Changing Work and Family Trajectories – the Experiences of Older Academics/Carers in China according to the Life-course Theory

By
Snow, XUEYING, WANG
Newcastle University Business School
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
August, 2019

Abstract

The current situation in China is posing greater challenges to contemporary older workers' family caring responsibilities (FCR) paired with the limited capability of lone children in providing eldercare. Filial piety is lower than ever before, yet family is still the main source that older people rely on for eldercare in China. The pension and eldercare system resources for older people in China are still limited. In the future, both the state and families may struggle to adequately provide eldercare. However, limited research has been done on life-course of older workers with respect to their family caring responsibilities in China. Although academia has become more balanced with respect to gender, gender inequalities persist in other contexts, likely originating from major challenges of family caring responsibilities. To address the above issues, this research addresses three main questions: 1. What factors have influenced older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories? 2. How do older Chinese academics/carers navigate major turning points in their life courses? 3. How are the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers linked to the Chinese broader political and socio-economic, organizational, and linked life contexts, as well as human agency?

This research employs Life-Course theory (LCT); which has been predominantly applied to understand aging in western contexts. My research specifically combines LCT with the sociological concept of structure and agency, suggesting a new concept of *active ageing* in this theoretical framework. This research is based on 35 qualitative biographical interviews

from the city of Shenyang in China (i.e., 16 male and 18 female university academics above the age of 45).

This research contributes to knowledge on eldercare in China, with explanation of the life course of older workers with FCR. Unfortunately, little research has examined the specific life transitions among older adults with FCR. This research addresses this gap by analyzing the opportunities and restrictions derived from the macro socio-economic and political environment for older Chinese workers and how these factors shape their life courses.

This research contributes to LCT by characterizing the micro and macro structural life course factors in Chinese culture. From the historical and socio-cultural perspective of LCT, research findings indicate a normative life course for older Chinese academics/carers, at least compared to the individualization of life courses in western cultures. Research findings also highlight an ever-increasing need for independence and a lower capability of adapting to technological development among older Chinese academics/carers. Research on the linked life element of LCT has identified important factors of *guanxi*, generational gaps, and FCR that all influence the work-life balance (WLB) of older Chinese academics/carers. Research findings indicate that older Chinese academics/carers make compromises to keep *guanxi* (i.e., personal relationships or social connections) from the workplace, and navigating the complexities of interacting with two generations—their senior parents and single children.

This research also highlights two important factors pertaining to FCR that are worthy of future investigation: senior parents who may live at a distance (especially for those staying in rural areas) and that people with a middle/high school education often had the busiest life trajectory of childcare responsibilities. These two factors are considered distinctive cultural mechanisms of Chinese FCR.

This research contributes to LCT by characterizing the important turning points and trajectories associated with FCR among older Chinese academics/carers' life courses. From the transition and trajectory elements of LCT, five major turning points have been identified: 1. Entering higher education and starting a first job; 2. Changing a job/starting second career; 3. Getting married and having a first child; 4. Middle age; and 5. Children moving away. The two trajectories that pertain to highly intensive FCR are the trajectories of having a child of middle/high school age and the trajectory associated with mid-life, which involves significant eldercare responsibility or dual caring responsibilities.

This research contributes to active ageing literature in China by investigating lay voices and attitudes of older Chinese academics/carers towards WLB, ageing, extended working lives, and age discrimination. Older Chinese academics/carers tend to prioritise family needs when dealing with WLB, during circumstances of having eldercare responsibilities with severe health condition of senior parents and childcare responsibilities of midlle/high school education. Female older Chinese academics/carers tend to make more sacrifices and experience more WLB pressures than male older Chinese academics/carers.

In examinations of agentic orientations of older Chinese academics/carers, they have aimed to extend their working lives in order to comply with the national pension policy and to avoid penalties to their pensions. However, those older Chinese academics/carers tend to hold a negative attitude towards ageing and extended working lives. More significantly, this research has found a different understanding of age discrimination among older Chinese academics/carers compared to those from western cultures.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Doctor Jingqi Zhu, Professor Doctor Matt Flynn, and Doctor Heike Schröder. I am indebted to all of them for their constant and generous help, encouragement, patience and especially their scholarly advice throughout this long journey of PhD project. Thanks to Matt who has introduced me to the world of academic career, ageing and life course; and your kind support and guidance at each stage of my study. Thanks to Heike for your guidance both in life course and how to conquer difficulties during PhD and your enormous encouragement. Thanks to Jingqi for your sincere advice for my research and my career, and encouraging my confidence and keeping my interest in research.

I would like to thank my whole family. Their support, love, and understanding have given me immense courage to complete this project. I want to say thank you to my Mum and Dad, your selfless contribution to both of my study and life have helped me achieved everything I have. I also want to particularly thank my Auntie Caihua Wang and Uncle Runbo Bai, who have helped with connections to all gatekeepers to get access to participants of this research. Thanks to Uncle-in-law Zhu Shimin who has participated in the pilot study. I want to thank my Grandpa and Grandma for loving me, wish you rest in peace.

I want to thank for all my good friends, who have eased my pressure during the 4 years' PhD. I want to thank my dear friend Xiaoyu He, for cheering me up everytime I doubt myself along the way of my study in the UK.

I wish to thank all the 35 participants and other 2 pilot study participants, and all gatekeepers who have devoted your time and assistance in this research. I also appreciate all my colleagues in the office for the discussions, greetings and sharings across these years.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

China has raised attention on its population aging and initiated approaches to solve potential and existing social problems caused by aging. However, relevant resources and assistance to safeguard older Chinese people under existing retirement and pension systems are significantly limited. According to Wang et al. (2014), there could be a 9.15 trillion yuan (approximately 1 trillion pounds) deficit in China's financial support in its pension in the period of 2001-2075. Therefore, it is important to study and develop approaches to solve ageing problems in a family oriented culture like China. This is particularly important with the rapid rate of population ageing and reduced family structure raised by OCP.

Literature on ageing in China has revealed that traditional filial piety, in which families take full caring responsibilities for their older members, is in strong conflict with the contemporary realities faced by families (Tang et al., 2009). Due to smaller family structures with fewer working adults, the results of the One-Child policy have been posing great challenge for families who need to provide eldercare support. It is also a challenge for older Chinese people who are more independent and who do not entirely rely on eldercare.

Family is still the main source of support for older people, and the Chinese government has been encouraging family members to support older people's lives because pensions cause a great strain on the state (Bartlett and Phillips, 1997; Woo et al., 2002). However, from a cultural perspective, the value of respect and filial piety on Chinese tradition have been relatively weakened. Expectations for filial piety have also decreased between the older and young workers in China (Shen and Yeatts, 2013). Consequently, a social problem has emerged because there are insufficient resources to support eldercare from the state and families in China collectively. Simultaneously, current older workers in China are involved with greater family caring responsibilities along with being under immense social and governmental pressures. These problems are all compounded by a reduced capability of their single children to express filial piety.

This PhD project examines the Chinese political and socio-economic environment for older workers, explores the current situation confronted by older Chinese workers, and discusses the major social issues that affect older Chinese workers' work-life-balance (WLB) and retirement decisions, especially in relation to their family caring responsibilities (FCR).

This research examines WLB of older Chinese academics/carers. Since level of WLB could potentially indicate employee satisfaction and capability in negotiating their personal autonomy over work and non-work domains (Sirgy and lee, 2018; Greenhaus, 2003). This

research is particularly interested in whether and how FCR has affected the WLB of older

Chinese academics/carers and whether FCR has limited their personal autonomy in

responding to structural forces. As mentioned above and will be discussed explicitly in this

thesis, FCR has been a crucial social issue affecting older workers' work and lives in China.

This research is interested in whether older Chinese academics/carers have reached their

satisfaction in achieving WLB while dealing with FCR. Furthermore, in this study, this

research has focused on both work and family trajectories, which are the main trajectories

that form the life courses with people's social, work, and family duties.

This research employs Life-Course theory (LCT), which has predominantly been applied in

western contexts. It furthermore combines LCT with the sociological concept of structure and

agency, suggesting a new concept of *active ageing* in this theoretical framework. This

research goals are to thoroughly investigate the current situation experienced by older

Chinese academics/carers. This research considers that LCT is an effective tool to grasp the

sophistication of contextual environment/structures by systematically classifying macro and

micro factors in to explain linkages between the social environment and individuals.

Therefore, this research classifies a number factors for how macro socio-economic and

political environments shape the life course of older Chinese academics/carers, and how the

family and social network influence agentic orientations. Further, this research identifies the

major transitions and trajectories associated with FCR and how Chinese academics/carers

navigate major turning points. Hence, my investigation of the research questions are generally structured according to LCT.

1.1.1 Research Gaps and Contributions.
This research contributes to three streams of the literature. The first stream refers to our current knowledge of eldercare in China. The second stream sheds light on the study of LCT. The third stream refers to characterizing active ageing in China.

This research contributes to knowledge on eldercare in China, with an explanation of the life course of older workers with FCR. Evandrow et al. (2002) noted that the majority of work done in the area of sandwiched individuals (couples with dual caring responsibilities for both their senior parents and their children) has been on individuals from North America. Hämäläinen and Tanskanen (2019) also argued that existing research on such sandwich families enormously focus on Anglo-Saxon areas. Falkingham et al. (2019) suggests that there may be similar limitations placed on sandwiched adults in China, but most research has been done on advanced cultures. This research addresses this gap by explaining how older Chinese academics/carers make strategies of WLB associated with FCR.

Gravador and Teng-Calleja (2018) pointed out that existing literature has mainly focused on organisational policies and difficulties in attaining WLB, while there lacks studies to explore individual experiences of achieving WLB as well as employee well-beings. There has been significantly limited studies on WLB based on eastern countries including China (Cieri and Bardoel, 2009; Chandra, 2012; Xiao and Cooke, 2012; Lewis and Beauregard, 2018; Ratnesh et al., 2019). This research addresses the above gaps by narrowly focusing on a select number of older academics from sandwiched families and applying LCT to investigate FCR and WLB of older workers in China.

Additionally, the topic of the sandwiched generation, originating in the 1980s, has paid larger attention to female carers, with limited research investigated male carers. The preponderance of evidence suggests that men show less involvement compared to women (Vlachantoni et al., 2019). More significantly, the majority of the existing research related to FCR merely focuses on sample of female carers, or have emphasized that FCR are primarily covered by females (e.g., Chevalier, 2007; Dautzenberg et al., 2000; Dentinger and Clarkberg, 2002; Tsai and Chen, 2017; Widmer and Ritchard, 2009; Wolf et al., 1997). This research addresses the gap by examining male older workers with FCR and compares the life courses of male and female life older Chinese academics/carers.

This research contributes to study of LCT based on context from both macro and micro life course analysis, particularly the transitions and trajectories in Chinese culture. In the past four decades, life course studies have been developed based on both macro analysis of cultural, socialization, and organizational contexts; and micro analysis on work and education trajectories (Angela, 2018). However, "the main focus of the life course paradigm is on linking specific context- and time-dependent events in earlier life to responses in later life" (Moschis, 2019: p. 41). The main focus of life course studies is to shed light on specific events from early life impacts later life trajectories. In contrast, the innovation of the current research is a context based study, a more thorough examination on people's *whole* life

trajectories and analyzing the contextual environment from both micro and macro

perspectives.

Dingemans and Mohring (2019: 23) noted that the existing literature on life course has

concentrated on "socio-demographic characteristics such as gender and educational

background and on factors that were proximal to the retirement transition, such as health,

partner status, wealth, and income at the time of the retirement transition". Unlike those

studies focusing on specific demographic characteristics or situational factors, this research

investigates life outcomes under the causational mechanisms originating from multi-level

forces of macro socio-economic and political strengths, family influences, and individual

choices. Crucially, there lacks research in investigating linkages of former command

economy systems and the life courses of older workers in China. This research addresses this

gap by suggesting a relative standardisation of life course events among older Chinese

workers.

Baltes and Smith (2004) claimed that the long tradition of life course studies mainly focuses

on impacts from early life, until age 20. Specifically, what is needed is an investigation into

the factors that embed contextual structural characteristics and influences into the study of

adult workers and ageing population. This research fills this gap by investigating

contemporary older Chinese academics/carers and the sophisticated contextual environments in which they are embedded.

This research contributes to micro level mechanisms of life course factors in Chinese culture associated with in-depth analysis on the particular Chinese cultural factors of *guanxi*, generational gaps, and FCR. This is relevant because, Binstock and George (2011) emphasized the problem of a "life-course fallacy" in the current literature. The life-course fallacy ignores variations between cohorts and generation from generation. This research will address this issue by discussing generational gaps in the Chinese context and suggest that generational gaps impact on the life course of older Chinese academics/carers.

