

Homes needed by the elderly

[China Daily](#), North American ed.; New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]07 Oct 1998: 8.

Abstract

ZHANG Ping, an elderly editor with the China Higher Education Press, and her retired husband live in downtown Beijing.

Statistics indicate that elderly people who have children studying or working in other cities or foreign countries account for more than 20 per cent of Beijing families that contain elderly members.

The number of so-called "empty nest" families associated with colleges and institutes accounts for between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of the total, with Beijing University alone reporting more than 1,500 families in the category.

Full Text

ZHANG Ping, an elderly editor with the China Higher Education Press, and her retired husband live in downtown Beijing.

There, they depend on kindhearted neighbours for help with heavy household chores.

The couple's dependence on others centres on the fact they both suffer from heart problems and that their only son is working in the United States.

"I hope we can move to a senior citizen's home once I retire so we will have someone to care for us in times of need," said Zhang.

Statistics indicate that elderly people who have children studying or working in other cities or foreign countries account for more than 20 per cent of Beijing families that contain elderly members.

The number of so-called "empty nest" families associated with colleges and institutes accounts for between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of the total, with Beijing University alone reporting more than 1,500 families in the category.

Reform and opening policies, combined with a blossoming market economy, have prompted an increasing number of young people to leave their parents in search of better opportunities in other cities or foreign countries. This has, in turn, led to increasing numbers of "empty nests," according to Zhang Wenfan, president of the Chinese Association on Ageing.

Experts predict that more than 100,000 elderly parents will be left on their own in Guangzhou, capital of South China's Guang-dong Province, by the year 2000.

But while elderly parents need daily care and attention of younger people, they often also want to maintain independent lifestyles.

Zhang said senior citizens' homes, which offer improved healthcare and entertainment facilities, are a viable option for the elderly to consider.

Such homes enable the elderly to enjoy a private family life, while at the same time enabling them to enjoy the benefits of maid service, laundry and shopping facilities, said Zhang.

The first apartment house especially designed for senior citizens opened in East China's Anhui Province in 1986. More than 600 senior citizens homes across China currently provide elderly people with access to independent living.

"We can trade our current apartment for quarters in a senior citizens home in suburban Beijing when I retire," said Zhang Ping. "My son has already promised to provide financial support."

A recent survey of Beijingers ages 50-59 revealed a great demand for future occupancy in senior citizens' homes.

About 4.7 per cent of respondents expressed an immediate willingness to move to senior citizens' homes, with 14 per cent indicating their intention to do so later in life.

Zhang Wenfan said a number of senior citizens homes have been built in Beijing, and numerous other facilities are being designed for individuals with varying financial capabilities.

"We are exploring ways to care for elderly Chinese, especially those living on their own," said Zhang.

He said the facilities must be built in accordance with the nation's social and economic conditions.

Hypertension hits three in 10 Chinese

[China Daily](#), North American ed.; New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y]03 Sep 2002: 1.

Abstract

The prevalence of hypertension among Chinese people aged 35 to 74 has reached 27.2 per cent, putting the blood pressure of 130 million adults above the normal level, according to a 2000-01 study jointly conducted by researchers from China, the United States and Australia.

Gu Dongfeng - a professor from the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, who was in charge of the study - said: "The worst thing is that the increasing rate of hypertension among young people is much higher than among the elderly.

Full Text

Almost three out of 10 Chinese adults have high blood pressure, one of the highest rates of hypertension in the world, a new study has shown.

The prevalence of hypertension among Chinese people aged 35 to 74 has reached 27.2 per cent, putting the blood pressure of 130 million adults above the normal level, according to a 2000-01 study jointly conducted by researchers from China, the United States and Australia.

The researchers found that both the prevalence rate and the absolute number of hypertensive patients in China had increased rapidly compared with previous studies. There were 30 million people with hypertension in 1960 and 94 million in 1991.

Gu Dongfeng - a professor from the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, who was in charge of the study - said: "The worst thing is that the increasing rate of hypertension among young people is much higher than among the elderly.

"If no preventative measures are taken, the prevalence of cardiovascular disease caused by hypertension will inevitably rise in China."

Cardiovascular diseases have become the leading killer in China, he said.

"On average, two to three people die of a stroke every minute in China and hypertension is a significant cause," said Gu.

The professor said that major causes were an unhealthy lifestyle and diet - including a high intake of salt, sugar and high-calorie food, less physical exercise, smoking and alcohol abuse - in conjunction with a faster pace of life and greater pressures.

He said routine physical check-ups and a change of lifestyle are effective in the control and prevention of hypertension but said not many people seemed to be aware of this.

Fifty-five per cent of hypertension sufferers were unaware of their condition, the research showed. Of those who knew they are ill, less than 30 per cent took the appropriate medication. Of those taking medicine, only 10 per cent successfully kept their blood pressure at a safe level.

Gu said the government should rank hypertension among China's key public health problems.

Playing With the Old Blood Rules: With the death of filial piety and the rise of 'kids for

hire,' no Chinese family value is sacred anymore.

[Liu, Melinda](#). [Newsweek](#), International ed.; New York [Vol. 151, Iss. 11](#), (Mar 17, 2008).

China's one-child policy is broken. After years of public grumbling, international scandals over forced sterilization and government tinkering, that's a truth of which most Chinese are aware. So when a senior official announced two weeks ago that Beijing was considering scrapping the policy, it didn't come as a complete surprise. Speaking at a press briefing in Beijing, Zhao Baige, vice minister of China's National Population and Family Planning Commission, cautioned that she couldn't say exactly what changes the government would make, or when. But she did make one thing clear: that Beijing knows the policy doesn't work any longer, and it needs to be rethought. This has become a big issue among [China's] decision makers, she explained.

