related to the core categories were kept to build the theoretical model. The core category is depicted as the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this study, “lifelong independence” and “self-empowerment” were identified as the core categories which integrate the perceived factors contributing in the participants’ value and concerns about post-retirement living arrangement. The results are displayed in a phased model picturing the trajectory of preference of living arrangement and perceived factors shaping their perceptions.

## Chapter 3: Results

The one-child parents' preference of living arrangements in this study can be summarized in three conditional clauses led by "if", "even if" and "only if". Their preferences may shift slightly with the passage of time; however, the most dominant attitude is lifelong independence. In term of living arrangement, all the participants stated that they prefer to live with their spouse only. None of them considered parent-child co-residence (or multigenerational family) as his/her desired post-retirement housing choice. Figure1 is the model which links the hierarchical preference of living arrangement and the perceived factors along the timeline.

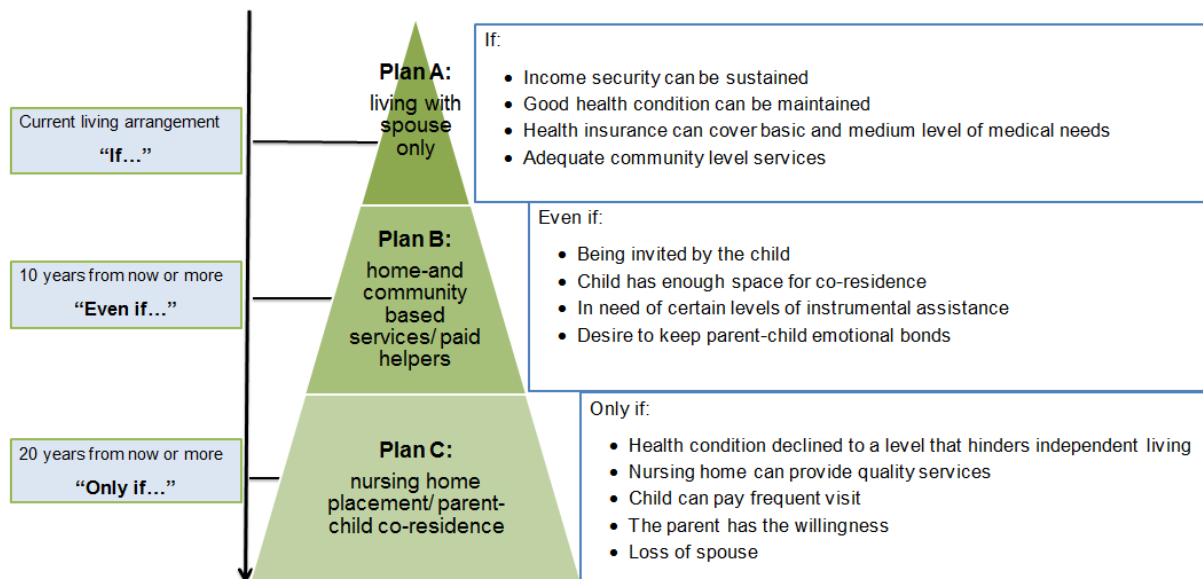


Figure 3: Model of living arrangement trajectory

### Living arrangement trajectory "If..."

The participants stated their resolution of lifelong independence *if* they can sustain the income security, good health condition, adequate health insurance coverage and community-level services for older adults. Although some of them are still taking the responsibility of giving care to their parents or parents-in-law, they hold the opinion that being independent of their children is preferable.

*Our current thought is that as long as we can still take care of ourselves, we will absolutely choose to live independently.*

*It all depends on the future development...if the health condition allows, we will be independent throughout our life.*

### **Income security**

Whether the participants are government employees or factory workers, they identified pension as the primary source of income. Although there are variations of income levels among the participants, they assert that their pension can cover their day-to-day expenses in old age. Apart from pension, they also described a variety of income sources, which encompass savings, stock returns and longevity insurance. These alternative approaches play important roles in fulfilling one-child parents' desire of independence. For the participants, retirement is not the watershed of stopping earning income or labeling themselves as "old".

*If I am in good health condition, I still hope to get a second job. Anyway, as an independent individual, I don't want to be forgotten by the society or be labeled as useless. The essence of leading a meaningful life is that I am able to make contributions by doing valuable work.*

*...in the coming couple of years, I am still able to work. Therefore, I want to save more money so that my activities and plans will be less confined by financial constraints.*

Income security has emerged as the participants' main concern of post-retirement plans; it was the foundation of their plans regarding decisions of relocating, seeking of a second job and lifestyles. The economically sound participants showed their interest in enriching their life by choosing a new pattern of living arrangement. The material prosperity nurtured the mobility of the participants in selecting living environment.