According to Yi et al. (2015), there has been a number of studies on generational differences in the workplace from western perspectives—especially the US—while lacking relevant research from other cultures. However, little research has been done in investigating older Chinese workers/carers' perceptions and experiences towards these generation gaps. This research considers the importance of not only studying ageing in China and but also the psychological well-being of older Chinese workers/carers. Cheng et al. (2018) pointed out that there is shortage of research in how eldercare in China could be influenced by major socio-economic reforms—fast urbanization and ageing environment stand in strong contrast to the emerged economies who have just experienced dramatic population ageing. This

research fills this gap by making an in-depth analysis on how the life course of older Chinese academics/carers is shaped by the macro socio-economic environment, including how they deal with the linked life issue of generation gaps..

This research contributes to the investigation of life transitions and turning points on LCT. Giele and Elder (1998) have pointed out a significant challenge of the LCT to unify a holistic line of accessibilities of structure and changes. This is rather difficult while accommodating social structure at various levels and divergent changes. However, this research has not attempted to clarify all structural changes to older Chinese academics/carers in specificity. Nonetheless, this research will attempt to unify a holistic line of important turning points over older Chinese academics/carers' life course, as a reflection of macro and micro structural changes.

Life course studies and turning points have paid great focus on major social events. The most frequently investigated major social events have been the Great Depression (Elder, 1998) in western contexts and the Cultural Revolution (Zhou and Hou, 1999) in the Chinese context. Researchers have predominantly investigated how the Great Depression and Cultural Revolution have influences on later life outcomes. Based on a review of life course research in the development of LCT, a number of studies focus on specific individual life turning points, such as transition into adulthood (Schwartz and Petrova, 2019), military service (Gade,

1991; Sampson and Laub, 1996), the transition into parenthood (Prabhakar et al., 2019), residential changes (Kirk, 2012), and many more. Studies have been focusing on special turning points and social identities corresponding to the unique timing of structural influence. In contrast, the current research sheds light on sequential turning points experienced by individuals through the reflection of the macro socio-economic environment in China. The current research has classified major turning points and major trajectories of FCR of older workers in China and characterize the life stages of contemporary older Chinese academics/carers.

This research contributes to the study on active ageing in China. There has been limited information on lay voices towards active ageing (Bowling, 2008; Chen et al., 2019; Schmidt and Yang, 2019). Chen et al. (2019) notes little information document the social needs of older people from a cultural perspective. This research fills the gap in the active ageing literature by adding explanations from socio-cultural environments and taking into account the needs of older academics/carers in contemporary China. Research methods and theoretical frameworks pertaining to topic of "ageing well" are mostly based on western cultures. Chen et al. (2019) highlights a need for research on these topics from Eastern Asia. This research fills the gap of active ageing study in Chinese context. The study of age discrimination has also been primarily studied in western populations (Zhang et al., 2019).

This research addresses this gap by distinguishing understanding of older Chinese people on age discrimination compared to western cultures.

1.2 Overview of Research Objectives

According to the aforementioned research gaps identified from literature, three research questions have been generated:

1. What factors have influenced older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories?

2. How do older Chinese academics/carers navigate major turning points in their life courses?

3. How are the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers linked to the Chinese broader political and socio-economic, organizational, and linked life contexts, as well as human agency?

1.3 Overview of Research Methodology

This research is based on 35 qualitative biographical interviews from the Shenyang city of China. Interviews were conducted with 16 male and 18 female university academics who were above the age of 45. This research is targeted at a specific group associated with a particular age, generation, social, and educational background. The current generation of workers aged above 45 in China have experienced significant social changes. Therefore, the Chinese context and older Chinese workers are a valuable resource for life course studies, as a rich background providing sophisticated factors from diversified socio-cultural and historical and family perspectives for analysis already exist. Simultaneously, due to significant generational differences, life course studies in China requires up-to-date data.

Accordingly, this research took a social constructivist worldview to conduct a qualitative

study on the nature of complexity in life courses of older academics/carers. Rather than

restricting the value of social phenomenon to small scale of categories, qualitative studies are

more suitable for this research to gain an in-depth analysis (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore,

this research decided to take smaller scale of 35 biographical individual interviews, which is

more suitable for acquiring in-depth analyses of social resources compared to large scale

studies (Brayman, 2016). This research has conducted non-probability and purposive

sampling which focuses on a particular group of people with particular characters, features,

responsibilities, behaviours, and experiences (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014). More importantly,

most participants have eldercare responsibilities while some participants have childcare

responsibilities or dual caring responsibilities.

This research has decided to choose academia for fieldwork, due to its richness in resources

for older employees with FCR. The use of academia is especially useful given the resources

afforded to older female employees in an effort to maintain gender equality. In contrast,

industrial organizations may possess limited resources for female older workers. Rhoads and

Gu (2012) suggest that approximately 45% of Chinese academia is comprised of women with

higher education degrees, likely higher than many other countries. Additionally, there is

supposed to be more flexibility in academic work, which provides availability for conducting

family caring responsibilities. However, findings from an international perspective have

made the argument that gender inequalities in higher education persist due to family caring

responsibilities confronted by females in a male-dominated cultural and social context that

lacks assistance female carers (Rhoads and Gu, 2012). The main challenge for female

academics derives from work-family tensions and switching between traditional and modern

conceptions of work (Rhoads and Gu, 2012; Tartari and Salter, 2015; Zhang, 2010). Hence,

the implications of this research may include taking a critical look at the resources provided

to older workers with FCR and further describe the life courses of older Chinese

academics/carers, both men and women.

Compared to other provinces in China, the Liaoning has an accelerate rate of population

ageing—especially in rural areas—due to lower fertility rates, longer life expectancy, and

rural-urban migrations. Liaoning has an older average age compared to the rest of the country.

For example, 15.4% of the population in Liaoning is aged 60 and above compared to 13.3%

at the national level (Li and Sicular, 2013). Therefore, significant social problems of ageing

and issues of FCR to older workers could emerge in Liaoning. The problems are further

exacerbated because of participant's senior parents live primarily in rural areas without

sufficient resources in eldercare. This research mainly accesses participants in city of

Shenyang (capital city of Liaoning) due to the time, resource, and accessibility limitations of

a PhD student. Thus, the representative nature of the study is limited. Nonetheless, as

discussed previously, focused qualitative studies on a more homogenous group could provide

a more in-depth analysis of aging workers/carers.

Participants in higher education generally come from privileged groups who possess better

income and social status, which may also be considered a limitation. Therefore, they may

possess more economic and social support for WLB. Additionally, academia affords more

flexibility for people. In contrast, the fast development of an economy may deteriorate work-

life conflicts among people working in other fields. Future studies on life course or ageing

societies in China may attempt to investigate other fields of work, including public

governments or industrial organizations. Future studies on FCR in China may also investigate

people with lower incomes, or people with work that affords less flexibility.

1.4 Research Findings

From the historical and socio-cultural perspective of LCT, research findings indicate a

significant influence of state-level policies on the general life trajectories of older

academics/carers in contemporary China (e.g., the former state policy of the command

economy system). These policies have resulted in a relatively standardised form of life

courses among older Chinese academics/carers. This relative standardisation results in similar

timing of life turning points and unified career trajectories. This reflects a distinctive

difference compared to western cultures, which have experienced an individualization of life

course (Kohli, 2007). In particular, Chinese academics/carers have experienced significant

poverty during their early life course and come from a collectivist culture which avoids risk.

Surprisingly, this research has found the opening-up economic reform started in the 1980s

has not had a big impact on enabling multiple career transitions and changes for older

Chinese academics/carers. A crucial reason could be that research participants typically come

from privileged positions in the society. Thus, these participants are satisfied with existing

employment conditions and receive extensive benefits from the "iron rice bowl" (i.e.,

clustered benefits and subsidies offered to state enterprise employees; a job for life) and do

not need to change jobs. Furthermore, this research has found increasing and significant

challenges among older Chinese academics in adapting to new technologies and high-tech

teaching facilities. Moreover, this research has found an increasing need for independence

among older Chinese people in the future

From the linked life element of LCT, this research has identified important factors of *guanxi*

and the generational gaps and FCR that impact on WLB of older Chinese academics/carers. It

is currently unclear how large of an influence *guanxi* has on employee commitment. This

research considers that keeping the "iron rice bowl" may be biggest factor in maintaining

employee commitment among older Chinese academics/carers. However, there is also a

profound influence of *guanxi* on WLB among older Chinese academics/carers. The most

common strategies that older Chinese academics/carers use to deal with *guanxi* were to

compromise and comply with superiors and to make efforts to build good *guanxi* with

colleagues. Research findings are consistent with literature that suggests *guanxi* systems

could be detrimental to those employees with less political capability and interpersonal skills

(Wei et al., 2010; 2012). Simultaneously, older Chinese academics/carers deal with

generation gaps by accepting and adapting to autocratic types of communications with senior

parents, while making more democratic adjustments towards their children. This research

also pointed out two important factors pertaining to FCR: (1) senior parents who live at a

distance from their children, especially for those staying in rural areas and (2) people with a

middle/high school-level of education had the busiest life trajectory with childcare

responsibilities. These two factors construct distinctive cultural mechanisms of Chinese FCR.

From the transition and trajectory elements of LCT, five major turning points have been

identified: 1. Entering higher education and starting a first job; 2. Changing a job/starting

second career; 3. Getting married and having a first child; 4. Middle age; and 5. Children

moving away. The two trajectories that pertain to highly intensive FCR are the trajectories of

having a child of middle/high school age and the trajectory associated with mid-life, which

involves significant eldercare responsibility or dual caring responsibilities.

With respect to the agentic orientations, older Chinese academics/carers tend to

prioritise family needs when dealing with WLB, during circumstances of having eldercare

responsibilities with severe health condition of senior parents and childcare responsibilities of midlle/high school education. Female older Chinese academics/carers tend to make more sacrifices and experience more WLB pressures than male older Chinese academics/carers. Older Chinese academics/carers have aimed to extend their working lives in order to comply with the national pension policy and to penalties to their pensions. However, those older Chinese academics/carers tend to hold a negative attitude towards ageing and extended working lives. They generally hope to retire earlier and expect stability in their career trajectories rather than making dramatic career progress. More significantly, this research has found a different understanding of age discrimination among older Chinese academics/carers compared to those from western cultures. Older Chinese academics/carers tend to ignore certain age-related issues at workforce and assume that they result from a normative ageing process to which they need to adapt and accept. They also assume older workers possess the duty to retreat from important positions in the organization and create more opportunities to younger workers.

Above all, one insight from this research will likely be that older Chinese academics/carers are accustomed to making compromises throughout their life course. They had previously compromised in the context of the command economy and state arrangements on their career trajectories, compromised to maintain organizational *guanxi*, actively compromise in the family life—to both senior parents and their children when dealing with generation gaps, and compromise in accommodating organizational and social age discrimination.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The first chapter provides a general overview of the thesis, including research background, research gaps and contributions, an overview of the methodology and research objectives, and a brief report of the main findings. This research contains a literature review in Chapters 2 and 3, which explicates the theoretical background and justification of this research. Accordingly, Chapter 2 addresses the Chinese context specifically, with a focus on the working culture, gender, pension and retirement policies, social welfare and medical care systems for eldercare, and age discriminations in contemporary Chinese working environments. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework underlying this research, including the LCT, the sociological concepts of structure and agency, and the western concept of active ageing. Simultaneously, Chapter 3 also discusses how this research applies LCT in contemporary Chinese environments to illustrate potential factors classified by four LCT elements. Throughout the literature review, research gaps are identified and research questions are formed to systematically address each one. Chapter 4 is a description of the research methodology and the detailed processes of study development and data collection. Chapters 5 through 8 use the collected data to make inferences about the life trajectories of older Chinese academics/carers by providing the results of the study. Chapter 9 provides a synthesis of this research based on reflections of the research findings, provides linkages to the literature review, and properly contextualizes the research. Finally, chapter 9 offers some

concluding thoughts on this thesis, specifically highlighting the theoretical contributions and

limitations of this research.

Chapter 2: Chinese Context

2.1 Introduction

This section mainly discusses the Chinese context including reviews of working culture, gender roles, pensions and welfare policies, and age discrimination in contemporary Chinese culture. Literature review in this section plays important part in supporting or accommodating data analysis of this research. Arguments made in the data analysis and discussion chapters will largely refer back to the literature review in this chapter.