It's no wonder. After almost 30 years in force, China's unpopular one-child rule though it was never as strict as usually portrayed has distorted the population in a manner that threatens China's future. Coupled with the tumultuous impact of rising wealth, the policy has reshaped families in a number of unintended ways. It has limited the number of children available to care for parents in a rapidly aging society in which the state provides few services. The one-child rule also has turned China's traditional bias for sons into a motivation to screen out girls, yielding a population heavily overweight with men. Beijing knows full well these trends won't produce the harmonious society that is its official goal, and so it has begun tweaking its policies anew. But tweaks may not be enough.

The most pressing problem is a breakdown of filial piety, the sense of loyalty and shame that drove generations past to protect their elders no matter the cost. Chinese experts say the nation of only-children is increasingly self-centered, more and more inclined to abandon old obligations. Drawn to the booming big cities, many young people are also throwing themselves into the newly rich urban lifestyle (and helping to save for retirement) by opting to have no children themselves.

Those left behind are being forced to adapt. Most strikingly, many Chinese parents are now even reconsidering their long-held prejudice for sons, on the new assumption that daughters are more likely to grow into loyal caregivers. In a striking recent online survey, a thin majority of Chinese said they would now rather have girls than boys. Aged Chinese, meanwhile, are scrambling to find new ways to care for themselves, including private insurance programs and more-bizarre measures like kid for hire systems.

The government is seeking creative solutions of its own. Recognizing that the breakdown in filial piety is likely irreversible, it is moving to create a nationwide system of home care for the elderly in part because it's still considered shameful to send mom or dad to a nursing home. Of course, the simplest fix would be to free people to have more kids, and in some cities, officials are doing just that. But since the 1980s, when the state routinely conducted forced sterilizations, Chinese authorities have largely lost the will and capacity to enforce family-planning policies. Beijing is

also still fearful of setting off an uncontrolled population boom. Thus no sooner had Zhao said the one-child policy was being reconsidered than Prime Minister Wen Jiabao tried to squelch the news, insisting no change was in store. We will adhere to the current policy of family planning [and] keep the birthrate low, he told the National People's Congress last week.

But the changes underway are too big to contain. The problem of a rapidly aging population is common to prospering nations worldwide but it's made more complicated in China by the impact of its family-planning policies. As China has developed, life expectancy has shot upward, from younger than 50 in 1949 to older than 72 today. The elderly (over 60) share of the population has grown, from 10 percent in 2000 to 11.3 percent in 2006. Though China's Constitution says children must support their parents, many now neglect them. That's partly because the offspring of one-child families are more likely to be spoiled and self-centered, says Cai Feng, a demographer. But the result is that, as of 2005, 42 percent of Chinese families consisted of an old couple living alone, according to government statistics. In some cities, that figure is now more than 56 percent comparable to the United States, where aid and the elder-care infrastructure are more comprehensive.

For centuries, a healthy Chinese brood dominated by male children was considered the best form of social security. It still is in many rural areas, where boys can work the fields alongside their parents and won't transfer their earning potential to their in-laws after they marry. After the one-child policy was implemented in 1979, such sentiments led many Chinese parents to do whatever they could (including resorting to female infanticide and selective abortions) to make sure they had boys. As a result, the male-to-female birth ratio in China today is about 1.18 to 1, as opposed to the standard ratio of 1.03--1.07 to 1.

In China's modernizing cities, however, many young couples now recognize that daughters are better caregivers. Girls are more thoughtful, says Feng Xiaotian, a sociologist at Nanjing University. Not for nothing are girls known in Chinese slang as *tie sheng xiao mian ao*, or a thin padded jacket, owing to their perceived ability to provide parents convenience and warmth. As a result, an online survey conducted by the China Youth Daily in early 2007 among 2,603 people from 29 provinces and cities found that more respondents would now choose to have a daughter (29 percent) than a son (28.4 percent). This change hasn't shown up in national birth statistics yet, and the sample set wasn't entirely representative (since Chinese who participate in Web surveys tend to be more liberal and well educated than average). But the numbers represent a stunning shift all the same.

Many Chinese who are too old to bear daughters of their own, meanwhile, are finding other ways to acquire them. Adopting adult children which was common in feudal times is becoming prevalent, says Nanjing University's Feng. Take Wu Shaoqiu and his wife, a retired couple living in the central city of Wuhan. After their kids immigrated to the West, they decided they needed someone to stay and talk with them, says Wu, 75. So in 2006, he attended a meeting, cosponsored by the city government and a local newspaper, where lonely elderly couples were introduced to prospective adult daughters. There he met Fang Fang, an executive, whom he brought home to meet his wife. She brought flowers [and] called me 'Papa' and my wife 'Mummy', Wu says. Fang Fang soon joined the family as did two other women she brought

along. On weekends and holidays, all three women, who are in their 40s and married, now visit the couple to cook and clean, and maybe play cards or surf the Web.

Wu and his wife never offered any financial compensation to the women; he says they're happy to act as surrogate children for the good of society. But in other cases, the terms are more explicit. Tian Zhendong, a retired construction expert, also in Wuhan, says he and his wife felt lonely and lost after his son moved to Canada. So he published an ad titled *Elderly couple desperately seeking daughter*, promising successful applicants would inherit the couple's apartment. To his surprise, 100 people applied, though the couple abandoned the talent search after their son objected.