*We have the plan of buying or renting an apartment in a coastal city, and we have taken action to make it happen. For instance, we can rent an apartment in Hainan province. During the winter, we can live there to avoid the cold weather in the city I am living now...According to where my child settles down, we will also consider renting an apartment near him so that we can spend some time together.*

*I think when I stop working I will plan to travel around at least once a year. Previously, I didn't plan to buy a car; but now I changed my mind. If I had a car, I could visit my daughter more conveniently.*

Nevertheless, for the less economically well-off participants, economic constraints significantly affect their decisions. Compared with the wealthier families, they demonstrated that they will ground their long-term plans in reality and needs than their expectations and preferences. For participants who identified economic constraints in the family, they tend to hold a conservative view about their future.

*I never think too much about my future. Currently, I tend to be realistic and focus on today...Regarding the future, it's just too unpredictable...If the economy cannot reach a certain level, any imagination about the future will just be platonic.*

*Since the apartment we are living in now hasn't been renovated for years, it will cause some inconvenience. We want to buy a bigger apartment when we have enough savings. However, we won't exhaust the savings to buy it, that's not realistic.*

### **Health condition**

Health condition is the most frequently mentioned term among the participants regarding assumptions about their current and future living arrangement. Currently, all the participants have good self-rated health and they regard this as an advantage of living independently without help either from the outside helpers (e.g. housekeeper and hourly worker) or their children.

*As long as my health condition is OK, I wouldn't move to anywhere. For me, I prefer to age in my own home because the familiar environment can give me the sense of comfort. And I feel convenient living in my home.*

In the coming 10 years, these one-child parents are still young-old. They do not plan to live a "typical" or stereotypical retirement life characterized by loose schedule and disengagement from social life. Instead, continued involvement in multiple activities is one of the themes that emerged when they talked about their retirement life. High level of activeness is their imagination about their life in ten years. In addition to fulfill their pursuit of meaning by working, they also demonstrated their interest in developing hobbies and take advantage of the active years to enjoy their life.

### **Dependable health insurance**

Aging is associated with the increase of medical costs; serious diseases can exhaust family savings with an underdeveloped health care system. This study explored the participants' perspectives toward health insurance. The participants are all content with their current health insurance provided by their Danwei (work unit or the organization they work for) as a part of social security. According to the participants' description, their basic medical needs can be well met with the reimbursement from their health insurance.

With the reimbursement of their medical insurance, the basic medical needs will not create extra burden to their daily living.

*If we have health insurance, the burden of medical costs won't overwhelm us as long as we do not have extremely severe acute diseases. One of my colleagues installed cardiac pacemaker which cost more than 100 thousand yuan (around 16 thousand US dollars). After treatment, he got 80% reimbursement. In this case, his family can afford the rest of the expenses.*

However, the participants also showed their concern about severe acute diseases as it is difficult to be reimbursed by health insurance. These acute diseases would put the families into financial risks.

*For some severe or terminal diseases, the health insurance will not reimburse. If you insist to continue the treatment, it means that your whole family will exhaust*

*all the savings, and the life quality will drop sharply to the pre-revolution old society.*

### **Adequate level of community services**

Another important resource that enables retirees to live in their own homes is the development of community services and a harmonious neighborhood. In modern China, the residential community (shequ) has become the basic administrative unit for implementing central governance in urban areas (Bray, 2006). For the one-child parents interviewed in this study, they conceptualize their living environment as an acquaintance community. They maintain frequent interactions with their neighbors by mutually providing help and support. A helpful neighborhood enhances the participants' strong attachment to their current living environment. When the participants were asked about their willingness to move together or close to their children, they showed the concern about the barriers to readapting to a new environment.

*I almost know every neighbor. If any of the neighbors need help, whoever is available will offer help to them. I have very good interaction with my neighbors.*

Nowadays, the residential community's functions have been broadened. Beyond the administrative functions, it also embraces the delivery of various social services. Street office and community resident committee are the major grass-root organizations that facilitate the provision of community services under the policy initiations. The residents' increasing participation in community activities and programs marked the development of the urban community (Xu & Chow, 2006). The community residence committee is more actively involved in residents' daily life by providing multiple services especially to older adults. Although these services are currently limited to the basic level of services such as providing entertainment space for retirees and making reference to the domestic service companies. The participants expressed their hope that the services can be broadened and deepened in helping the retirees to age in their own homes. Because the community service model has not been well established, the participants gave the answers based on their assumptions and expectations. The participants assumed that services such as providing instrumental and medical assistance should be incorporated in the community-level service network.

*From my point of view, I don't support the practice of congregating housing of older adults...If I lived in a community full of older retirees, I am afraid that the residents will affect each other with the 'old' thoughts. I think the older adults should be distributed in natural community as long as the society can provide enough services to help them live independently. It will be more beneficial to the older adults' psychological wellbeing...Most of the older adults will not consume a lot of care resources.*

### **“Even if...”**

In answering the question of “how you perceive your living arrangement in 10 years”, all the participants responded that they would still keep the current living pattern (living with spouse). Co-residence is not preferred or expected under any circumstances, as depicted in “*even if*” sentences. According to the participants, they regard “living close to the child but not under

one roof” as the most desirable living arrangement. This arrangement is regarded ideal to keep the close intergenerational caregiving interactions and close emotional bonds.