2.2 Working Culture of China

This section discusses working culture in China with regard to the Chinese context and the current situation of older Chinese workers. Relevant factors such as retirement age, pensions, health care and working beyond the retirement age have also been researched.

There is a mandatory retirement age in China of 60 years for male employees, 50 for blue-collar female employees and 55 for white-collar female employees (Stauvermann & Hu, 2018). Stauvermann and Hu perceived a need for China to postpone the retirement age: The life expectancy has been increasing (from 70 in 1994 to 76 in 2014) while mandatory retirement age has remained the same, and as a result the country may face long-term financial dilemmas in affording pensions for the population. This research considers that pension and retirement policies may affect workers both in their plans for later work trajectories and their preparations in supporting eldercare responsibilities. Managing pension and retirement policies is also crucial for China to prevent financial risks and ameliorate societal problems derived from its rapid population aging.

The basic pension system for urban Chinese workers, implemented since 1997, involves an integration of 'social pooling accounts' and 'individual accounts'. 'Social pooling accounts' are a pay-as-you-go strategy requiring the employer to pay in 20% of the worker's full wages, while 'individual accounts' are paid by the employee in the amount of roughly

8% of his or her full wages (Liu et al., 2015, p. 10878). According to Yuan et al. (2018), since the year 2001, 13 Chinese provinces have experimented with individual pension accounts to which employees could make payments to accumulate their own future pensions. Therefore, this research perceives that the pension system in China, especially social pooling accounts, may become a major factor that influences retirement decisions since early retirement will result in deduction from pensions. This could potentially be a strong force keeping older workers in the labour market.

Furthermore, rural–urban inequality has been a significant social issue that has drawn attention, and it also manifests in the social welfare and pension systems in China. The population of older people in China is the largest among all the countries of the world, which in 2010 contained 178 million residents above 60 years old and 119 million citizens above 65 years old, with 60 percent of those older people living in rural areas. However, rural older people are much more vulnerable compared to their urban counterparts due to insufficient pensions, major dependence on families, limited savings, and urban–rural inequalities (Liu & Cook, 2018). These data on the rural older population is relevant to this study as most of the research participants were migrants to the city whose senior parents have remained in the rural areas. Lives distant from their senior parents, who have in time become empty nesters, and less advanced eldercare and pension systems in rural areas could be factors that concern and influence the WLB of the research participants.

The poverty rate of the rural older population was about 28.7% while that of the urban older population was merely 6% (Cheng et al., 2018). In 2016, there were about 230 million older people in China, making up 16.7% of the total population. This figure was predicted to increase to over 400 million in 2050 and will account for 35% of the overall population (Liu & Cook, 2018).

In 2007, more than 90% of rural older people did not possess any pension at all. In 2009, New Rural Pension Scheme (NRPS) was established in China. Therefore, nearly 89 million older people from all the counties making up rural China were paid their pensions before the end of 2011 (Cheng et al., 2018). However, it should be noted that nearly half of the older population from rural China are still uncovered by the national pension system, so older workers' concerns about eldercare for their senior parents in rural areas could not be satisfied in the short term. This research has investigated how older Chinese academics/carers deal with having senior parents who are empty nesters from rural areas.

In 1991, roughly 70% of older people from rural China were living with their adult children. However, in 2006 this figure has decreased to just above 40%. 'The increasing mass rural-to-urban migration and shrinking family size inevitably have eroded the foundation of the Chinese traditional intergenerational support system' (Cheng et al., 2018, p. 157). In spite of the mass rural to urban migrations, the traditional method of family support still remains the major form of provisions for eldercare in rural China. Simultaneously, the roles of adult daughters have become increasingly important in eldercare responsibilities within families (Liu & Cook, 2018).

The participants of this research fall in a large part within the rural-to-urban migrant populations. In addition to the insufficiency of the rural eldercare system, there could be observed a dilemma of older Chinese academics/carers in managing WLB while meeting the demands of FCR. This research has exposed the difficulties they have experienced and how they manage their eldercare responsibilities.

In addition to current retirement and pension policies and the state of filial piety among contemporary older Chinese workers, this research also has reviewed *guanxi*, which is undeniably an influential factor in the working culture of China. *Guanxi* is a crucial Chinese indigenous concept that is embedded in every part of an individual's life (Cheung & Wu,

2011; Liu et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2015; Ding et al., 2017). According to Ren and Chadee (2017), and Hom and Xiao (2011), as opposed to constructions of relationships from Western cultures, the Confucian-based *guanxi* (private reciprocal connections within a social network) contains wider aspects expanded to private obligations, interpersonal trust-building, and personal interests. Liu et al. (2013) pointed out that for an emerging economy like China, in which formal regulations and constitutions are still not mature, daily operations depend significantly on *guanxi*. In this section, this research mainly discusses *guanxi* from the organisational perspective as an element of working culture in China. In section 3.4.4, this research will discuss *guanxi* from individual perspective as a factor affecting employee well-being and individual life course.

According to Zhang et al. (2015), based on the Confucian origin of Chinese culture, the operation of Chinese society is permeated and underpinned by social relationships constructed by hierarchies. Trusted reciprocities and stabilisation of hierarchical structures in families, organizations and societies are safeguarded by those social relationships, which come from family or social networks (Zhang et al., 2015). Therefore, it is a given that *guanxi* is a major social factor influencing Chinese people's life trajectories. Major turning points in life trajectories, such as job application, career transitions, promotions and opportunities, could all potentially be linked to a person's social connections or family network.

The literature presents a constant critical debate over *guanxi*, painting it as a double-edged sword with both positive and negative effects (Yang, 2014; Zhang et al., 2015). Liu et al. (2013) studied supervisor-subordinate relationships in a bank in southern China, and their findings noted improvements in employees' self-esteem derived from good quality *guanxi* with supervisors, both in and outside of the workplace; these improvements in turn aided the employees' performance.

In their analysis, Liu et al. pointed out that constructing good relationships with employees has been subconsciously deemed a responsibility of supervisors, while keeping good *guanxi* with supervisors may, in the relationship-oriented Chinese culture, make employees feel especially bound to the supervisor and the organisation. Chen and Francesco (2000) have explicated that *guanxi* could significantly improve outcomes in people's work in terms of 'trust, liking, favourable evaluation, frequency of communication, and preferential actions'. Chen and Francesco (2000) have pointed out that young people in organisations in China who possess closer relationships with superior officers are usually more likely to win employment or promotions.

Chen (2008) described the 'middle way' philosophy of Chinese culture. In traditional Chinese culture, people prefer 'following the middle way', seeking approaches of moderation: reconciling, integrating and synthesizing with opposites that are assumed to be interdependent elements. This conception challenges traditional the Western thinking of analytical context, which emphasises the importance of paradoxical phenomena, assuming each opposite to be an independent element (Chen, 2008).

Hom and Xiao (2011) conducted a study among 417 workers from Chinese high technology companies and confirmed *guanxi* to be an incentive factor to improve employee commitment and to prevent turnover. Cheung and Wu (2011) did a similar study in three Chinese companies and showed a link between a good quality of supervisor-employee relationships and improvement of employees' commitment to the organization.

From another perspective, this research has also considered that paying too much attention to *guanxi* and making connections at the expense of individual development and independence may also be detrimental to organizational efficiency. Studies including Hom and Xiao (2011) and Cheung and Wu (2011) indicated positive effects of *guanxi* on employees' commitment in China. Other findings, such as Zhang et al. (2015), which

conducted surveys in 12 hospitals in Taiwan and recruited 240 workers from the middle level and their supervisors. The responses tended toward the opinion that human resource management implementing *guanxi* could potentially hamper employees' trust of the organization and their creativity at work. Ren and Chadee's (2017) findings, based on surveys from employees in two big cities in China, recommended that the help of *guanxi* in developing employee competences is not always positive and has started to be eliminated to a certain extent. They explained in their paper that high levels of *guanxi* may overwhelm employees and drain their initiative in order to escape expectations from employers.

Guanxi may be detrimental to organizational effectiveness in another way. According to Zhang et al. (2015) and Cheung and Wu (2011), employees may obtain benefits such as promotion opportunities or better assessment results by expending effort on establishing good *guanxi* with superiors. In other words, a manager may decide among the promotion options based on the quality of *guanxi* between the employee and the manager rather than objective work abilities.

Yang's (2014) study from 7 southern Chinese firms revealed positive effects of *guanxi* on work performance for those with excellent political skills and negative effects for those with poor political skills. Yang (2014) explained that employees with advanced political abilities are more likely to avoid the negative effects of *guanxi* on work performance, transcending self-interested ingratiation with an intention to develop better reciprocal interactions. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that workers with a higher level of political acumen may be better able to survive in the labour market. However, considering the ever-conflicting debate in the literature, this research approaches the implementation of *guanxi* with comprehension of its double-edged sword effects. Ding et al.'s (2017) survey from MBA students with sufficient experience in China indicated positive effects of *guanxi* on employees' willingness to share knowledge juxtaposed with a worsening sense of self-

worth. Ding et al. more elaborated that the unique cultural factor of saving face (fear of damaging harmony within a group and reluctance to stand out, especially while facing conflicts) embedded in *guanxi* could potentially hamper one's sense of self-worth. The behaviour of *guanxi* and the effects of *guanxi* on employees needs further investigation. It merits studying how best to prevent or ameliorate the negative effects of *guanxi* on employees and their performance in China. According to Yang (2014), there has not been a clearly-defined metric marking to what extent *guanxi* plays positive roles in employee performance. The researcher considers that keeping good *guanxi* may improve organisational effectiveness when members agree to be more involving and willing to adjust to others' ways of thinking. However, devoting too much attention to building good *guanxi* may be time-consuming and detrimental to the confidence, proactivity and initiative of employees who have weaker political skills. As *guanxi* is still an important Confucian element of Chinese society, organisations in China should be able to manage the extent to which *guanxi* penetrates the workforce in order to avoid wastes of time and resources.

Subsequently, in answering the research questions, this research has implemented an investigation into how *guanxi* influences older Chinese academic/carers on their WLB and well-being. This research has explored how older Chinese academics perceive *guanxi* and their level of satisfactions towards *guanxi*. This research has also discussed how older Chinese academics/carers deal with *guanxi* at work.

The last point in this section refers to the growing pressure, driven by increasing competition, faced by older workers in China. A tremendous increase of demands on talent along with the fast development of an economy with a large population have resulted in severe labour market competition in China across all industries, including academia. Zhou and Wei (2011) have pointed the significant debate raised by scholars around whether China

has been transitioning into a knowledge-intensive or innovation-driven economy under the influence of world factories.

In order to reach the speed of globalisation, there has been a large demand on the science and technology system in China to generate knowledge and innovation for purpose of linking academia and industry (Zhou & Wei, 2011). Despite the effect of universities and research institutions on industrial development still being small, China has attempted to encourage domestic universities and research institutions to create, disseminate and commercialise knowledge (Zhou & Wei, 2011). Therefore, it could be perceived there may be increasing pressure put on older workers in China to reach the demands of work competition and technological development. At the same time, this may also increase pressure on older Chinese workers to compete with younger colleagues.

Forces from China's marketisation have gradually overtaken the full-life employment provided by central planning economy, while the evolution of people's work trajectories continuously manoeuvres at a fast pace such that multiple career transitions becomes normal. Hence, people are required to develop comprehensive competitiveness and skills to increase employability and adapt to the career environment (Ren & Chadee, 2017). Malul's (2009) findings based on data from the Israeli Income Survey indicated that younger people possess an advantage in employability in the form of advanced technical skills resilience to the fast technological change in the labour market. By contrast, older people were severely threatened by technology's effect of change on their employment. According to Wang and Wang (2017), organisations in China tend to replace their top management teams with new generations due to the booming Internet start-ups during marketisation. This research has explored whether and how technological changes and the demand on increasing employability have affected career and life trajectories of older academics/carers. Simultaneously, this research has

investigated how older Chinese academics/carers adjust to contemporary economic and technological developments in China.

Frone's (2000) national study surveying 8,098 individuals in the US proved that pressure from work-life conflicts is a detrimental factor to employees' mental health, triggering anxiety and psychological problems. According to Tsai and Chen (2017), studies have shown that people from Hong Kong possess a higher propensity for anxiety towards WLB compared with people from the US and the UK. Mainland China and Hong Kong are neighbors and both share a similar Eastern culture. Hence, people from those two regions may tend to possess a similar level of anxiety towards WLB; this research specifically concerns factors and mechanisms that interrupt the WLB of older Chinese academics/carers.