Attacking things from the other side, the Chinese government has been trying to quietly liberalize the one-child regime for decades. Since the policy's introduction, rural families, who make up more than 60 percent of the population, have been allowed to have a second child if their first was a girl, and ethnic minorities have been allowed to have two or more kids. And since 2000, provincial governments have allowed only-children who married other only-children a second child as well, to prevent what's known as the 8-4-2-1 syndrome, where a single couple has to support four parents and eight grandparents. Authorities in wealthy cities such as Guangzhou and Beijing have begun publicly urging only-children couples to take advantage of this exception.

Yet finding takers is proving complicated. Many young Chinese urbanites, like yuppies everywhere, don't *want* more than one kid; some don't want any. A Beijing survey late last year revealed that 52 percent of adult single children didn't want to have more than one child, and more than a quarter said they preferred the DINK lifestyle: double income, no kids. That's a big problem for a city with an estimated 2 million only-child adults.

The answer, says Hou Yafei, an expert of the Beijing institute that conducted the survey, is for the government to make it clearer that only-children couples can now have two kids without incurring the draconian fines of the past. But financial problems will linger. Many of the survey respondents explained their aversion to larger families by pointing to economics. Fang Meiqin, 30, a telecom analyst who is expecting a baby in about four months, spoke for many of her generation when she recounted with horror media reports that said that raising a child through college could cost about \$422,000. Fang, a Beijing resident, laid out just how expensive it is to bring up baby these days. She figured she would have to budget \$1,400 for annual living expenses, \$8,440 to \$14,000 for primary education and \$7,035 for six years of middle school. Tutoring would cost extra.

Beijing could help defray these costs. But it has its own reasons to be cautious. The stop-and-go course of family-planning reform reflects lingering fears of instability in a population already 1.3 billion strong. Many officials still remember what happened in 1983, when public discussions of changes in family-planning regulations led to a reported 30 million extra births that year and the following one. With the population now growing by 8 million to 10 million annually, Beijing is determined to retain some control lest its hard-won economic gains be undone by a rampant population boom.

The less troublesome fix is to offer parents new aid to support them in old age, rather than new incentives to have kids. One key reason the one-child policy is so contentious in the first place is that China lacks an adequate social safety net an abiding irony in a supposedly communist country. To address this gap, last year authorities introduced a social-security scheme for farmers and a new program of rural medical cooperatives. Residents who choose to participate in the medical cooperative program now pay 10 yuan (about \$1.50) annually for access to local clinics and partially subsidized hospital stays. In the past, when a farmer was ill or needed an operation, the whole family would go bankrupt, says Prof. Wu Changping, a prominent expert on population and aging at Renmin University.

Caring for the elderly remains a huge challenge. Less than 1.2 percent of China's retirees have access to nursing homes, compared to 8 percent in developed countries. And packing parents off to a nursing home is still seen as shameful. The government also lacks adequate facilities, funding and staff. China required 1.8 million nurses to care for its elderly in 2006, and that figure is slated to mushroom to 6.5 million by 2020, according to the China National Committee on Aging (CNCA).

As an alternative, Beijing is now trying to promote home-care services for the elderly. In late February, CNCA unveiled plans to complete by 2010 a nationwide home-care system that would offer things like house calls by health professionals, meals-on-wheels and volunteers who help with household chores. Of course, nothing beats having your kids around to do the job. But until China finally resolves to scrap its dysfunctional birth-control policies, that's unlikely to be an option.

With Mary Hennock in Beijing and bureau reports

Health problems of elderly linked to lifestyle, experts say

[He, Dan](#). [China Daily](#), Hong Kong ed.; Aberdeen [Aberdeen]27 Sep 2013: 5.

"The aging population has imposed huge challenges on the public health services," he said, adding that enabling more seniors to live a healthy lifestyle can prevent disease and enhance their quality of life. hedan@chinadaily.com.cn Credit: He Dan

[Full Text](#)

More than half of China's elderly have health problems and their lifestyles are believed to be a leading contributor, officials and medical experts said on Thursday.

China's population is rapidly aging and the number of citizens older than 60 is expected to reach 202 million by the end of 2013, including 23 million older than 80, said Wu Yushao, vice-president of the China National Committee on Aging.

By then, 37.5 million elderly Chinese, or 19 percent of the senior population, will require daily care because of disabilities.

Only about 40 percent of Chinese people over 60 are considered healthy, compared with 60 percent in developed economies, Wu said, citing 2008 statistics from the World Health Organization.

Tao Guoshu, a retired doctor from the Chinese PLA General Hospital who specialized in geriatrics in Beijing, said cardiovascular disease, cancer and cerebrovascular disease are common among elderly Chinese patients, and about 60 percent of health issues were triggered by unhealthy lifestyles.

High blood pressure, a common complaint among elderly Chinese, is closely related to the dietary habit of eating too much salt, he said.

"People in China lack common sense about health," he said. "There is an urgent need to popularize basic health knowledge and encourage people to improve their way of life in order to further increase the life expectancy in China."

On Thursday, the China National Committee on Aging and the National Health and Family Planning Commission released an instruction book for seniors on how to live healthily.

Wu said the brochure includes 36 suggestions for diet, sports, mental health, health management and social interaction.

Regarding nutrition, the book advises the elderly to eat more fresh food and dairy products and avoid eating leftovers.

Copies of the book will be provided for free in community activity centers for the elderly, universities dedicated for the aged and elderly associations, he said.

He Zhaohua, deputy head of the National Health and Family Planning Commission's family development department, said his ministry has been taking measures to improve the health of the elderly, including providing free health checks since last year for nationals over 65.

"The aging population has imposed huge challenges on the public health services," he said, adding that enabling more seniors to live a healthy lifestyle can prevent disease and enhance their quality of life.

Riding the rich, grey Chinese wave; Fosun

[The Economist](#); London [Vol. 411, Iss. 8892](#), (Jun 21, 2014): n/a.