*Our society as a whole is moving forward; I feel it's the future trend that parents and adult children live in different households...the best way of living arrangement is that we live in the same city as our child, it's not appropriate for us to live under one roof. The short stay is acceptable, but if we live together all year long, we will influence each other's life.*

Even if the one-child parents desire to spend time with their children and grandchildren to enjoy the family's quality time, the participants still insist that regular reunions during festivals and vacations would be more acceptable than living together. In their conceptualization of co-residence, they define themselves as “burden” even though they can continue taking care of their children and grandchildren. They attribute this kind of burden to “generation gap”, which results in different lifestyles.

*The paces of life will be different, our values and opinions will vary as well. Simply speaking, we talk about different things and we choose to focus on distinct aspects of life.*

Having this attitude in mind, the participants refuse co-residence even if all the objective conditions allow them to do so. They expressed that **even if** their children have enough housing space or willingness to take care of them, they still prefer to live separately from their children.

*If my son has enough space in his house, we can temporarily live with him. Actually, what I want is living close to him. There is no necessity for us to live together; living near to each other will be the best choice.*

Instead of relying on their children to gain instrumental support, they would like to hire paid helper to assist them in housework (e.g. cleaning, cooking and repairing, etc.). When the participants were asked how they will deal with their increasing needs in the aging process, they unexceptionally responded “hiring paid helper”.

*If I were too old to walk around, I can only call the external helpers. That day will finally come. When it comes, I will hire the helper to take care of my daily life...If there are any emergencies, I will definitely contact her (the daughter), but it's impossible for me to solely rely on her to gain day-to-day care.*

The idea of home- and community-based services designed specifically for older adults is still a little unfamiliar for the participants. However, when this type of external care source was explained to them, they all showed interest in utilizing them; they conceptualize these services as the perquisites for older adults to age in place. They thought that if there are affordable services embedded in the community, they would be willing to take advantage of them. However, at this point in time, community services in urban areas are limited to providing settings for older adults to socialize and develop their hobbies. The target population for these services is the active young-old rather than the oldest-old who need higher-level of instrumental assistance and

medical attention. Although the participants are interested in home- and community-based services, they said they cannot rely on these when introducing care resources outside of the family. They believed that the paid helper will provide services of higher quality than the collective service network or volunteers. Regarding the community residence committee's role in developing home- and community-based services, one of the participants has such expectation.

*For example, the community committee has some liaisons with domestic service companies who make the business out of cleaning, plumbing and even taking care of the older adults...The community committee can work as an agent that refers the services to the residents. Also, they can provide training to the unemployed residents to become potential caregivers to the older residents. On one hand, the care needs can be met; on the other hand, the unemployed people can make a living from providing service.*

### **“Only if...”**

In 20 years, the one-child parents will enter their 70s. Responding to the question of living arrangement in 20 years, their preferences do not change significantly than 10 years ago. They identified living with spouse only as the primary choice, and they will consider other alternatives (e.g., retirement community, nursing home and parent-child co-resident) **only if** they cannot take care of themselves any more. Health condition was again identified as the most important reason for the participants to consider relocation. However, even in consideration of declining health conditions, the participants did not prefer parent-child co-residence which has been reported as the most desirable way of old-age living arrangement in recent surveys such as 2005 wave of Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (Sereny, 2011). The first preference was regarded as the last choice among the participants interviewed in this study. All the participants interviewed are from double-income families which give them good sense of post-retirement income security. However, the preference of living arrangement in the oldest-old stage seems to vary according to overall income level. Table 2 shows that when the participants were predicting their future in over 20 years, they showed more uncertainty than the previous stages. There is the difference between the participants with high and low self-rated economic statuses. The wealthy participants were more confident in aging at home with assistance from paid helpers while the less wealthy participants said they might want to use the social welfare system if they cannot afford the expensive long-term care services.

Compared with other alternatives of living arrangement, aging in original home or community was most preferred among the participants. Their strong emotional attachment or “nostalgia” was often mentioned in the interviews.