"The work-life concept was first identified and developed in the USA and in developed economies" (Cieri and Bardoel, 2009: p.182). In recent decades, there has been increasing focus on WLB discourses due to globalisation and rapid changing working environment that have heightened work/family or work/life conflicts (Chandra, 2012; Xiao and cooke, 2012). Most WLB studies focus on developed countries with individualistic cultures including Europe, US, and Australia (Xiao and Cooke, 2012).

There has not been a consensus definition of work life balance (WLB) established from the literature (Lewis and Beauregard, 2018). A variety of scholars and studies have conceptualized WLB. Among many definitions that this research has reviewed, one quote from Fleetwood (2007: p. 351), as cited from Employers for Work Life Balance (2006), could be a comprehensive explanation that addresses various WLB issues from both organisational and employees perspectives:

> "Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society.''

Hence, this research considers that it could potentially be the responsibility of employees to manage WLB. This includes level of control over time and resource management distributed to work, FCR, and leisure. This could improve both fulfillment of inside and effectiveness at work. On the other hand, it should also be the mutual benefits and collective objective of both employees and organisational management to keep WLB. According to Fleetwood (2007), WLB could be financially valued by better satisfaction of employees, reduced absence, increased productivity etc.

There have been WLB studies focusing on role transitions between work and family both in China and other countries in the world, including Zhang et al. (2011), Jensen et al. (2017), and Lomazzi et al. (2019). These studies have investigated factors that caused or strategies to ameliorate work life conflicts, and navigate gender issues at individual level. In this research, WLB is shed light on all aspects of work and non-work domains of older Chinese academics/carers. As defined in Sirgy and Lee's (2018: p.230) research cited from Greenhaus et al. (2003): "work life balance is defined as allocation of time and psychological energy in a balanced way in work and non-work life while deriving much satisfaction from both work and non-work life".

Therefore, this research considers the definition of WLB from Sirgy and Lee (2018) and Greenhasu et al. (2003) is more suitable to this research rather than the definition from Fleetwood (2007). Since the aim of this research is to investigate the individual experiences of older Chinese academics/carers in managing WLB associated with FCR, and not focus on organisational efficiency of WLB. This research decided to examine WLB in order to investigate agentic capability and personal autonomy of older Chinese academics/carers in dealing with work and family trajectories in responses to structural forces.

Gravador and Teng-Calleja (2018) pointed out that existing literature has mainly focused on organisational policies and difficulties in attaining WLB. Gravador and Teng-

Calleja (2019) called for more studies to explore individual experiences of achieving WLB as well as employee well-beings. Ratnesh et al. (2019) revealed that studies based on Asian countries of Singapore, Malaysia, India, Pakistan and China have indicated ongoing issues of WLB especially from developing countries due to increased working hours. However, the concept of WLB is "somewhat foreign" to Chinese people (Cieri and Bardoel, 2009: p. 183). There has been significantly limited studies on WLB based on eastern countries including China (Cieri and Bardoel, 2009; Chandra, 2012; Xiao and Cooke, 2012; Lewis and Beauregard, 2018; Ratnesh et al., 2019). This research addresses this gap by exploring satisfaction of older Chinese academics/carers on WLB, and strategies they take to manage WLB.

Lewis and Beauregard (2018) called for more studies to investigate cultural influences on the value of WLB and effects from different levels of context on the cultural concept of WLB. According to Ren and Caudle (2016), the discussion of WLB from the west may not be appropriate to explain the WLB context in China. In Confucian Chinese culture, it is virtuous to prioritize duties (e.g. work or family responsibilities) over leisure, and concept of WLB is usually dismissed (Cieri and Bardoel, 2009). Chinese employees are accustomed to imbalanced work and life and do not sense the need of developing WLB policies from organisations (Ren and Caudle, 2016). There also significantly lacks social and organisational policies and practices of WLB in China, comparing to western countries (Ren and Caudle, 2016)

There have been critiques raised by researchers regarding potentially limited effects of existing WLB policies in western countries on improving employee WLB. For example, flexible working schemes may have extended the working hours of employees. Employers may design WLB policies in favor of themselves rather than employees (Lewis and Beauregard, 2018). This research considers developing employee abilities in achieving WLB

is equally important to establishing organisational policies and improving employer's approach on WLB.

Lewis and Beauregard (2018) have also pointed out another critique that WLB seems to ignore gender differences. According to Lewis and Beauregard (2018), female workers seem likely to be reduced in their power of achieving advancement in career if they adopt WLB practices. Since female workers are socially maintaining more caring responsibilities while being required to reach similar demands on work responsibilities compared to male workers. This research contemplates that the increasing pressure of FCR on older workers and traditional family pattern of male-breadwinners and femlae-carers may impose greater interruptions on careers of female older workers in China. As according to Xiao and Cooke (2012), under the impacts of cultural traditions in China, Chinese women tend to sacrifice their careers to a large extent either with voluntary or involuntary to meet the needs of FCR. Despite that they are in the equal position to their husbands who are both highly educated.

Nonetheless, this research considers significant importance of developing social and cultural construction of WLB especially on older workers with FCR in China in improving individual abilities to achieve WLB. As Lewis and Beauregard (2018) has revealed that social and cultural structure may influence individual sense of entitlement to manage WLB (individual recognition to develop personal abilities to conduct a balanced work and life). Due to the significant cultural root of filial piety, FCR has constantly been important duties of Chinese people with impacts on their life decisions. In addition, OCP has significantly changed family structures, and reduced the number of available family carers. On the other hand, the increasing competition at work has limited employee abilities in serving FCR.

Therefore, it could be interesting to explore social construction of WLB in Chinese context with its distinctive cultural elements of filial piety, OCP and FCR. It deserves focus on how Chinese older workers make strategies of WLB in responses to the changing

environment and demanding contextual pressures to FCR. Comparisons between genders in taking strategies of WLB due to significant cultural influence on enlarged caring responsibilities of Chinese women also deserves investigation.

Studies focused on work-life conflicts in higher education have investigated various factors that influence WLB and employee well-being. For instance, Toffoletti and Starr (2016) referred that factors such as workloads and high work intensity, lacking resource and management, and job insecurities are influencing university academics in their work trajectories. According to Toffoletti and Starr (2016), studying work-life conflicts and assessing work-life policies have been two focuses of qualitative researchers investigating higher education. However, those studies focusing on work-life conflict are largely conducted under the umbrella of feminist studies analysing gender inequalities in particular.

As mentioned previously, this research considers that higher education could potentially provide more flexibilities that facilitate older academics to manage their WLB and FCR. From Baruch (2013) we understand that academics possess the freedom to manage their WLB since, as opposed to other institutional systems, academics' work is mainly based on self-management and self-initiation. Studies from the literature have also brought about opposite findings. For example, Ang et al. (2018) did a study from wide range of different types of Malaysian universities and discovered highly-intensive workloads and poor WLB, which led to a higher propensity for turnover.

Lindfelt et al. (2018) reported that 86.3% among 811 respondents were willing to continue working in academia with WLB playing the most important role in influencing their intention to stay. Their findings indicated higher intent to stay working in academia among older male workers than older female workers, based on their study from a US pharmacy school. Respondents with intentions to stay working in academia correlate with higher rank and older age. This research is interested in how older Chinese academics/carers adopt the

flexibility of academia to manage the WLB associated with their FCR. This research has also identified and compared female and male participants' satisfaction towards their WLB and the level of importance of FCR on their WLB.

2.3 Gender

The researcher reviewed the literature on the topic of gender in the working culture of China. This research also investigates gender's impact on the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers as it pertains to FCR.

Dentinger and Clarkberg (2002) have argued that investigations on the influence of taking FCR on later-life career pathways have been underdeveloped. Dentinger and Clarkberg contemplated that the reason for this may partially be that FCR are often taken by females outside of the labour market. More significantly, the majority of the existing research related to FCR (mostly based on Western societies) such as Wolf et al. (1997), Dentinger and Clarkberg (2002), Dautzenberg et al. (2000) and Widmer and Ritchard's (2009) work mainly focuses on samples of female carers or have emphasised that primarily females are involved with FCR. A theme of discussion could be isolated from the literature that males are both culturally and domestically assumed to be breadwinners while females are viewed as family carers. However, this research addresses the gap, investigating the experiences of older male workers with FCR and comparing the life courses of male and female older Chinese academics/carers.

The researcher considers that the effects of FCR on male workers' mid- or later-life career and life trajectories deserve more investigation. Evandrou et al.'s (2002) national survey, with a sample of 9,139 British citizens from 16 to 69 years old, discovered that males had an equal or greater probability of possessing multiple roles compared with females. They hypothesised that this may be due to higher participation of females in the labour market and later childbirth time. Most of the male participants of Dentigner and Clarkberg's (2002) research (participants from large companies in the US) have also been providers of FCR at

one point in their life courses. In their research, despite females being the ones likely to exit the labour market and work as full-time caregivers for older or ill family members, the time the male participants spent in FCR was merely 10% less than that of the female participants.

Nonetheless, the literature strongly demonstrates bigger impacts of FCR on female workers than male workers. For example, Frone's (2000) research in the US showed that females possessed higher probabilities of mental disruptions associated with work-life conflicts than males. The most important reason for this may be the doubled responsibilities that modern females carry compared with their male counterparts. Tsai and Chen (2017) demonstrated that working women from Eastern countries of China, India, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea, from occupations such as bank workers and nurses, have all reported a higher level of work-family conflicts and resulting dissatisfactory work experiences. This researcher supposes that keeping WLB may be more difficult task for female than male workers. According to Tsai and Chen (2017), female workers/family carers with higher social capital are more involved with labour participation, thus tending to experience bigger WLB issues.

According to Blau and Kahn (2001), policies on parental leave have been a factor contributing to gender discrimination and the gender pay gap. This is due to an increase in time of labour force absence and a raise in costs and investment to maintain female employees' attachments to the organizations. Public policies on childcare could also be a factor that impact female employees. Most Western countries have implemented policies on equal payment and opportunities in order to oppose gender discrimination (Blau & Kahn, 2001).

According to King and Pickard's (2013), England has brought growing focus to providing support for people with FCR and maintaining their employment in the labour market. It was stated in the Carers' Strategy that 'it is crucial that we place a much higher

priority on supporting people of working age with caring responsibilities to remain in work, if they wish to do so' (King & Pickard, 2013, p. 303). Crompton and Birkelund (2000) stated that European countries, including the UK, which has maintained the fewest public childcare support structures, have started to develop childcare policies. European policy establishments have noticed that the family pattern of dual caregivers increased while the traditional pattern of male breadwinners and female carers has been declining (Crompton & Birkelund, 2000). By contrast, a sufficiently mature anti-gender discrimination policy has not been reached in China.

This research was conducted with the understanding that FCR could be major factor impacting older female Chinese academics/carers' decisions around managing their life and work trajectories. This research has investigated whether there are gendered differences between life courses among older Chinese academics/carers.

There has been a reported trend of a decrease in the gender pay gap. According to Green et al. (2016), improvements on female workers' occupations have led to drop in the gender pay gap from 14.8% to 7.5% between 1997 and 2012 in the UK. However, this researcher considers that gender inequalities deserve attention in life course studies. It has been broadly accepted that females usually devote greater amounts of time and exertion to FCR and more likely to reduce their working hours, exit the labour market for certain periods, or lessen or eliminate career aspirations. Conversely, males' career pathways tend not to be affected by FCR, despite the increase in male carers and males joining FCR (Dautzenberg el al., 2000; Aluko, 2009; Seay, 2010).

Additionally, another factor could be taken into consideration when considering employment arrangements between genders in life course. There could potentially be differences between males and females in terms of life expectations and life management towards FCR. For example, Blackaby et al. (2005) discovered one incentive that drives the

gender pay gap in universities in the UK: Female professors possess lower job mobility and, as a result, fewer offers from other universities due to being more intimately attached to family commitments. Promotions in payment among university professors in the UK partially correlate with the number of offers received from other universities (Blackaby et al., 2005). Female employees may be more bound to family responsibilities, which take their priority. Thus, they prefer more stability in their careers in order to balance well with FCR.

The researcher observes that perception of female and male older employees towards gender and age discrimination also deserves investigation. Schrader and Nazarov (2016) found that while both genders experience the same level of vulnerability towards age discrimination, females are more likely to experience harassment associated with gender and age. This research was conducted with the understanding that older employees' experiences of gender discrimination are an important part of studying ageing and retirement.

However, apart from the gender discrimination that exists in modern employments, another aspect may also drive gender inequality, which lies in females' self-perceptions or self-esteem. Chevalier (2007) conducted a survey among 1995 graduates to appraise their expectations towards their careers in 1998. Their result showed that 'the largest difference in job expectations is found for childrearing responsibilities: 28% of women strongly agree that they expect to take a career break for family reasons, but only 2% of male graduates do' (p. 821). Perceptions of females towards FCR lead to making different decisions and distinctive gendered career and life courses. As such, this research was conducted with the understanding that those perceptions deserve investigation.