Abstract

Retirement homes can be depressing places, but Starcastle comes as a pleasant surprise. This upmarket development for pensioners in Shanghai is a joint venture between Fosun Group, a Chinese conglomerate, and Fortress Investment Group, an American private-equity firm. Visitors find a colourfully decorated apartment building filled with energetic oldies. By the entrance, a giggling gaggle admires the herbs and flowers; nearby, residents practise tai chi and calligraphy; others are in a classroom, learning to use WeChat, a mobile-messaging app. The Starcastle venture illustrates the long-standing strategy behind Fosun's transformation from an entrepreneurial startup into China's largest private-sector conglomerate. Put simply, the firm has been brilliant at trend-spotting, catching successive waves of economic growth in China at just the right moment. Fosun's revenues exceeded 50 billion yuan (\$8.3 billion) last year; its profits rose by half to 5.5 billion yuan.

Full Text

China's largest private-sector conglomerate has been a skilful surfer of changing business trends

RETIREMENT homes can be depressing places, but Starcastle comes as a pleasant surprise. This upmarket development for pensioners in Shanghai is a joint venture between Fosun Group, a Chinese conglomerate, and Fortress Investment Group, an American private-equity firm. Visitors find a colourfully decorated apartment building filled with energetic oldies. By the entrance, a giggling gaggle admires the herbs and flowers; nearby, residents practise tai chi and calligraphy; others are in a classroom, learning to use WeChat, a mobile-messaging app.

Ask a trio chatting in the centre's open-air cafe why they chose this place, which caters to people keen on living independently while still getting meals and nursing as needed, and their answers point to a powerful trend. Since time immemorial, Chinese children have been expected to take care of their aged parents--but rising incomes and shifting norms are changing things. The 93-year-old former boss of a hotel chain insists such stylish retirement homes, previously unheard of in China, are the future: "It's very advanced, it's convenient... and the kids stop worrying."

The Starcastle venture illustrates the long-standing strategy behind Fosun's transformation from an entrepreneurial startup into China's largest private-sector conglomerate. Put simply, the firm has been brilliant at trend-spotting, catching successive waves of economic growth in China at just the right moment. Fosun's revenues exceeded 50 billion yuan (\$8.3 billion) last year; its profits rose by half to 5.5 billion yuan (see chart).

Two decades ago, four graduates of Fudan University in Shanghai pooled about \$4,000-worth of yuan to form Fosun. First, they applied their quantitative skills to market research, helping the peddlers of such things as moon cakes. Their rigorous methods helped them earn 1m yuan in six months, but they learned a painful lesson about intellectual property. "Chinese are too smart and too hard-working, so if they see anyone making money others will copy," explains Liang Xinjun, one of the founders and the current chief executive.

So the young entrepreneurs decided to plough their earnings and energies instead into capitalising on China's continuing economic liberalisation. The drugs industry was strictly controlled at the time, but diagnostics kits using the new technologies of gene sequencing were not yet regulated. The Fudan four grabbed the opening. By 1994 their sales of the kits were approaching 40m yuan. In 1996, when private firms were first allowed to enter drugs manufacturing, they jumped in. In 1999, when drugs wholesaling opened up, Fosun expanded again.

"As soon as the government liberalised, we leapt," says Mr Liang. When private firms were later allowed to go into the property business, Fosun launched Forte, which is now one of China's biggest developers. In the 2000s there was a boom in heavy industry, and Fosun again found opportunistic ways to cash in on the trend. It became one of the largest steelmakers in China, as well as one of its largest miners of gold and iron ore. Mr Liang muses, "If state-owned enterprises can make money in an area then anybody can make money--and we were the most efficient."

That potted history explains why Fosun's assets look like a ragbag. However, its management is determined to transform the firm from an industrial conglomerate into an insurance-oriented financial firm with long-term investments in consumer-facing, services-oriented businesses selling to China's rising middle classes.

Why insurance? The Fosun four are inspired by Berkshire Hathaway's use of the "float" money generated from premiums to pay for long-term investments. Fosun has been expanding rapidly into the business. It has a joint venture in China with Prudential Financial, an American life insurer, and is currently pursuing LIG, a South Korean insurer.

However, the EUR 1 billion (\$1.4 billion) acquisition earlier this year of Caixa Seguros, a Portuguese insurer, has transformed the firm: insurance assets made up only 3% of total assets before the deal, but now account for nearly 40%. Guo Guangchang, the Chinese group's chairman, declared that the deal "marks a solid step for Fosun to evolve into Warren Buffett's model." With a generous premium float now assured, the firm's grand plan is to "marry Chinese momentum to global resources."

Rather than going it alone into unfamiliar consumer businesses, Fosun is bringing world-leading brands to China. Starting in 2010, when it invested in Club Med of France so as to bring its all-inclusive holiday resorts to China, it has gone on an acquisition spree. As Western asset values plunged in the wake of the global financial crisis, the firm developed a "target matrix of 200 to 300 firms"; it has looked into about 100 so far. Foreign firms often find China hard to crack, so they may welcome having a well-connected and wealthy local partner like Fosun.

Mainlanders are now the biggest force in global tourism, but in the past had few upmarket offerings to choose from. To serve Chinese families seeking novel holidays, Fosun is spending 10 billion yuan to bring Atlantis, a water-themed resort, to the Chinese island of Hainan in partnership with Kerzner International of South Africa. It is also engaged in a battle to take full control of Club Med.

Aside from tourism and elderly care, Fosun is also making big bets in fashion, beauty and health care. It has invested in Folli Follie, a Greek fashion retailer, so it can reach the mainland's increasing numbers of style-conscious youngsters. It acquired Alma Lasers of Israel, which makes technology for cosmetic enhancement, to cater to the booming beauty market. It is said to be pursuing Healthscope, an Australian hospital operator, so it can expand high-end medical care in China's cities.