*As a Chinese, family is the anchor and I feel so attached to it. I don't feel like leaving the home that I lived for almost half of my life. For me, I just want to live at my own home. I feel more comfortable living in a familiar environment than moving to a place that I know nothing about.*

Table 2: Current and future living arrangement of participants

	<b>Current living arrangement</b>	<b>10 years from now</b>	<b>20 years from now and after</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	living with spouse only	never thought about this, but prefer living with spouse only	living with spouse only (but conditionally accept congregate housing)
<b>Participant 2</b>	living with spouse only	keep the current status	living with spouse only (but conditionally accept congregate housing)
<b>Participant 3</b>	living with spouse and mother in law	living with spouse only	living with spouse only
<b>Participant 4</b>	living with spouse and own parents	keep the current status	retirement community/ nursing home/co-residence
<b>Participant 5</b>	living with spouse only	keep the current status (buy a better apartment)	keep the same status as 10 years ago
<b>Participant 6</b>	living with spouse and daughter	living with spouse only	no preference, subject to changes

The quality of services provided in nursing homes as well as their fear of isolation both led to their hesitation to consider a retirement community or nursing homes. Nowadays, nursing home placement still remains a non-mainstream practice of long-term care. The majority of the nursing homes are developed under the administration of central and local government. The eligibility for admission of these nursing homes is very strict and the quality of service cannot be assured by the unprofessional practitioners (Chu, FRCP, & Chi, 2008). Although they denied that they viewed nursing home as the “stigma” of being abandoned by their children, they did not deem it as a desirable place to go. If they really need to go there, they expect that the children can pay frequent visits to keep them feel attached.

*I feel weird if I leave home and live in a nursing home. It gives me the feeling that I am waiting for the day to say goodbye to my life, I think I would be feeling lonely if I was placed in a nursing home.*

*If the living conditions are good enough, I will consider moving to the retirement community or nursing home. But it all depends on whether my daughter can come to visit me frequently...Living in a non-home environment, like living in hotel, no matter how luxury it is, it's not my home...Till now, I cannot accept this type of living arrangement. Emotionally speaking, I will feel lonely. If they hire a housekeeper or send me to a day care center, at least I can get together with them (daughter and her family) on weekends.*

In most of the cases, they prefer to use the paid helper to meet the basic needs of daily life when they talked about the increasing limitations of activities in their 70s or 80s. In addition to the use of paid housekeepers, the participants also talked about other ways to meet more

advanced needs such as medical assistance. Two of the participants mentioned the commonly observed practice of addressing the advanced needs among wealthy families. According to their observations, the well-off families usually hire professional nurses or nursing assistants to take care of the older adults who cannot live independently. The nurses and nursing assistants usually live with their clients in their houses.

*In the city where I live now, the older adults will hire a nursing assistant if their children are too busy to take care of them...The middle-income families cannot afford the long-term personal nursing services. Usually, the 24 hour nursing assistance's daily salary is 200 yuan (or 6000 yuan/ month).*

Instead of being placed into nursing homes, the participants preferred to introduce care resources into their homes. This preference supported the idea of “aging in place”. Institutional dwelling still remains an uncertain and unfavorable choice for Chinese older adults’ living arrangement.

## **Contextual themes**

In addition to the model depicting the one-child parents’ phased preference of living arrangement, this study also captured two interesting themes on contextual background of these preferences.

### **Theme 1: Only child, but not child only**

As one child policy penetrates each individual family, the only child’s parents are accused of spoiling the singletons. The only child is depicted as the “little sun” for which all the family decisions are made and resources are planned. This study also shows that the one-child parents would be willing to contribute as much as they can to help their children to establish their careers and families. However, the only-child parents will shift the focus of their life to their own life quality at a certain stage when their children are able to develop their own families independently. Instead of being devotedly contributing to their children’s life, the one-child parents are increasingly aware that their own well-being is equally important to their children’s happiness. Only one participant of the study stated that her life is totally child-centered.

*One hundred percent of my life is about my child. Only if she can live a happy life can we feel that the mission of our life is completed...As the parent, all I want to do is just help her overcome difficulties in her life. As long as she will live a good life, we will be happy.*

All the other participants identify their roles as “happy helper” rather than “helicopter guardian” to their children’s life. They will provide any kinds of support based on their children’s needs or requirements regardless of the genders of the children, but they also emphasized that they need to live their own life with quality.

For instance, they expressed that if their children need to pursue further education or establish their own business, they would love to be the primary sponsors.

*...if he just starts his career, there must be the needs that me and his mother provide some money to supplement his starting salary. For example, we will provide the down payment of an apartment for him if he decides to work in a big*

*city. In addition, if he does not have adequate start-up capital for his business, we will definitely provide him some money if our financial situation allows at that time.*

Especially at their children's early stage of establishing their careers and families, the participants share the common attitude of continuing providing financial support.

*It depends on her future development; if she needs us...I estimate that we have to support her as least before she turns 35. At least for the coming 10 years... As you know, the housing price in big cities is just unaffordable. Usually, it exhausts two or three generations' savings to make sure that our daughter can have a satisfying living situation.*

In addition to providing financial support to their children, they also said that they are ready to take care of their grandchildren as they are aware of their children's burden of make a living in high-paced modern society.