This researcher contemplates that social perceptions of gender responsibilities may also impact gender life course and life decisions. One's social environment labels different roles and subsequently different socially-approved recognitions, values, and requirements on each gender. For example, possession of a house is of foremost importance in Chinese culture

for marriage. There is still an existing cultural expectation in contemporary China, which the bride does not have, that the groom take the responsibility of purchasing a home or providing accommodations for the newly-created family. (Li & Wu, 2017). With this in mind, the researcher has compared gender orientations towards career and FCR plans among older Chinese academics/carers and has compared the research findings to existing literature.

The literature frequently reports the negative impacts of FCR on female workers, most notably on their career trajectories. Marks' (1998) paper, using data from a Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, revealed that females taking FCR for senior parents, children, a partner or another person outside of the family experienced more mental pressure, worse health, and more hostility senior parentsthan did males. Dautzenberg el al. (2000) pointed out a broadly-found trend in the caregiving literature in terms of the negative effects of taking FCR on middle-aged female workers' performance at work. However, despite their results showing that eldercare responsibilities to senior parents was a factor pushing females out of the labour market, their results also indicated that females tended to manage WLB well when taking FCR, albeit minor time conflicts and role constrains.

A number of studies support this finding in terms of diversified life course in the West. For instance, Widmer and Ritchard (2009) did an empirical study, analysing a 2002 retrospective biographical survey of the Swiss Household Panel data. Their result supports their hypothesis of variant career and family trajectories between genders. They concluded that females switched between family responsibilities and part-time jobs while males retained full-time jobs. This research has detected FCR distributions within the households of older Chinese academics/carers and allows us to observe whether there has been change in relation to past experiences of cultural tradition.

Wolf et al. (1997) did a quantitative research in estimating the distribution of eldercare and childcare responsibilities within families based on data from the 1993 'Asset

and Health Dynamics Among the Oldest Old' study. Their result corroborated much of the research in their own literature review: daughters tended to offer higher levels of eldercare than sons regardless of marital status. Wolf et al. also reported that very few survey respondents indicated receiving care from sons-in-law or daughters-in-law. However, conditions such as the forms taken by FCR in China and the level of eldercare responsibilities from each gender towards older family members may be different from that of Western cultures. These differences were was also explored in this research.

From another perspective, this researcher conceives that as societies are transforming and cultural values are also changing, gender life courses may also change from the past. Kohli (2007) argued for the importance of acknowledging females' life courses to have diversified patterns. This is opposition to the traditional view of institutionalised paradigms of unified life courses between genders, under the influence of globalisation. Based on Fordist epistemology, traditionally housewives' efforts in FCR are not equally valued with employment in the labour market by societies and economies; they rely both economically and in terms of social norms on their husbands participating in public life. However, in contemporary societies, females' life courses have followed a more diversified pattern rather than a single one as they have interwoven full-time jobs, part-time jobs and FCR (Kohli, 2007). Kohli called for future gender studies linking career and FCR.

As reported by Dautzenberg et al. (2000), there has been growing female participation in the labour markets of industrialised cultures. Labour participation of females between the ages of 40 and 49 in the Netherlands increased to 52% in 1994 from 17% in the mid-1960s. Labour participation of females aged from 45 to 54 has reached 60% in the US since 1983 (Dautzenberg et al., 2000). Seay (2010) observed that there has been an upward trend in the number of females working in academia as well. Females took 21% of all positions in

academia in the US in 2001. In 1995, 33% of academics in Australia were females, increasing to 53% in 2004 (Seay, 2010).

According to Lin and Yi (2011), despite the lasting cultural norm of patriarchy in China, traditional roles of females in families have been changing due to their improved employment and education levels in the labour market as well as the spreading of modern values. Nowadays, more females have become capable and indeed have been contributing as much to supporting eldercare as the males do; traditionally, it was primarily the responsibility of the sons or the eldest son and his wife to provide eldercare (Lin & Yi, 2011). Traditional family forms with male breadwinners and female carers has decreased.

It can be ascertained from the above resources and discussions that gendered life course may vary due to cultural differences, occupation types and human capital of women. This research mainly focuses on older Chinese academics/carers, among whom females gain more education opportunities and, it can be assumed, for whom it is more feasible to gain personal capitals. Therefore, investigation of gendered life course and of the changes in female life course patterns are significantly relevant to this research.

In the West, feelings of isolation have been reported by female workers in academia resulting from being marginalised in the workforce due to their identities as mother and wife and their responsibilities as caregivers (Aluko, 2009). According to Santos and Cabral-Cardoso (2008), enormous gender inequality in terms of opportunities has been found in the policies of academia in the UK. However, Santos and Cabral-Cardoso's interview data from participants working in Portuguese universities expressed that working in academia has given them more flexibility compared to industrial jobs to take FCR and reconcile work-family balance. This researcher is interested in how older female Chinese academics/carers manage their WLB with FCR and their perceptions of the level of gender differences in this topic.

According to Toffoletti and Starr (2016), there have been findings in the literature indicating significant challenges for female academics to reach requirements at work while taking FCR. Studies from diverse countries have shown that females' traditional roles as family carers has been a factor impeding their career progressions in academia. Toffoletti and Starr also pointed out that workplace culture plays a major role in influencing the work-life conflicts of female employees. They stated that there have been obstacles for female academics' representation in the senior level in the form of lacking the competence to completing academic missions while having caregiving responsibilities. Toffoletti and Starr's research, in which they interviewed 31 female employees of Australian universities from all levels, identified caring responsibilities as a factor generating work-life conflicts for female academics.

Toffoletti and Starr's findings from Australian universities is consistent with their literature review, which revealed long working hours, intensive workloads, superiors' and colleagues' attitudes and procedures from administration requirements as significant institutional factors influencing WLB in academia. Their review of prior studies showed positive effects of work-life policy on female workers' WLB, though initiations to implement such policies have been halted by workplace cultures associated with gender inequalities. There is no consensus to what extent gender inequalities hamper females' career developments (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). This research has investigated how older Chinese academics/carers navigate important transitions and turning points triggered by FCR, including pursuing childcare or dual caring responsibilities.

2.4 Pension, Welfare and Retirement Policies in China

The pension system in China consists of legal provisions from the Constitution of the PRC (1982), the Social Insurance Law (2010) and the Labour Law (1995), National Administrative Regulations, Ministerial Rules, Local Administrative Rules, etc. (ILO, 2015).

Implementations have been introduced in China to ameliorate potential and existing social problems derived from population ageing.

The Population Council (2005) states that, due to rapid population ageing and an increasing number of retirees, China has turned its attention to developing approaches to fund its pension system. For instance, it has been implementing pension funds paid by both organisations and employees. The total payment of pension funding from organizations across the country reached 259.5 billion yuan in 2003. This investment, designed to increase the subsidy power of basic old age insurance from the government's budget, grew to more than 130 billion yuan by the end of 2003 (Wang et al., 2014).

However, the Chinese government still seems to have a long way to go in developing its social security and pension systems to provide satisfactory safeguards and service to all of its ageing population. Furthermore, there could still be observed insufficiencies in resources, facilities, and welfare and pension schemes in China.

As reported by the World Bank according to Wang et al. (2014), there could be as much as a 9.15 trillion-yuan gap in China's financial support for its pensions in the period from 2001-2075. Pozen (2013) said that the rate of profits gained from retirement on the average Chinese salary is still low because of the fast-increasing wages and relatively low investment returns associated with pensions. Chinese people must deposit into bank accounts or purchase government bonds when they invest their money in the individual accounts pertaining to the pension system. Both approaches are required simultaneously due to the low interest rates (Pozen, 2013). Hence, in order to gain sufficient finance for their retired lives, Chinese people need a long investment history during their working trajectories.

Kincannon et al. (2005) points out that the majority of the population of oldest old (aged above 80) in China would not be able to attain retirement pension. Sometimes, they merely possess a pension that is insufficient to support their life. The pension system that

provides lifetime pensions in China, first implemented in the 1950s, only covers people with a minimum of 20 years of working experience. It follows that many of the oldest old may have lost their chance to gain sufficient pension since they could not work for 20 years after the 1950s.

Therefore, the researcher considers that in the future, there may be a trend of older Chinese people towards more independence while confronting pressures from different sources. There could be a long duration before China has developed a comprehensive and effective pension system to assist all of the older population. At that time, families could become more limited in their ability to provide eldercare services. Since the OCP has been totally released and families could have more than one child which increases need of childcare. The increasing competitive labour market environment also drives younger workers' focus and efforts to contribute more to their careers, which takes away available time and labour from family eldercare. Simultaneously, the shortage of labour in the country may provide more employment opportunities for older people.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2015), there is a two-tier pension system in China first implemented in 1998 and reformed in 2006. It includes employees in urban areas and many parameters based on the average city-wide income. The basic pension provides 1% of the indexed personal wage on average for those whom have contributed to the labour market for at least 15 years. The average income is based on province for annual coverage. The second-tier system comprises private accounts into which employees pay 8% of their wages. This inflow is then redistributed to retirees' pensions on an annuity factor decided by the government.

The system of individual accounts has been financially supported by 11 provinces including the three from the northeast (Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning; OECD, 2015). The

city in which the interviews take place during this research, Shenyang, is in the three northeast provinces, meaning it is covered under the basic pension system of China.

Accordingly, it seems possible to observe that the relevant subsidies for older Chinese people from the retirement pension seem significantly limited. For example, the Chinese pension system mainly covers people from urban areas, and most of the later lives of older people, who live in rural areas, cannot be safeguarded. Only 11 provinces are covered under the basic pension system out of the 23 provinces, 4 municipality cities, and 5 municipality regions in China. The amount of reward that older people could receive from retirement schemes is also limited by the accumulation of long-term investments. The participants in this research are mostly in the position of having senior parents living in rural areas without pensional protections.

This research has reviewed current Chinese policy on extended working lives, which has not been as largely or prevalently adopted as in Western societies. Chesnais and Wang (1990) revealed that three groups of people (teachers at primary or middle schools, teachers at universities from junior levels, and medical practitioners) are able to extend their working lives by 1-5 years. They are required to possess capability and be officially authorised by local authorities; further, their employers must verify the employees' need to extend their working lives.

Additionally, female assistant directors at the district level in Party and government organizations can also work beyond the normal retirement age of 55 as of May 1987 (Chesnais & Wang, 1990). Thus, it could be perceived that there are still limitations to extending working lives (EWL) in contemporary China. Only a limited proportion of people with specific requirement could gain the chance. Nonetheless, participants of this research are covered in this range, which provides an advantage to this research in terms of investigating active ageing and EWL in China.

Flexibility is considered in the Chinese retirement and pension systems. As OECD (2015) stated, pension profits in China can be applied earlier by males who have reached 55 years old and females who are associated with physical work in particular industries and positions and who have reached 50 years old. The pension could also be postponed beyond the retirement age with the added incentive of non-monetary compensation such as more paid vacation time. This research is interested in older Chinese academics/carers' opinions, attitudes and plans towards retirement, whether they prefer earlier retirement or EWL, and what reasons support their retirement decisions.

In the basic PAYGO (Pay-As-You-Go) pension system, people with 40 years' working experience will be supported by a quarter of the average wage in the local area Those with fewer working years see their support decreased by certain proportions according to the their length of working history (Feldstein, 1999). Companies are responsible for contributing 22% of the workers' whole to cities or provinces to run the Basic Pension Fund (Cai & Cheng, 2014).

Thus, it could be enhanced that in order to receive sufficient or greater amounts of retirement benefits, one has to wait and invest for many years. Feldstein (1999) pointed out that in the second-tier system, 10% of wages are invested by workers and their organizations to the personal accounts. The annuity profits could potentially reach roughly 35% of the individual's whole year earnings. Hence, it could be understood that with more assistance from companies or the government, pressure to prepare for later lives after retirement could be relaxed to some extent. As a result, older Chinese workers' retirement timing could vary, and there could potentially be more possibilities for early retirement.

Moreover, Feldstein noted certain improvements in the Chinese pension systems as more assistance from governments and companies could be provided to older employees as will be elaborated below. However, whether older Chinese employees feel satisfied with the

social security and pension system, and how assured they feel that their later lives are supported, may still be in doubt. According to Cai and Cheng (2014), in the second-tier system, which lasted from 1998 to 2006, 11% of workers' wages were paid by both workers and their organisations to individual accounts under the control of authorities from cities or provinces. Of that 11%, individuals were responsible for between 4-8%. However, after 2006, workers became the only contributors to their individual accounts in the amount of 8% of their wages and without any funding from the companies.