The firm is also pursuing the mobile internet, where China is a leader. It is developing a car-insurance policy to be sold on mobiles. It has a tie-up with an arm of Alibaba, a local internet giant making a big push into mobile banking, which provides microloans to small businesses. And it has various private-equity investments in firms offering "online-to-offline" services (such as apps that lure smartphone users to nearby physical businesses).

Betting on a better life

Will Fosun's dream of becoming the next Berkshire Hathaway, propelled by the lifestyles of China's new middle classes, come to fruition? Things have gone well so far, but there are grounds for worry. One is that economic growth may stall, dragging down middle-class aspirations with it. Another is that the government may fail to relax its tight regulation of elderly care, and therefore that profits from this business remain elusive. Even so, Fosun's bet seems reasonable. The McKinsey Global Institute, a think-tank, has calculated which of the world's cities will have the largest populations of rich wrinklies in future. Shanghai and Beijing are the leaders, and five of the top ten cities are in China.

In all, Fosun seems well placed to benefit from China's shift from export-oriented growth to domestic consumption. Chinese state firms and even many private ones are still obsessed with being the world's biggest in their industry. But Mr Guo sees the future differently: "China doesn't need bigger plants and higher steel production. Ordinary people want...a better life."

There's a downside to China's economic boom: Who will take care of the elderly?

[Stuart Leavenworth TribuneService](#). [Saint Paul Pioneer Press](#); Saint Paul, Minn. [Saint Paul, Minn]02 May 2015.

Abstract

According to United Nations figures, nearly 200 million Chinese are now over age 60. China's Communist Party seems well aware that in a nation that is increasingly silver-haired and vulnerable, elder neglect is an ugly side effect of the nation's economic miracle.

Full Text

BEIJING -- At age 32, Zhang Jianing holds a good-paying job at an international construction firm that allows her to travel and keep an apartment in pricey Beijing. As a rising young professional, she is living a life that previous generations in China couldn't imagine.

But over lunch at a cafe recently, Zhang's thoughts wandered to her home province of Jilin, where her mom, at age 61, is living alone in a remote village.

"I am always thinking of my mother," she said. "What is going to happen to her? Who will take care of her?"

Millions of people ponder that question regularly in China, a country with a demographic crisis that its leaders are only starting to confront. According to United Nations figures, nearly 200 million Chinese are now over age 60. Roughly half are "empty nest" parents living alone in rural areas. In the next 15 years, nearly 1 in 4 Chinese -- more than 320 million people -- will be 60 and older, including tens of millions of disabled seniors.

In the past, Chinese elders could be assured that, when they were frail and no longer able to work, their children would look after them. But because of the government's one-child policy and the migration of young people to urban jobs, China's traditional system of elder care has been shredded.

"The old people in their own homes are often not getting checks from their own children," said Timothy Beardson, author of "Stumbling Giant," a 2013 book that examines China's looming challenges, including its demographics. "It is not a happy picture. It is a very gloomy picture."

China's Communist Party seems well aware that in a nation that is increasingly silver-haired and vulnerable, elder neglect is an ugly side effect of the nation's economic miracle. In 2013, the government even felt compelled to pass a controversial law, Protection of the Rights and Interests of Elderly People, that spelled out the obligations of young offspring.

Yet unlike most industrialized countries, China doesn't have an insurance safety net like Medicare to provide medical treatment for seniors. Nor does it have anywhere near enough nursing home beds to ensure care for the seriously infirm.

In 2013, Chinese state media reported that there could be a 100-year wait to get into Beijing's top-ranked nursing home, as some 10,000 applicants were waiting for 1,100 available beds. The nation currently has about 4 million nursing home spots. There are roughly 30 million Chinese age 80 or older.

"There are a lot of smart people in the Communist Party," said Beardson. "But are they going to be able to respond effectively to the challenges China is facing? I am not sure."

A graying population is just one of the bumps China's encountered as it speeds through the 21st century. As Beardson notes in "Stumbling Giant," the percentage of young people in China is

shrinking, and with it, the work force that has powered the Chinese economy in recent decades. And while the Communist Party has recently loosened its one-child policy, surveys suggest that young urban families -- facing high rents and concerns about college costs -- have little interest in rearing more than one or two children.

All that poses questions for China's leaders: Can they keep the nation's economic engine running without a large pool of low-paid workers? And how will it pay for health care and living costs of hundreds of millions of people who will enter their golden years in the decades ahead?

Three years ago, Jim Biggs relocated from El Dorado Hills in Northern California to help a Chinese company, Honghui Senior Living, launch an assisted-care facility in Tianjin, a city of nearly 15 million. Called the Friendship House, the facility specializes in care for people who suffer from Alzheimer's and other disabilities.

Biggs, who worked in the U.S. senior care industry for decades, said that business was initially slow. He said it was difficult to spark interest in a community that offered assisted nursing care, an alien concept in China. In addition, he said, some families are wary of the stigma attached to dementia, and so were wary to acknowledge it.

Two years later, the 33-bed facility is more than 80 percent occupied, and Honghui is planning a second and third phase. At Friendship House, many residents are elderly couples, with one spouse bedridden and the other leading a relatively independent lifestyle.

In Shanghai, several companies have launched some of China's high-end senior communities. One of the most successful is Xing Bao -- "Starcastle," in English -- a joint venture between Fortress Investment Group, a publicly traded U.S. company, and Fosun, one of China's leading investment groups.