*If our child is too busy with his work, we would love to babysit our grandchild. When we both retire, that would be a pleasant thing to do.*

*If she wants us to go over to take care of her child and she is indeed busy, we will take the responsibility. You know, it's expensive to hire a nanny, and we do not trust on external personnel to take care of our grandchild. Under these circumstances, I feel obligated to help her...But I will go back to my own house after this mission is completed.*

One powerful statement of the interviews is that the one-child parents are clearly aware that it's not easy for their children to lead a life in big cities in modern society. They identify it as the primary reason for them to continue supporting them to establish careers and families. The awareness of the children's burden manifests in their understanding of the young generation's hardship of transitioning to independence and the changing family structure's influence on the increasing caregiving responsibility.

*If the parents have any emergencies, the only child will be challenged by the overwhelming burden. Before getting married, she has to take care of two parents; after she gets married, the caregiving burden will be doubled. That situation is really tough. If she had any siblings, it will be easier if burden can be shared among them. Now, she has to rely on herself only, really poor kid.*

The willingness to contribute to their adult children's well-being does not tell the whole story about the intergenerational dynamics between the parents and only child. The participants also talked about their aspiration of freedom and privacy. In their opinions, neither the parents nor the children are orbiting each other's life. The rising individualism is reflected in their awakening in the enjoyment of personal life and the decreasing projection of their hope on the next generation.

*After abolishing the traditional mental set of carrying on a family line by having more children, parents shift their focus on enjoying their personal life. As you can see, there are more DINK families in the society.*

*If I live with my daughter, I will be a **free housekeeper**. She will rely on me for everything, she will just do nothing at all...If I only live with my husband, we will have much more freedom...If we live with her, we have to make compromises to her schedule. In this case, we have to undertake the caregiving responsibility and we will not be relaxed even after retirement.*

Instead of living a child-centered or child-only life, the participants showed more interest in living and enjoying their own life. The one-child participants understand that the geographic proximity won't enhance the emotional bonds between parents and children. The distance will not undermine the kinship interactions.

### **Theme 2: Modernized view of filial piety: emotional bonds rather than money**

The participants expressed viewpoints about filial piety that differs from the traditional beliefs. Although some of the participants are still fulfilling filial obligation by co-residing with their elder parents, they do not expect their children to do the same for them. For the one-child parents, they believe that they can sustain lifelong independence. In this case, they do not expect their children to give them any material or financial support.

*I think the old saying about "raising children for old age" has been outdated. Especially in modern society, it makes less sense.*

*Previously, filial piety practices are more reflected on the financial support. But now, it should be defined by emotional aspect as frequent communication.*

The participants identified why the filial piety tradition is less directive in modern society. They thought that most of the one-child parents living in urban areas would be in less need of financial support than their own parents do. The better economic conditions allow the one-child parents to live independently without children's support for a longer period of time.

*In modern society, most one-child parents can live a comparatively better off life. Children are not able to experience how hard it is to bring them up as we did before. Consequently, they will not appreciate parents' efforts and won't think of paying back.*

*As our economy is developing faster, the shortage of materials is not the major concern of family caregiving. Previously, getting old means the disability of working. Children have to take the responsibility of taking care of their parents. And at that time, the national welfare system was underdeveloped. My wife and I both have pension, so we don't have to count on our child. For our parents, they don't have pension so we have to take care of them; but for us, it's another story.*

The economically independent one-child parents don't anticipate their children to give them money as return, but they have expanded the value placed on the emotional bonds.

*Currently, parents will be wealthier than you. For the parents, filial piety is not a matter of how much money our child gives us. What's more important is that she can think of me on birthdays or festivals...I might expect little gifts, but they cannot be measured by how much money my daughter spends.*

Compared with the traditional filial piety which emphasizes hands-on practices and money returns, modern expectations of filial practices are more likely to be expressed in terms of emotional interactions. The participants did not consider the geographic distance as the barrier of kinships as the modern telecommunication and transportation systems have eliminated the boundaries of distance.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusions and discussion**

### **Lifelong independence and self-empowerment**

The story that emerged from this study about living arrangement preference of Chinese one-child parents revolves around the themes of lifelong independence and self-empowerment. Responding to the question of “who will take care of the aging one-child parents”, the participants in this study gave a uniform answer. They desire and plan to take care of themselves by living in with-spouse-only households. At least in their young-old years, all the participants agreed upon the desirability of keeping an independent living status. These respondents suggested that the traditionally desirable parent-child co-residence is no longer favored, and they are open to other alternative elder care services outside of the family.

Contrary to long-held assumptions and decades of consistent findings, this study suggests that the traditional pattern of living arrangement is least likely chosen by the participants in this study. In conceptualizing both current and future living arrangement preferences, the participants expressed their resolution of living an independent life as a couple, with their effort in seeking continued empowerment. This attitude corresponds with the phenomenon of rapid increase in the number of empty nesters. Zhang (2007) illustrated that the expanding urban housing market, the trend of conjugal living, and greater economic sufficiency resulted in the increase of empty-nest households (Zhang, 2007). The participants’ responses corroborated this finding from their subjective lenses. The one-child parents’ self-chosen empty-nest household reflected the impact of one-child policy and economic reform on transforming family dynamics and intergenerational caregiving patterns, as suggested at the beginning of the study.