According to Feldstein (1999), there have been reform on social security systems from changing design of PAYGO systems into funding systems. More explicitly, ILO (2015) reported that China has set up the objective of completing general coverage of its pension system across the country by the year 2020. It made immense improvement between 2009 and 2013, in which time the pension coverage tripled. According to ILO (2015), the general structure of the contemporary pension system in China focuses on three groups: urban employees, civil servants and residents from both rural and urban areas who are not included by the first two.

However, the coverage of the pension and medical care system in China is still in an insufficient situation. As reported by Cai and Cheng (2014), social insurance has become the most important income resource for no more than a third of people over 60 years old. Merely 70 percent of older Chinese people from urban areas and 10 percent from rural areas could depend on public schemes for income resource. Cai and Cheng also noted another problem of the social security system in China: Inspection and supervision are not strong enough to ensure the thorough implementation of pension. For example, Shanghai, the city that possesses the strongest ability in governance, reported that 71% of workers had not received pensions above the compulsory social insurance.

According to Bloom et al. (2010), people could potentially be expected to extend their working lives since nowadays life expectancies are higher and people tend to possess better health conditions. However, social security systems could dissuade older people from staying in the labour market, as they would possess more resource to rely on rather than working (Bloom et al., 2010).

On the other hand, there may also be older people who prefer to work longer in order to support a higher quality of their later lives. This researcher contemplates that if the support older people gain from a social security system could be able to cover their lives simultaneously, the living conditions of the whole family could be guaranteed. Thus, it would be possible to decrease the motivation of older workers for EWL.

This research has investigated the retirement intentions of older Chinese academics/carers as associated with the family need of caring responsibilities. The researcher seeks to understand whether work–life balance or life trajectories of older Chinese academics/carers are affected by the existing pension system and whether their retirement decisions could be affected by pension system. More importantly, this research has investigated how older Chinese academics/carers navigate the major turning point of retirement transition.

2.5 Social Welfare and Medical System for Eldercare in China

China has been making efforts to develop both the social security system and the medical system, which may be a positive indication for older people and the societal condition of the ageing population. This may also indicate a trend of greater possibility for older workers to extend their working lives with fewer concerns related to declining health conditions. Tang et al. (2014) have stated that from 2003 to 2010 the percentage of the total population covered by the three main health insurance schemes has increased from 23% to more than 90%. The three schemes are the Urban Employee Basic Medical Insurance

(UEBMI), Urban Resident Basic Medical Insurance (URBMI) and Rural Cooperative Medical Scheme (RCMS).

There have been advancements achieved by the Chinese medical system that may help to enable more effective ageing in older Chinese people. Bartlett and Phillips (1997) stated that medical care services in large cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou contain international-level high-tech facilities. Wong and Chiu (1997) reported that China has developed a system of healthcare protection consisting of three levels: public medicine, collective medicine and cooperative medicine (Please see Appendix A). These levels of healthcare services were established to help employees and retirees from all different departments in both urban and rural areas.

Furthermore, despite medical facilities and hospital services having significantly improved in China, and the convenience and guarantee of older Chinese people's accessibility to medical services are much more ensured (Li & Yu, 2011), available medical resources to meet needs of the population are constantly limited (Zhu et al., 2018). Limited space and resource in the medical care system and the high cost of medical resources are still prominent concerns to family carers of older people in China.

Researchers have proposed that the market mechanism has drastically damaged the effectiveness of and people's accessibility to health services, and China has been putting effort into reforming its healthcare system (Liu et al., 1999; Sen, 2009). IBM's Business Consulting Services (2006) reported that China's investments in healthcare have been rising but are still low compared to other developing economies and developed economies. For example, in 2002, China spent 5.8% of its GDP on healthcare, while 8 OECD countries spent 8%. More explicitly, China's strategy and the fast developments made to its economic growth seem to have influenced the economic condition of its healthcare system and its older population.

However, there is significant pressure on older Chinese workers in terms of gaining sufficient support both from the state and from their families. As has been discussed previously, China possesses a long tradition of familial support for older people's later lives. Working people tend to feel more pressure in gaining sufficient income to support the whole family. Hence, the self-contribution responsibility of working people may tend to become the main stream in supporting their own later lives.

'The social security system is far from integrated and still falls in two main parts. One is for urban workers employed in state- and collectively-owned enterprises and the other for needy people requiring assistance' (Barlett & Phillips, 1997, p. 152). Thus, the limited coverage of the social security system among the large population could also indicate the need for individual independence among older people.

As has been demonstrated by Chen et al. (2010), there have been increasing income disparities, economic inequalities and inefficient health insurance schemes. These have triggered unequal accessibility of people to the health care system. The Chinese government and state enterprise have reduced their funding for the welfare system, which in the early market transition in the 1980s bore the main responsibility for health care and facilities and clinical services (Chen et al., 2010).

There is still insufficient funding for preventive and public health services as well as limited accessibility to and high costs for health and medical care. Inequality between rural an urban areas still exist. This is due to a lack of sufficient monitoring in sub-level governments and non-urban areas as well as to the integration and cooperation of various governments in transforming the healthcare system. (Tang et al., 2014; Millar et al., 2016).

IBM (2006) explained that high prices for healthcare and inappropriate spending were two main factors that have led to the insufficiency of Chinese healthcare system. IBM's

Business Consulting Service (2006) predicted that there could be over 500 million Chinese people who could not afford the high cost of seeing a doctor.

This research has explored the experiences of older Chinese academics/carers' eldercare responsibilities as they relate to medical service as the medical care system plays a major role in assisting eldercare. Concerns, needs and problems in receiving medical services could be big issues to families, especially for those whose senior parents are living far away and in rural areas. Hence this research has investigated how the changing political economic and social context shape life courses of older Chinese academics/carers in conducting FCR.

2.6 Ageism in China

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) denoted a classic theory in sociology which emphasised the contradicting strength between rational choice, directed by economistic analysis, and non-rational, norm-oriented cultural traditions. This researcher speculates that cultural norms and social perceptions of age discrimination may influence older people and impose constraints on their pursuit of active ageing. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, this research insert the concept of active ageing into the theoretical framework, which is a western concept developed against ageism.

Age discrimination may lead both to stereotypical organisational decisions and psychological disorders in older employees (Chiu et al., 2001). Western literature has consensually recognised organisational age discrimination. There have also been anti-age discrimination legislations launched in the West, while no such legislation has occurred in China (Chiu et al., 2001).

In Gulette's (1997) classic view of 'Declining to Decline' as mentioned by Twigg (2004, p. 61), concepts of age and ageing abound in culture, and people feel aged not by being informed by biological bodies but by influence of cultural norms. According to Kooij et al. (2008), society's view towards being old could potentially trigger negative effects on older workers and put pressure on them to retire. Therefore, such views may lead to anxiety

towards physical or mental signs of ageing, development of negative feelings about ageing, and feeling aged early. Therefore, this research has incorporated influences from an environmental perspective on older Chinese academics/carers' perceptions and conceptions towards ageing.

According to Walker and Matby (2012), there is still a negative social construction of old age in a society that views older people as 'passive yet "deserving" recipients of pensions and other forms of social care' (p. 118). As people from different cultures may understand social terms and subjects differently, and thus have different ways of dealing with social issues, this research has investigated how older Chinese academics/carers view and understand age discrimination.

This research has reviewed conceptual discussions on age discrimination in China from the literature. There have been researchers that predicted lower levels of age discrimination in China (e.g., Ng, 1998; Chiu et al., 2001). In the cultural tradition of China, older people are viewed as having more knowledge, experience and wisdom. They should be highly respected and prioritised to receive help, care and obedience, especially from descendants towards older family members. Simultaneously, older people are responsible for providing guidance to younger people (Ng, 1998; Chiu et al., 2001).

Crucially, to study age discrimination, it is essential to investigate social and cultural understanding of old age. More explicitly, whether older workers are viewed as independent, productive and valuable resources is the central question in age discrimination. Ping-kwong (1997) argued that usually Chinese societies treat older people as passive recipients for services, attempting to deny or minimise older people's role in the formulation of service provision. Thus, many older people are not likely to actively engage in protecting and claiming their own rights. This researcher conceives that it could be a severe problem if older people encounter difficulties in making claims about their own needs and concerns. Such

difficulties could cause barriers in developing public policies to help the ageing population. Ping-kwong pointed out that older people usually feel weak and helpless to voice their claims to society and instead choose to depend on family support and wait for help.

Chinese families are usually given social responsibilities to provide thorough care and help for older family members, meaning Chinese families may have unintentionally exacerbated the challenge facing older people around conceptive change into active ageing. In addition, voices of older people are usually hidden from the families out of fear of the family losing face. Ping-kwong (1997) has also indicated that, because eldercare issues are usually viewed as family rather than community or social issues, the Chinese government feels less pressure to support the older population.

Additionally, older people and families feel ashamed to ask for help in eldercare from outside the family; doing this is collectively assumed as failure of the family to take responsibility for eldercare according to the Confucian conception on filial piety (Ping-kwong, 1997). The proposition could be made that it is a reasonable strategy for China to adopt advertising toward active ageing, encouraging older people's independence and giving them courage to voice social claims.

Above all, lay voices of older people towards understanding of ageing and age discrimination are also a crucial part of ageing literature. Ageing brings with it questions of mental development, which plays an important role in impacting older people's capacity and intention towards decision making. Steel (2013) stated, 'the idea of "ageism" is still not fully accepted within the general population, meaning that most stereotypes of older people function beneath the conscious thoughts of those that hold them' (p. 34). With this in mind, it is clear that the very perceptions of older workers themselves is crucial in leading to their status as passive recipients. It is worth investigating the constructs around older workers in conjunction with norms and social image associated with age discrimination.

Steel (2013) explained that what has been influencing both the biological and psychological functioning of older people is adoption of stereotypes towards themselves. For example, a paper has shown worse performance on memory tests by older people who are primed with negative descriptions of discrimination towards older people (Steel, 2013).

Therefore, this research has explored older Chinese academics/carers' perceptions of ageing and their responses towards age discrimination from an organizational context. This reflects how life courses of older Chinese academics/carers are linked to the socio-economic, organisational and linked life contexts in China. According to Spedale (2019), there has been an overwhelming focus in the literature surrounding age stereotype on responses from employers or managers. To fill the gap in responses, this research collects responses from the side of older workers regarding age discrimination.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the sociocultural and political economic backgrounds for older workers in the contemporary Chinese environment. This chapter provided important knowledge and abundant information about the national background being studied, and it provides justifications for extracting contextual factors from Chinese environment related to older workers.

Therefore, based on the reviews in this Chapter, this research has observed a major pressure both for Chinese government and families to support sufficient eldercare, due to rapid population ageing and reduced family structures. This is particularly crucial to the participants of this research, since they are generally migrated populations from rural areas to urban cities in China. Thus their senior parents are usually living in distance from rural areas with insufficient pensions and less adult children in proximity to support eldercare. Consequently, this research is particularly interested in the current position of older Chinese academics/carers in supporting FCR.

This chapter has also reviewed literature of *Guanxi* on discussions of its importance in the organisational cultures in China. Hence this research decided to test whether *Guanxi* has influenced life course of older Chinese academics/carers. Additionally, this research has reviewed literature discussing difficulties and challenges to older workers in adapting technological advancements and increasing competition. This research is interested in the experiences of older Chinese academics/carers in dealing with rapid technological development. Furthermore, this research has reviewed gender issues in life course and has been interested to investigate changing patterns of life course between genders in China.

In this chapter, this research has also observed insufficiency in pension, welfare, and medical care systems to support eldercare in China. This research is interested in whether shortage of pension, welfare and medical resources affect older Chinese academics/carers' life courses and their experiences of providing FCR in their families. Moreover, this research has reviewed western studies discussing and examining agism and is interested in the social construction of agism in China and how older workers understand and respond to agism.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical background of this research, while identifying research gaps from the literature of life course, active ageing, and eldercare in China. Section 3.2 discusses the theoretical concept of LCT as it relates to structure and agency. Therefore, this research has reviewed the major discussions from the literature regarding LCT including LCT history, the emergence and major developments of LCT since the 1970s, and applications of LCT from different cultural contexts with critical evaluations. Moreover, by applying the concepts of structure and agency to LCT, this research is sufficiently justified to deeply investigate older Chinese academics/carers and systematically analyse the contemporary social background to them. Section 3.3 focuses on the Western concept of active ageing, which provides theoretical justification for this research to investigate agentic orientations of older Chinese academics/carers in dealing with major turning points and reacting to their environment. During the review of the literature on LCT, structure and agency, and active ageing literature, the researcher explores how prior research has attempted to answer their research questions based on theoretical frameworks. Secion 3.4 demonstrates how this research adapts LCT to life courses of older Chinese academics/carer. Finally, by identifying research gaps from life course studies and ageing literature from Chapter 2 and 3, the researcher has isolated the study's major research objectives. After reviewing relevant theories and concepts, it has become clear how this research will investigate the research questions.