Located in the Baoshan district of Shanghai, Xing Bao opened in May 2013 and features 189 independent living units, a restaurant, cafe, medical clinic, fitness center, mahjong rooms, tea house and other amenities. One of its 13 floors is an assisted-care center, devoted to seniors with dementia and other disabilities.

Lilly Ho Donohue, managing director of Fortress' China operations, said Xing Bao is now fully occupied, with each resident paying 12,000 yuan per month, about \$2,040. The company has two more similar projects in the works, totaling more than 1,500 units, she said.

Still, said Donohue, it took years of preparation and seven different government licenses to launch Xing Bao. When asked, she said she wasn't sure if such projects could be easily replicated outside of Shanghai, which has a high percentage of seniors and many who are affluent and internationally savvy.

Given that per-capita disposable incomes in China are about \$4,500 a year -- about five times less than what Xing Bao charges annually per resident -- it seems unlikely that private retirement communities will soon be a panacea.

"This is not a business where if you build it, they will come," said Donohue. "The truth is, it is so damn hard."

A retirement home on wheels

[Xu, Lin. China Daily, Hong Kong ed.; Aberdeen \[Aberdeen\]03 Feb 2016: 19.](#)

Abstract

The retired lawyer from Liaoning province's Dalian city has spent the past half-decade RVing through China and over 30 countries in Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The 61-year-old retired university professor from Jiangsu province's capital, Nanjing, points out that many Chinese mistake the lifestyle as reserved for the rich.\n

Full Text

Hou Yingqian felt searing pain when she regained consciousness.

The 67-year-old didn't realize her spine was dislocated but knew she couldn't move her neck.

She also realized her RV had rolled over, crumpling its nose and door.

Hou and her husband, Zhang Zhiwu, 67, had been racing across Russia to reach Europe before their visas expired.

It had been a longstanding dream to travel the continent together.

But that dream dimmed when they struck the lamppost.

Still, the couple were back on the road in a new RV a year later.

"It's a lifestyle," Zhang says.

"It suits old people. We have time and savings. We want to travel at our own pace rather than with group tours."

The retired lawyer from Liaoning province's Dalian city has spent the past half-decade RVing through China and over 30 countries in Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Zhang turned the stories behind the 100,000 miles he'd racked up into a book in 2013. He's working on another about RVing to Europe.

Zhang and Hou focused on their careers and grandchildren until recently.

Hou watched their newborn grandson while Zhang first explored Europe in 2012, even though it was his dream to take her to the Eiffel Tower and Coliseum.

He'd often meet elderly couples on the road.

One day in Switzerland, a local couple asked Zhang where his wife was by pointing at his wedding ring and his empty passenger seat.

Zhang pantomimed to try to explain she was raising their grandson, as Chinese grandparents traditionally do.

The man then pointed at his wedding ring and watch.

Zhang understood - they should be traveling together.

"I know he meant we don't have much time left, so we must cherish it," Zhang recalls.

Two year later, the couple was on their way to Europe when the accident stopped them in their tracks. The following year, they hit the road again.

"The sceneries are endless," Hou says.

"Our home on wheels enables us to go where we want and when we want. We constantly have new neighbors."

Hou flew home after six months. Zhang continued through Turkey, Iran and India.

He barely speaks any foreign language and relies on body language and Google Translate.

"Toilet" is the most important English word, he says. He learned it from a French hitchhiker.

"I always meet warmhearted people who help," he says.

A Chinese couple in their 30s invited him to stay a week in their home in Sofia, Bulgaria. They drove him around and sent him off with rice and vegetables.

He gave them money. They secretly slipped it back into his pocket.

"They said it was like an elderly relative visited, and they were happy to see it as a family reunion," Zhang says.

Indeed, RVing - a longtime retirement-life staple in the West - is catching on among China's elderly.

"China's RV industry is developing rapidly," Zhang says.

"I notice more Chinese driving RVs to Europe. I hope more Chinese will enjoy this lifestyle."

The Chinese mainland had about 21,000 registered RVs by the end of 2014.

The number of campsites increased from nearly 40 in 2010 to about 500 in 2015, the Chinese Association of Automotive Manufacturers reports. It predicts 10,000 in the next five years.

Zhang's friend Wang Renhe designed his own vehicle and then hired a domestic company to manufacture it in 2006.

The 61-year-old retired university professor from Jiangsu province's capital, Nanjing, points out that many Chinese mistake the lifestyle as reserved for the rich.

"We save lots of money on food and accommodation, and can drive to scenic spots that are hard to reach by public transportation," Wang says.

"I'm confident about China's RVing because of government support and growing awareness."

He drove three times to the base camp of Qomolangma, known as Mount Everest in the West.

"The world becomes your backyard garden (with RVs)," he says.

His wife says it has changed her.

"You learn things you can't in school," 62-year-old Zhou Xiaojing says.

"It has broadened my horizons. The past decade has been more colorful than my first five."

The challenges that come with RVing are part of what make it worthwhile, she believes.

"Flying places is easier," she says.

"But RVing's fun is the process. We face many difficulties, like language. But we feel joy and a sense of achievement through resolving them."

Under one roof: China's 'huddle' retirement

[Chong, Koh Ping. The Straits Times; Singapore](#) [Singapore]02 June 2018.

Some elderly Chinese are opting to retire as a group in rural areas, away from the hustle and bustle of city life, for companionship, lower cost of living, fresh air and greenery

HANGZHOU (Zhejiang) • For several years, retired school teacher Zhu Ronglin and his wife lived in a sprawling three-storey suburban villa all by themselves.

Last July, he decided to invite complete strangers, also retired couples, to live with them in the northern outskirts of Hangzhou, the capital of affluent Zhejiang province in the east.