All the participants asserted that they will not rely on their children to gain elder care as they are increasingly aware of the unprecedented social stress and caregiving obligations of singletons. Even when they imagine that they will be running out of resource to stay independent someday, they would prefer to use the social welfare system to address their long-term care needs. The one-child parent generation is still taking care of their parents with the obligation shared with siblings. However, they do not expect this caregiving pattern to be passed down to their children. Leung (1997) and Zhang (2004) suggested that caregiving roles shift through life course based on needs. Child-centered caregiving pattern will be altered to parent-centered as the parents’ needs expand with the aging process (Leung, 1997 & Zhang, 2004). The finding of this study demonstrates some counterviews of this conclusion. The one-child parents in this study described that they would not like to become the burdens of their children no matter how fragile they are going to be in the future. Compared with obtaining assistance from their children, the one-child parents prefer to utilize external help such as hiring housekeeper and professional nurses. Certainly, these opinions from a small number of participants cannot represent the whole population of one-child parents living in urban areas. However, their perceptions provided a new scope of understanding one-child parents’ understanding of their future living arrangement. To verify if this resolution of lifelong independence is prevalent among the urban-dwelling one-child parents’ generation, a national-level social survey conducted among a representative sample will generate more generalizable conclusions. Due to the small sample size, no overarching conclusions will be made on the overall one-child parent generation. This exploratory study just focused on illustrating possible scenarios of one-child parents’ future living arrangement and related concepts.

The view of lifelong independence is also reflected in their changing understanding and expectations of filial piety practices. In traditional Chinese family value, the absolute obedience

to parents is considered as the doctrine of filial piety (Holzman, 1998). However, this belief has been modified in modern China as the intergenerational resource exchanges are more likely based on needs rather than religiously following the normative value (Logan & Bian, 1999). This study also revealed the changing understanding and practices of filial obligations. The participants expressed that they are not in favor of abusing parental power to manipulate their children's choices to accommodate with their willingness; also, they appreciate the autonomy of making their own decisions. In terms of living arrangement, the participants do not regard co-residence as the desirable approach for their children to fulfill filial piety obligations. From their perspectives, the emotional connections have overridden the importance of intergenerational monetary exchanges. As the one-child parents' attitude starts to alter, they discern less necessity of parent-child co-residence which was considered as fundamental for elder care. Whyte (1997) stated that the young couples are more likely to focus on their own nuclear families than the co-residence with their older parents when they get married (Whyte, 1997). According to what the participants articulated in the interviews, they also prefer to live with their spouses instead of extended families. In effect, the desire of keeping separate nuclear families is mutual. The meanings and functions of parent-child co-residence are understood differently. From the participants' perspectives, co-residence will only be necessary when they are asked to take care of their grandchildren.

To achieve the goal of lifelong independence, the concept of empowerment has permeated in the participants' statements. The perceived factors that influence living arrangement preference fall under the overarching idea of self-empowerment. Empowerment is defined as the process of improving the capacity in order to make choices toward desirable outcomes (World Bank, 2013). According to Myers (1990), the empowerment in later life is largely related to the ability of living a content life. The success or failure of empowerment determines the life satisfaction of older adults (Myers, 1990). Reacting to one-child dilemma and the challenges of retirement, the participants expressed their willingness of empowering themselves to maintain lifelong independence and high life quality. There are some factors that the participants identified as critical in self-empowerment. In conceptualizing their current living arrangement, they considered income security, good health condition and adequate coverage of health insurance as the major factors preventing themselves from burdening their children or being placed in nursing homes.

As the economic environment in urban areas invites the skilled workers to reenter the job market after retirement, the well-educated one-child parents have access to the opportunities to get a second job to supplement their pension and enhance the financial resilience. In this study, the participants who got a second job described that the continued working experience serves as the supplemental income source as well as the approach of gaining the sense of reengagement. For them, the second job helps them to save enough money to make long-term plan such as renovation of house and regular traveling. In addition to generating income from continued working, some participants also described other possibilities existing in market including purchasing longevity insurance and investing in stock market. One participant mentioned that purchasing longevity insurance provides the family with additional sense of security as it reimbursement can cover some expenses of unexpected diseases. These new practices of maintaining income security reflected that the economic development has broadened individual's choices in staying empowered financially in post-retirement life.

Health condition is identified as another important variable of the participants' conceptualization of their preferences of living arrangement. The increase of health constraints

were often mentioned by the participants as the most possible cause of reconsidering living arrangement through their life course. As the timeline proceeds, the participants expressed less certainty about the health conditions. In this study, the topic of how the one-child parents enhance and keep the health condition has not been thoroughly investigated whereas all the participants consciously attribute health as a major factor affecting their decisions. In the condition of the declining health, the strategy that the participants choose to compensate for the physical limitations is hiring paid helpers to maintain the acceptable level of life quality. The empowerment source shifts to the external resources. Responding to the health concern, the deficient coverage of severe acute diseases by health insurance is identified as the risk factor influencing the stability of their post-retirement life. How to address the issue of medical care has become the major challenge for the policymakers to guarantee the well-being of the aging population.