3.2 Life-Course Theory

3.2.1 Life-course theory and unfolding structure.
Life course theory has been widely adopted by behavioural research and social science studies in investigating the link between human behaviours and contextual changes throughout the life span. Life course paradigm

suggests that behaviours are shaped by prior experiences in life trajectories, the time and timing of events, and human agency (Yingwattanakul & Moschis, 2019). Studies on Life Course Theory (LCT), an interdisciplinary field focusing on human lives from birth to death, has significantly advanced since the 1970s – 1980s (Mayer, 2009). Life course studies have been attempting to merge multiple subjects such as sociology, demography, anthropology, economics and developmental psychology into an integrated classification and interpretation (Mayer, 2009). This research provides a sociological analysis of the older Chinese population and of the life course of contemporary older Chinese workers.

There are four dimensional pressures of LCT on human agency: the historical and social dimension (e.g., changes in the social economy, the welfare state and laws); trajectories (e.g., the biological time when people had expected to retire versus when they actually are retiring); turning points (major events by which life trajectory is changed such as entering school, losing a job, having a family, and so forth); and linked lives (e.g., with family, superiors, or friends) (Giele & Elder, 1998; Moen & Sweet, 2010). Figure 1 illustrates the model of Life Course Theory.

Figure 1: Life course model from Giele and Elder (1998)
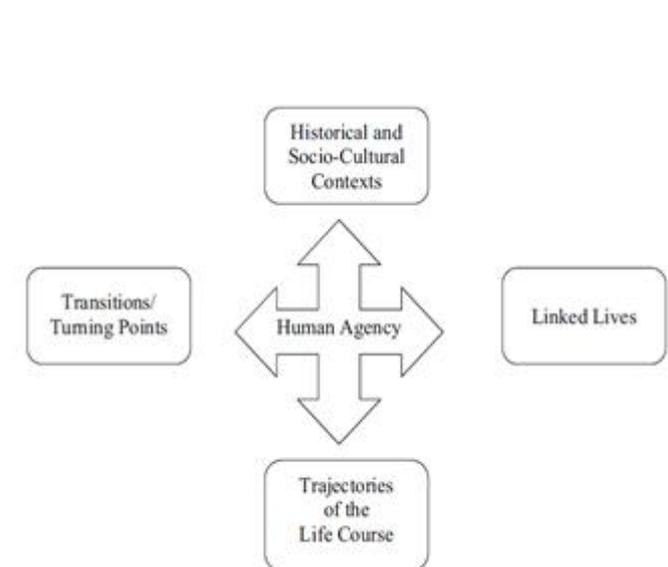
As cited in Bruening and Dixon (2008)

This research aims at thoroughly investigating the current situation of older Chinese academics/carers. This research has found LCT an effective tool to unfold the structural contexts into multi-leveled factors. Hence, this research has aimed to identify what are the structural factors from Chinese broader political and socio-economic, organizational, and linked life contexts that influence life courses of older Chinese academics/carers. Therefore, LCT provides this research a theoretical basis to thoroughly explain structural contexts to older Chinese academics/carers. Simultaneously, based on the framework of LCT, the researcher also decided to identify major transitions and trajectories associated with FCR and how Chinese academics/carers deal with the major turning points.

This research aims at capturing the mechanism behind the sophisticated macro environment with major economic and social transitions and increasing pluralization in which ageing Chinese people live. Titma and Tuma (2005) explained that elements at macrosocial levels in a society could potentially be helpful in elaborating operations of human behaviours, thus it is essential to study the interplay between human behaviour and society. According to Binstock and George (2011), the result of the life course could potentially be elaborated by the strength formed by social principles and values surrounding ageing. Crucially, this research seeks to contribute to the use of LCT by applying it to the effects of major social change; similarly, the research aims to contribute to macro socioeconomic analysis of life course study in China.

Elder and George (2016) viewed life course outcomes from a different perspective than Titma and Tuma (2005) and Binstock and George (2011). They contended that social change may be determined by the size of the cohort. Large quantities of people may be able to convey enormous power that could potentially be able to propagate a social change to the

rest of the society. Thus, among communities of larger size, accumulative influence of people

on each other in a cohort may accelerate social changes. This research accepts that people's

opinions, values, habits and perceptions of others could be influenced by their social network.

Subsequently, individuals in a cohort share the same network for a long time. Therefore,

investigations on cultural reforms deserve a focus in life course studies. This research has

investigated the cognition of older Chinese academics/carers towards ageing, age

discrimination, extending working lives (EWL), and family caring responsibilities (FCR).

LCT has demonstrated that the trajectory of people's lives should be a

synchronization of various transitions and trajectories located in the social structure, a fact

that this research understands as given. As Mayer (2004) has pointed out, life course study

incorporates personal lives into social structures, mediated by roles and positions of people in

the sequential order throughout their life spans. The objective of investigating life course in

sociology is to picture, demonstrate and interpret social status throughout the lifetime. This

includes allocations of individuals along with diachronic elements and synchronicity (Mayer,

2004). Accordingly, this research identifies the most crucial turning points and trajectories

associated with FCR of older Chinese academics/carers. These turning points and trajectories

are reflections of contextual impacts of older Chinese academics/carers' orientations towards

ageing. This provides a good opportunity to discover the needs, concerns and intentions of

older Chinese academics/carers.

Consequently, this research pays attention to participants' experiences possessing

various role responsibilities. 'As actors move within and among these different unfolding

contexts, they switch between (or 'recompose') their temporal orientations – as constructed

within and by means of those contexts – and thus are capable of changing their relationship to

structure' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 964). This research looks not only at the successive

influences of different transitions and trajectories based on chronological order; it also looks

at how older Chinese academics/carers deal with simultaneous role-plays while managing WLB and FCR. Moen and Sweet (2010) argued that the life course model exploring 'work and family' emphasises diversified relationships between roles or in a group with discloses of different contexts, time, and tandem. This research considers that human agency positioned in different contexts and time could produce different agentic orientations or behavioural trajectories while the responsibilities that said agency derives from different contexts may influence each other. Hence it is worth investigating simultaneous responsibilities that people hold during specific life stages.

3.2.2 Structure and agency. This research is grounded by LCT and is associated with structure and agency. The previous section discussed how LCT unpacks the contextual environment (structure); based on this, the researcher explores what factors and in which ways those factors influence the life course of older Chinese academics/carers. In this section, the researcher explains how LCT correlates with the concepts of structure and agency and how this correlation prompts the researcher to investigate the link between older Chinese academics/carers and the context of Chinese society.

There have been extensive papers discussing the reciprocally-constitutive contextualising process between agency and structure, such as those by Shanahan et al. (1997), Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Brannen and Nilsen (2005), Titma and Tuma (2005), Hitlin and Elder (2007), Elder and George (2016), among others.

According to Brannen and Nilsen (2005) and Titma and Tuma (2005), it has been common, particularly in qualitative studies, to identify human agency as pertaining to a 'social actor.' The 'social actor' descriptor is applied in the environment of institutions in the society (e.g., religion or family) who possess the freedom and autonomy to make decisions affecting the social environment. In this research, older Chinese academics/carers are studied

as human agencies or agentic actors who manage their personal accounts and respond to the social structure.

Lane (2001) stated that structure labels itself through creating restrictions and opportunities for human agency; in this way, structure could shape human behaviour. Consequently, studies have moved beyond traditional conceptions of structure and have brought their focus to the capability of human agency to proactively perform and react rather than be passively restricted by the environment (Lane, 2001). This research investigates the sophisticated macro and micro Chinese context as structures that shape life trajectories of older Chinese people.

This research does not merely look at macro and micro contextual forces but also at agentic orientation of older Chinese academics/carers. Bandura (2006) summarised four major characters of human agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Bandura indicated that humans are 'self-organising, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting' (p. 164), and they are not only outcomes of the social context but also creators of the social context. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) elaborated that when social actors are located in a circumstance where problems emerge, they tend to rework their plans and change other possible solutions. They assumed this to be a hypothesisation of experience, which may define their orientation toward society (neither voluntarist nor instrumentalist): People measure the environment with which they are confronted based on previous experiences, and they make subsequent adjustments .

Hence, it could be understood that the strength of agentic capability is essential to the formulation of life trajectories. Strong agentic cabability is more likely to create consequences to the social context and thus control the outcome of a structural situation. This is an indicator of the effectiveness of agentic capability, which could also be linked to the concept of active ageing.This could mediate effectiveness of agentic capability, which could

also be linked to the concept of active ageing. It is worth considering that whether or not older people can achieve active ageing in their later lives may depend on their own attitudes towards ageing. It may also depend on their capabilities, and how they perceive their own capabilities, to manage their mindset and to adjust to changes in external environment. Therefore, the researcher is significantly interested in the agentic power of older Chinese academics/carers in dealing with major turning points and WLB with FCR.

The researcher has reviewed the history of the emergence of LCT and the developments in life course studies. Accordingly, it was discovered that the reciprocal interplays between structure and agency are key to life course studies and have driven the emergence and development of LCT.

Before the establishment of LCT, academics garnered attention attempting to explain the reciprocal, interrelated relationship between structure and agency. Binstock and George (2011) stated that before the emergence of LCT, there were two dissimilar paradigms of direction in the life course. The first one contains two categories. One is the biographical, referring to trajectories and transitions that represent individual lives, and the other is the institutional, associated with social structures and practices such as opinions, practice and societal institutions. Another paradigm discussed two categories of expositions in life course referring to the sociological, which focuses on transient, closed circumstances external to the individual, and personological, which looks at triggers inside the individual (Binstock & George, 2011). This research has shown that academics paid attention to the institutional paradigm, which could potentially indicate a focus on constructs and structures. At the same time, the biographical paradigm could involve agentic orientation in the life course in terms of subjects' individual accounts of managing and directing their life trajectories. Additionally, the sociological category of exposition could reveal structures that impact the personological category, which could relate to agency.

In Giele and Elder's (1998) work, the development of LCT highlights the link between their two separate frameworks: Elder's (1994; 1997) earlier work in defining four major elements in the life-course paradigm (historical and geographical location, social ties to others, personal control, and variations in timing) and Giele's (1988) conception of bidirectional correspondence between individuals and the proximate social context. According to Giele and Elder (1998), the link discussed above has revealed the interrelationship between individuals and structures. More explicitly, there could be factors in the structure that generate life opportunities or impose limits on individuals, influencing them to make decisions and place themselves into different situations. Systematic analysis of contextual forces in the formation of life course prompted academics to draw connections, leading to the emergence of LCT.

Beyond the two dissimilar paradigms and two frameworks discussed above as the origins of LCT, there are also two major conventions that Life-course studies have attempted to accommodate. They are the 'ecological and 'age norm' context surrounding the individual', and the 'longitudinal trajectory connecting roles and events in a person's life over time' (Giele & Elder, 1998, p. 12). As such, life course research should be required to include two perspectives: that of individuals participating in the social context and that of structure providing support, obstacles, norms, values and institutions for people's career and life trajectories.

Crucially, this research combines LCT with the concepts of agency and structure to investigate the process of life trajectories that reflect agentic responses towards social background. As Titma and Tuma (2005) claimed, human agency reveals the core laws of LCT, and focus on it has been widespread in social science studies. However, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) pointed out that most theories in psychology studies focus merely on a unique aspect of the concept of agency, neglecting the dynamics of complex interplay from various

dimensions of that agency. Social study based on LCT, which addresses macro and micro context and interplays between structure and agency, could ameliorate that limitation.

According to Bruening and Dixon (2008), organisational and sociocultural factors (e.g., retirement policies, pension, welfare provision, gender, age and social class) or life events (e.g., education and family composition) influence individual decisions when individuals respond to the expectations of the environment. Consequently, changes in life trajectories are bidirectional. Therefore, it is apparent that life course research should shed light on both agentic responses and structural forces.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) summarised the complex relationship between agency and structure in the following quotation:

> We might therefore speak of the double constitution of agency and structure: temporal-relational contexts support particular agentic orientations, which in turn constitute different structuring relationships of actors toward their environments. It is the constitution of such orientations within particular structural contexts that gives form to effort and allows actors to assume greater or lesser degrees of transformative leverage in relation to the structuring contexts of action. (p. 1004)

Hence, there could be consistent need for life course studies as social actors could re-adjust to the social environment through transformed methods of responding to social structure. Personal orientation in response to social structure changes by time. It is worth investigating individuals' perceptions, attitudes, abilities and decision-making towards structural contexts to keep life course data up-to-date.