Almost one year on, 11 retirees - five couples and a widow between the ages of 53 and 74 years - pay 600 to 800 yuan (S\$125 to S\$167) a month for room, and cooking and cleaning services in this self-organised retirement home. Food and utilities add up to another 700 yuan a month per person.

This concept of "huddling retirement" (or baotuan yanglao in Chinese), where the elderly band together for social support, has been gaining attention in China in recent years as the population ages rapidly.

At the end of last year, there were 241 million elderly citizens aged 60 and older, making up 17.3 per cent of the population.

In Yuhang district, where Mr Zhu lives, the same demographic makes up 20.5 per cent of the local population.

Local media have reported similar arrangements in other rapidly ageing cities, such as Nanjing in the east and the central city of Wuhan, where city folk retire in rural villages as a group. "We got the idea from a story in the local newspaper," said Mr Zhu, 78.

A retired widow in the western suburb of Hangzhou had recruited three other elderly women as housemates through the paper. But her set-up ended after a few months.

"We visited her place to see how she had done it. Her house is not too big, with only three or four bedrooms, and the tenants all have to share one bathroom," he recalled.

Confident he could make it work as he has a bigger house with better facilities, Mr Zhu called up the same newspaper to offer the same arrangement.

Nestled in a 21-household hamlet in Changshou village, his house was newly rebuilt in 2010 for two million yuan.

It has eight bedrooms with attached bathrooms and is surrounded with well-landscaped greenery, complete with a large vegetable garden and a fish pond.

They were looking for Hangzhou couples who were in good health, relatively young - between the ages of 60 and 70 - good-natured, and who shared a love of mahjong.

The response was overwhelming. More than 100 couples registered their interest with the newspaper. Eventually, the Zhus selected four couples after meeting 20 over food and drinks.

A typical day

A day in Mr Zhu's house starts at about 6am, when the couple rostered for duty wake up to make breakfast and set off for the nearby wet market to shop for groceries.

On the Wednesday that The Straits Times visited, Mr Jiang Yichun, 66, a retired documentary producer, was on duty. His wife has temporarily moved back to the city to care for her ill father.

Madam Wang Hehua helped him make breakfast, while the Zhus accompanied him to the market.

The rest of the tenants woke up at their own time for breakfast, with some leaving the house to run errands or for other activities.

When Mr Jiang returned home, Madam Wang Guifen helped him record the grocery costs in a notebook and draw up the menu for lunch and dinner.

"He is not too familiar with such tasks. Otherwise, I leave it to the couples on duty to do this," explained Madam Wang.

Usually, the couple on duty are also responsible for washing the dishes, but for that day, both the Madam Wangs helped.

Around 9am, the cook arrived to make lunch. This meal usually has eight to 10 dishes, comprising vegetables, fish, meat, poultry and a soup, depending on the number of people eating. Diners note the items on paper for a final tally to be done at the end of the month to divide the grocery costs.

Meanwhile, some tenants would do some simple cleaning, while others read the news or play the stock markets on their mobile phones.

Mr Jiang, an avid singer, usually practises his vocals with a housemate known only as Mr Fan. On the day of ST's visit, the latter was in hospital with a broken leg after a bike accident.

In the afternoons, some of the women, led by Madam Wang, indulge in their favourite pastime of mahjong for several hours, playing with small stakes, where average winnings or losses are between 100 and 300 yuan each round.

After dinner, some tenants take a walk around the neighbourhood and gather for a chat and to watch TV.

Mr Zhu has set a curfew of 10pm, when tenants have to be home, but he grumbled that Madam Wang Hehua always breaks the rule.

She quipped: "It's very safe. I have no problems getting home at night."

EAGER TENANTS

Over the past 10 months, two couples have left Mr Zhu's house, replaced by another three couples and a widow.

One couple left to take care of their 86-year-old father, while the other was the oldest couple, in their mid-70s, and the husband was suffering the early onset of Parkinson's disease.

"We told them it would be better if they went home, and we gave them a big farewell," said Mr Zhu.

Tenants spoke to The Straits Times about the methods they employed to get selected.

Madam Jin Jue, 63, a retired warehouse supervisor, and her husband found their way to Mr Zhu's house based on clues in the newspaper article, despite not having been called up for the "interview" initially as her husband had indicated in their application that he suffers from high blood pressure.

"It's my dream to live in such a villa in the village, where we rear some chickens, and grow our own vegetables. It's such a happy lifestyle," said Madam Jin.

Her determination got her a spot in the first batch of tenants who moved in on July 3 last year.

Another tenant, Madam Wang Hehua, 69, lied that she was applying as a couple - her husband had died. That got her a phone call from the Zhus in October.

"They had asked for couples. If I hadn't said that (applying as a couple), I wouldn't even get a chance to speak with them," said Madam Wang, a retired worker who enjoys playing the stock market.

"I love being with people. And I'm most satisfied with the mealtimes here. Eating with a bunch of other people definitely beats eating alone."

Living in a community had an unexpected benefit for Madam Jin when she broke her leg last September.

"It would have been too tiring for my husband to take care of me, and deal with the grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning if we were living back home," she recalled.

Their only daughter lives in Zhuhai city in the southern province of Guangzhou, more than 1,000km from Hangzhou.

With her leg in a cast, Madam Jin had people deliver meals to her bedroom on the second floor of Mr Zhu's house if her husband was out. A Madam Yu, who lives on the first floor, also volunteered to bathe her.

GROWING INTEREST

The companionship and support afforded by such "huddling retirement" arrangements have attracted growing interest from the elderly as well as those approaching retirement, say experts and social commentators.

The results of a survey of 709 people by Beijing News and a Beijing-based research institute released last December indicate that 70 per cent think this form of retirement living is a good idea and more than 40 per cent are willing to try it out.