In addition to seeking empowerment from their own capacities and financial liability, the one-child parents in this study also showed their interest in utilizing community-level services to achieve their goal of independent living. In these interviews, the participants repeatedly mentioned that the home- and community-based services might be the promising resources for compensating decreasing instrumental assistance from their children. Nowadays, the more advanced needs for elder care are mostly met by hiring paid helpers. However, the services from professional nurses and nursing assistants remain unaffordable for most of the Chinese families. As one participant suggested, the privately paid professional caregivers will not be a solution to meet the advanced care needs in a long run. The out-of-pocket payment for long-term care services will not be realistic for the low- and middle-income families. In this case, the cost-effective home- and community-based services provided by social organizations will be a reasonable substitute to negotiate the conflict between the affordability and the quality of services for older adults who desire to age in their own homes.

Currently, the existing home- and community-based models still stay at their pilot stage. The components of this service system including funding strategy, administrative structure, and service providers have not been fully experimented in reality or learned in the literature. The large variations of long-term care network among different geographic areas further complicated this issue. The only systematic analysis of China's emerging home- and community-based services illustrated the practices in Shanghai. Shanghai model provides basic services rooted in the two agencies including government-supported community service center and for-profit or not-for-profit jiazhen (domestic service) center. The services provided are restricted to the basic daily needs including shopping, housekeeping and adult day care (Wu, Carter, & Goins, 2005). As the network of home- and community-based services is still fragmented, more pilot programs need to be conducted in urban areas in China to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of this kind of services before a larger system can be promoted.

Since this study focus on the preferred living arrangement of one-child parents, their attitudes toward nursing home is not thoroughly investigated. In this case, the findings are not evidential for the discussion of one-child parents' need and desirability for nursing home placement. Although the participants demonstrated that they will not reject this form of elder care, none of them favored nursing home placement. In the climate of lifelong independence, how to blueprint China's nursing home's future demands further exploration.

## **Policy implication**

The tentative model (Figure 3) pictured how the urban-dwelling one-child parents conceptualize their living arrangements in later life and it provided some evidence to the policy

makers to develop the long-term care system to meet the increasing needs of the aging population. According to Williams (1979), value system can affect the future behaviors in guiding the people to make choices and decisions according to their preferential standards (Williams, 1979). Thus, studying the value or preferential standards of one-child parents will be helpful for the policymakers better understand the nature of the needs from this aging generation.

This study indicates that lifelong independence and self-empowerment are the core elements in the construction of the participants' value toward post-retirement living arrangement. Even though the urban-dwelling one-child parents are increasingly willing to take care of themselves, the government should consider developing social programs to expand the opportunities of empowerment for the older adults. As indicated earlier, not all the Chinese one-child parents can afford the professional private services. As they enter their oldest-old age, their needs of long-term care still need to be met either by families or the society. Since the one-child parents have the tendency of refusing to rely on their children, the government should take the lead in developing an aging network that keeps them empowered and live in their preferred settings. Grounded in the findings of the study, some preliminary thoughts on how to develop home- and community-based service network to benefit the aging generation of one-child parents are illustrated.

### **Deepening the function of community in empowering older residents**

As more singletons are reaching their adulthood, the number of empty nesters will increase historically. It is shown that the early use of paid instrumental assistance is vital to keep old adults age in place (Chen & Thompson, 2010). How to design the home- and community-based service network becomes critical to ensure the well-being of the one-child parents who particularly expressed the desire of aging in their own homes. The climbing empty-nest rate has already galvanized the government's effort on developing home- and community-based services network for the older residents living in residential community environment. The participants of this study have become more aware of the community's roles in their daily life. According to their statements, health station, activity room and the matching service of paid helper have been increasingly prevalent in the residential communities in urban areas. These services are mostly organized and supervised by the community resident committee. However, the functions of these services are more likely to enrich the older residents' older life and meet their basic daily needs than actually providing long-term care especially instrumental assistance (Zhang, 2007). In empowering the older adults to choose their preferred living arrangement, these services remain superficial at this stage.

As the entity that provides community-based services has shifted from danwei to residential community (Wu, Carter, & Goins, 2005), the participants anticipated that the residential community should be involved in providing more advanced services to meet the long-term care needs. Based on the understanding of the participants' conceptualization of the community's functions in providing long-term care services, this study proposed several possible roles of community residents committee.

#### **1) The advocate of empowerment**

According to the findings of this study, income security was identified as crucial for the one-child parents to keep the independent living arrangement. As they showed their interest in getting a second job, the community can design a program which provides the information and training for the retirees who want to be reemployed. The health prevention and management

programs can also be embedded into the existing activity centers to further reinforce the effects of these grass-root activities.