This signals a shift in people's mindset of depending on their children in their old age as family size shrinks.

By 2050, China will have 480 million elderly people - or one in every three people. Some 54 per cent will be living alone or with their spouses. And up to 79 million will die alone, without any children by their side.

The trend of such mutual-aid elderly care will grow, said Professor Lu Jiehua, a sociologist from Peking University.

"It will get increasingly harder for the elderly to retire at home. For one, families are getting smaller and the elderly have fewer children to depend upon. And due to greater geographical mobility, many of these children are overseas or out of town," said Prof Lu.

He noted that other than being relatively young and in good health, the elderly who chose "huddling retirement" are usually friends and relatives.

A more popular type of group retirement is the "migratory bird" arrangement, where the elderly go to places in the south, like Hainan, Yunnan, Guangxi, during winter and then move to cooler places like Dalian in the north-east in summer.

"Many former colleagues from the same company will buy houses in the same compound or even collectively buy a house," he added, noting that property prices in these places tend to be affordable as well.

But Prof Lu pointed out that "huddling retirement" can only work for a limited period of perhaps 10 to 15 years.

"When the elderly grow older, they will have to move on to other forms of retirement," he added.

MINI NURSING HOME

Mr Zhu's wife, Madam Wang Guifen, said she has not thought about the future of her "huddling retirement" set-up.

Other than providing a house, the 73-year-old retired factory manager acts as matron, organising the duty roster, overseeing chores and managing the cook, cleaner and gardener hired with the rent the tenants pay.

She also plays the mediator when the tenants get into disputes.

"We don't have any major problems," she said. "It's usually petty disagreements.

"I will talk with them separately to sort out the issues. Some will say things like 'tell them to leave'. No, I can't do that and it doesn't mean it will be all good when we get a new couple."

Her two middle-aged children, a son and a daughter, who live with their families in downtown Hangzhou, are supportive of her lifestyle.

"My son tells me if it gets too tiring, I could hire more help and increase the rent. We will turn it into a mini nursing home of sorts. By then, those who are not willing to pay more can leave," she added.

Many experts and social commentators agree that this "innovative" retirement model could help to ease the problems of inadequate retirement facilities - currently there are 31 nursing home beds per 1,000 elderly.

While some are sceptical about how to replicate such success across the board, they think that government and the community at large could chip in to provide more support.

Prof Lu noted that in this year's government work report, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang mentioned "mutual-aid elderly care" for the first time.

"This signals the government's intent to be more proactive in supporting this kind of retirement living," said Prof Lu.

"The government can help devise a regulatory system to provide the necessary social services. In the case of the elderly who move to Hainan during winter, there are hundreds of thousands of them. The local authorities need to consider how to service these people, especially in terms of healthcare," he added.

Others noted that the local authorities could provide legal support to help draw up contracts or agreements.

For Mr Zhu, he has made the tenants sign a 10-point agreement on the rules of staying in his house.

As for healthcare, his nephew - a general practitioner at a major hospital in downtown Hangzhou - visits him regularly and helps check on the other tenants as well.

Over 90 percent of Chinese seniors enjoy shopping with their smartphone

[People's Daily](#); Beijing [Beijing]19 Oct 2018.

A volunteer teaches elderly residents to shop online in Fengtai district, Beijing. (Xinhua/Li Xin)

Online shopping has become the new favorite past time of China's older generation, with 92 percent preferring to shop online with their smartphone. On Oct. 17, Beijing Morning Post reported that Chinese seniors favor intelligent products, cosmetics, clothes, and health products.

The number of elderly consumers on online shopping sites Taobao and Tmall has increased 1.6 times over the last three years, according to a data report on consumption of Chinese consumers over 50 years old, recently released by China's largest e-commerce conglomerate Alibaba.

Big data from China's e-commerce giant JD.com indicates that the growth of per capita expenditure of Chinese seniors on its online stores is now 20 percent higher than the average annual increase of website consumers.

The number of elderly mobile payment users has doubled in the last year, while the elderly are now 2.5 times more likely to use offline biometric payment methods like fingerprint or facial recognition according to statistics published by Alipay, a third-party mobile and online payment platform in China.

The number of seniors who use their mobile phones to pay living expenses such as water, electricity, and gas has increased by 108 percent, as shown in the data from Alipay.

Besides their ever-growing passion for online shopping and mobile payment, China's senior consumers have also shown a preference for intelligent devices, cosmetics, and sports-related products.

Compared with 2017, Suning.com witnessed a 31 percent decline in sales of simplified mobile phones which are specially designed for the elderly, seeing a 12.5 percent rise in smartphone sales in the same age bracket.

Suning.com is not the only company to notice this trend. The sale of Single Lens Reflex cameras has increased by 68.8 percent year-on-year, with a per capita expenditure of 24,204 yuan (about \$ 3,488).

Statistics from the report shows that 60 percent of senior consumers on Taobao and Tmall buy cosmetics an average of six times a year.

This year, elderly consumers spent 4.4 times as much money on medical cosmetics compared with last year, with a preference for anti-aging and anti-wrinkle products, as shown in data from AliHealth, a health and medical platform under Alibaba.

Seniors in China also prefer purchasing health products online compared with their younger counterparts. Koubei, Alibaba's platform for local life services, suggests that the per capita expenditure of Beijing's elderly on services including pedicure, massage, and sauna is 11 percent higher than the city's average.

Furthermore, besides old hobbies like swimming, dancing, and badminton, elderly Chinese people have developed a passion for golf and bodybuilding. According to Koubei, senior expenditure on golf and bodybuilding has witnessed a growth of over 70 percent in the last nine months.