## **2) The hub of information exchange**

As mentioned in the interviews, the community resident committee has already served as the liaison of matching the paid helpers with clients who need domestic services. The community resident committee can further develop this function by integrating and categorizing the information of service providers and the requests from the older residents. These kinds of information can be made available online so that the adult children or the older adults who can use the internet can get easier access.

Since it was not the objective to study the nature of advanced long-term care needs among one-child parents, the discussion will not make assumptions based on the limited data on this topic. However, the idea of implanting the home- and community-based services based on the unit of residential community can be a good starting point for designing the service delivery system. Corresponding evaluation studies and pilot programs should be conducted to further identify the nature and degree of these long-term care needs.

## **Limitations and future directions**

Responding to the research questions, the results of this study revealed the preference and perceived factors influencing the living arrangement of one-child parents. However, some emerging concepts have not been thoroughly examined in this study. Potential elements should be included to elevate its explanatory level and verify its validity. Due to its exploratory nature, there are some limitations in both the research design and data analysis process.

Firstly, the variability of the participants interviewed in this study is limited. All the participants are from provincial capital cities. Although there are some variations in a few of major characteristics including gender, education levels and current living arrangement, the sample is comparatively homogenous. These participants are all economically well-off and have good health conditions. In this case, the tentative model generated from the information collected from them will only be plausible to explain the trajectory of living arrangement of this group of one-child parents. To get an overall picture of the urban-dwelling one-child parents' preferences of living arrangement, additional variables should be included in the sampling process. For instance, the group of one-child parents with low socio-economic status should be involved in the future study. The vulnerable group of participants will provide richer information of the reality of their living arrangement preferences and choices. Hypothetically, they will tell a different story than the well-off one-child parents. Their voices need to be heard so that the policymakers can implement the social programs in response to specific needs and various target population.

Secondly, more factors should be explored to elaborate the tentative model of living arrangement trajectory. The factors identified in this study are mostly overarching terms. For instance, when the participants were talking about health, they indicated physical health. Mental health, as a significant predictor of well-being, is however missing in this model. In the future research, it will be valuable to investigate different facets of one variable. Due to the limitation of richness of data, this study did not have the chance to study some of the emerging categories such as social support, marital satisfaction and intergenerational relationships. Although these themes are lack of salience in this study, it will be meaningful to be explored in future studies to gain better understanding of one-child parents' family value in details.

In conclusion, this study shed some light on the one-child parents' preference of living arrangement under the influence of one-child policy and economic reform. It provided a systemic approach of understanding the trajectory of the housing choices and related variables affecting people's perceptions. The findings informed the policymakers of ideas on how to explore the transitioning family values and expected approach of meeting the long-term care needs for the aging population.

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## Appendix 1: Consent Form

### Consent Form

Topic of study: Exploring One-child Parents' Perspectives of Post-retirement Living Arrangement in China

Principle investigator: *Wenxuan Huang (Department of Sociology and Gerontology, Miami University)*

I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology and Gerontology at Miami University. As part of my thesis, I am conducting the research under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Kunkel. I am inviting you to participate in my study. The purpose of this study is to explore one-child parents' perspectives on the post-retirement living arrangement as well as the perceived factors affecting your decisions of living arrangement. To collect the data and information for this research, this study will conduct semi-structured interviews with the participants. Each interview is expected to last for one hour.

All the information gathered in the interview process will be kept confidential and anonymous. The results or findings will be included in the thesis in a collective fashion and no individual participant will be identified without their permission. You may decline to answer any question for any reason and may end this interview at any time

#### Permission to Quote:

I may wish to quote your words directly in reports and publications resulting from this. With regards to being quoted, please check yes or no for each of the following statements:

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I wish to review the notes / recordings collected during my interview.
I agree that researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me under the following conditions (checking YES to any of the below means that you grant copyright permission to the researcher for the purpose of publication):	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I agree to be quoted directly (my name is used).
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published (I remain anonymous).

**By signing below, you indicate that you have agreed to participate in this study.**

**Participant's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2: Interview topic guide**

1. What is your current living arrangement?
2. What are the roles of the family members who live with you play in the family?
1. What's your understanding and expectation of filial piety?
2. Can you describe your living arrangement in ten years?
3. Why do you choose this kind of living arrangement?
4. Compared with other choices, why do you think the one that you choose is ideal?
5. Can you describe your living arrangement in twenty years?
6. Compared with ten years ago, what are the changes of your living arrangement?
7. What are the causes that change your living arrangement?
8. What will be your choice for the living arrangement at the last stage of your life?
9. What are the approaches for you to gain help or care outside of family?
10. If you have more children, will you change your preference of living arrangement?
11. If your child is not a girl or boy, will you change your preference of living arrangement?
12. How do you think about nursing home placement?