Titma and Tuma (2005) believed each individual could be assumed as a unique, distinctive and recognisable social actor, different from any others. Their behaviours and reactions towards the environment are reflections of their internal values. This contributes to the validity of studying human behaviours and investigating human agency (Titma & Tuma, 2005). This research aims to study social actors in the form of older Chinese academic/carers and to investigate their reactions towards the social environment. This research provides

understanding of the internal value systems of older Chinese academics/carers pertaining to ageing and retirement. The thesis also explores how they view their role in the social structure, adjusting to the environment while achieving their life goals.

Above all, LCT explains the interplays between agency and structure rather than merely investigating agency and structure on their own. Harper (2006) argued that information on one person filling his or her role at a unique time point is not sufficient to understand the complex epistemology of ageing and retirement, which comprise interrelated factors in the functioning of social structures. This research demonstrates that LCT enriches the concepts of structure and agency by deepening knowledge of systematic interplay between structure and agency. Through usage of LCT that addresses structural agentic reciprocities, this research could thoroughly ascertain the current situation of older Chinese academics/carers and the contemporary Chinese environment that produces social meanings for them.

Consequently, this research has started its aim in investigating the interplay between structure (Chinese context based on macro, orgnisational and linked life levels) and agency (older Chinese academics/carers). In other words, this research has decided to investigate how the structure of Chinese context has shaped the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers, and how older Chinese academics/carers respond to structural restrictions and opportunities. Therefore LCT provides a theoretical basis for this research to investigate in-depth and comprehensive facets of life course. This is more effective than theories merely focus on structure or human agency in impacting on life course.

3.2.3 Current position and limitations of LCT. LCT's current level of development still has limitations. Mayer (2009) explicated the developments and future trends of life course research. Mayer explored the observed state of Life Course Theory and recommended future improvements:

1. Life course research was [a] progressive field for a few decades, but now it has achieved its goals and is 'finalised' and routine. It has become integrated into other specialties and is part of applied science.

2. After major successes, especially in regard to data collection, specifying micro-level causal mechanisms, and policy research, life course research is in a phase of stagnation and re-fragmentation. The ideal of a new interdisciplinary and unitary field has not materialised.

3. Life course research as a field is still cumulative, progressive and innovative. Its program is far from being realised. The fruits of longitudinal data collections are still to be reaped, interdisciplinary research is still far from taking-off and methodological breakthroughs are badly needed (and coming). (p. 415-416)

Mayer assumed that LCT had already achieved its goals, which may have indicated that it was 'outdated'. However, several issues contradict that statement. There could still be potential developments in LCT or extensions of this theory in applications in various contexts. Existing life course research from the literature could reveal there is still room for development of life course study based in an Asian context. Life course from an Asian context is not sufficiently explored, and there are still cultural mechanisms on structure and agency interplay that require investigation.

The second point from Mayer's (2009) aforementioned stagnation of LCT's development is that LCT is limited to being able to accommodate only micro-level factors. In the past four decades, life course studies have been developed based on both macro analysis, regarding the cross-culture, socialisation and organisational contexts, and micro analysis on work and education trajectories (Angela, 2018). However, 'the main focus of the life course paradigm is on linking specific context- and time-dependent events in earlier life to responses in later life' (Moschis, 2019, p. 41). The main focus of life course studies is to shed light on how specific experiences from early life impact later life trajectories. By contrast, this research innovates a more thorough look into life course study that is based on people's whole life trajectories, analysing the micro- and macro-level contextual environments linked to those trajectories. Baltes and Smith (2004) claimed that the long tradition of life course studies has mainly focused on impacts from early ages (up to 20 years); as such, there must

be further investigation on how patterns of logic embed in contextual structural characteristics and influence adult workers and ageing populations. This research fills this gap by investigating contemporary older Chinese academics/carers and their sophisticated contextual environment.

Dingemans and Mohring (2019) also stated that the existing literature on life course has concentrated on 'socio-demographic characteristics such as gender and educational background and on factors that were proximal to the retirement transition, such as health, partner status, wealth, and income at the time of the retirement transition' (p. 23). Unlike those studies, which focused on specific demographic characteristics or situational factors, this research investigates the outcome of life course under the causal mechanism combined with multi-level forces of macro socioeconomic and political strengths, family influences and individual choices.

Mayer (2009)'s third point, however, is valid. Application of LCT in different sociocultural contexts could generate diversified explanations of social phenomena, which may also provide information on developments, modifications or further specifications of the theory. Incorporating the study of LCT into various specialties is an effective approach to realise the value of LCT. However, life course study should not be limited to a chapter in interdisciplinary studies. Moreover, as discussed previously, people's conceptions and behaviours transform by readjusting to the changing environment. Generational variances also cultivate changes in life course. Thus, there should consistently be need of life course research and advocacy for the development of LCT in order to keep life course data up-to-date.

Mayer (2009) doubted of the relevance of LCT to the contemporary world; the ever-changing character of the important relationship between culture and people's lives renders it a challenge to establish a unified theory of systematic mechanisms explaining a social

phenomenon with a high degree of accuracy. At the same time, social norms and people's understanding of them change all the time. Therefore, there is a great need for life course studies to enrich and update explanations of contemporary social phenomena. Longitudinal studies on life course are also needed to aid in the formation of life course theories and to investigate changes of life course, despite Titma and Tuma's (2005) argument that it seems to take a long time for a new institutional or sociocultural principle to form.

As mentioned previously, academics have put enormous efforts into using LCT to explain social phenomena and have conducted multi-disciplinary studies. There still seems to be a long way to go in studying and transforming LCT. As Giele and Elder (1998) mentioned, life course studies are still a young area in the academic context. This contradicts Mayer's (2009) quote above, which labels LCT already 'finalised and routine'. There are still aspects that current life course study may overlook. For instance, Harper (2006) believed that LCT merely emphasises general transitions and pathways rather than the variance within or between designated age cohorts. LCT has been widely used to classify life course factors of specific age cohorts' trajectories, but this research seeks to remedy the limited investigation on life course that has been conducted on individual differences within these cohorts.

Another limitation of LCT is the difficulty in formulating a unique and holistic theory of life course. Giele and Elder (1998) pointed out a significant challenge facing LCT: isolating a unified, holistic interpretation of how macro structural changes intervene in personal transitions of life trajectory. To unify a holistic line of interventions of structure and changes into life course, LCT should regard social structure at various levels while also capturing the divergent changes. More explicitly, the life course model views people's lives through divergent levels. However, factors from those divergent levels are so difficult to theorise or generalise with explicit rules about their inter-dependence and synchronisation that it is hard to classify which mechanism has resulted in an individual's specific life

trajectory. Moschis (2019) defined the life course paradigm as a 'theoretical orientation' (p. 59), or conceptual framework, rather than a tool to apply rationally to research. The researcher contemplates that there are flexibilities in applying LCT to multiple disciplines and incorporating it with other theories or concepts. This flexibility has allowed this research to connect social mechanisms with the ageing Chinese population by explaining specific characteristics tailored to a Chinese political, sociocultural and economic background.

Nonetheless, people's life trajectories are constructed by factors from both macro and micro levels of structure. Those factors possess sophisticated inter-relationships in the changing environment. Thus, to theorise an individual's life trajectory could be unrealistic. However, the researcher considers this an opportunity for life course researchers to expand their explanations, giving them more freedom to design their research to fit a specific social phenomenon or group being investigated.

Moreover, as Mayer (2004) noted, people's life trajectories may be affected by the resources, knowledge and experiences they gained in their earlier lives. In Mayer's (2009) opinion, LCT seems not to possess a coherent theoretical body, hence it has failed to accommodate categories of mechanisms that could link early experiences and later results in life. There have been life course studies exploring the effects of early experiences on later life course outcomes; those studies mainly focused on potential damage to individuals' well-being as a result of early life adversities or social catastrophe. By comparison, the questions of this research focus on analysing influential forces from the extensive macro and micro environment and agentic reactions, an analysis that does not include influence from one life stage on another.

Another limitation of LCT is its incapability of capturing generational differences. Social and cultural factors (e.g., customs, religion, language, or class) may change over time. Thus, the implementation of LCT in a specific temporal background may no longer be

applicable or adaptable when it moves to the next generation or era. Binstock and George (2011) identified 'life-course fallacy', stating that LCT seems to ignore variations between cohorts and variances from generation from generation. This may reveal a dearth of qualitative investigations in LCT studies as well as research on ageing in China. Crucially, in the data analysis and discussion chapters, the research includes generational differences as a linked life factor uncovered by the research findings.

3.3 Active Ageing

The researcher has found previous theories, terms, conceptions and explanations (e.g. capability input, active agency) could demonstrate the function of human agency. Additionally, this research has found active ageing a valid concept to support this research in investigating responses of older Chinese academics/carers towards the structure. Despite active ageing is not a theoretical tool identified by the literature. Those discussions around human agency could help with understanding active ageing. Hence, this research has summarized and discussed those thoeries, terms, conceptions and explanations (e.g. capability input, active agency) around human agency in section 3.3.1, and introduce the concept of active ageing at the end of section 3.3.1. Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3 expand explanation of active ageing, and include discussions on active ageing in China. Section 3.3 provides justified background for this research to test the agentic power of older Chinese academics/carers and the social and political context embeds them.

3.3.1 Human agency. Bandura (2006) pointed out that the theory of human agency introduced the discussion of freedom and determinism of an individual to practice self-influence against constraints in order to achieve life goals and objectives. For example, people are granted the right and freedom to vote, but to what extent and by which approach they engage in political activity mainly relies on their own willingness and self-influence (Bandura, 2006).

It is true that humans are cognitive mechanisms who self-construct their own internal circumstances. They manage information gathered from the external world and from their own internal value systems. Hence, they make decisions by allocating the resources accessible to them, to meet their needs and goals. Hence, it is likely that developing the capacity of human agency is important for encouraging active ageing. When older people have enough confidence and a certain level of cognition of their capability to contribute to society, then active ageing could result.

Hitlin and Elder (2007) illustrated that people's agency may be presented in different forms depending on different processes in social psychology. They adopt different social psychology based on how they perceive, and thus react to, the contemporary structure of a social context. In Hitlin and Elder's opinion, there are two dimensions in life course agency: One is self-reflective belief in their capabilities in realising aims in life; the other is an individual's capability to direct himself or herself to achieve life goals and plans while cooperating with the social environment.

Therefore, from the above discussion, it could be argued that belief in one's own ability to achieve goals and make changes to the social structure, and one's actual ability to achieve those goals and changes, are both important in developing agentic capability. Thus, advocating for active ageing and independence in later life should include improvements to self-perception and mentality. This may include a positive attitude towards ageing and belief in one's own capabilities. This research has explored older Chinese academics/carers' self-construction, their experiences surrounding ageing, their perceptions of themselves and their career and life trajectories.

Marshall (2005) pointed out that many life course researchers have been refraining from supporting theories in general that are 'agency without structure' or 'structure without

agency' (p. 12). The terms *capability input* and *active agency* relate to how agency engages with structure and responds to structural forces.

The term Capability Input refers to the likelihood of structure as a resource in human agency development. As Bandura (2001) stated, rather than undergoing exhaustive seeking actions, individuals select feasible choices from strategies they have developed for problem solving along with analyses of presumable results. To do so, they operate symbols on the multitudes of information originating from both vicarious and personal experiences. In the meantime, they absorb knowledge and expand their comprehension of causation. This research considers that people could not progress or develop their unique selves in vacuum without communication with social structure. They think and analyse before making choices. The work of strategising is pushed forward by elements and logics acquired from the social environment (including past experiences, current situations, and envisioned potential future trends), according to the agency's understanding of those elements.

Elbasha and Wright (2017) mentioned Stones' (2005) analysis of two categories of 'within-the-agent internal structures', which are 'positional conjuncturally-specific' and 'general dispositional' structures. 'General dispositional' structures contain 'transposable skills and dispositions, [which] include generalised world-views and cultural schemas, classifications, typifications of things, people and networks, principles of actions, typified recipes of action, deep binary frameworks of signification, gesture and methodologies for adapting this generalised knowledge to a range of particular practices in particular locations in time and space' (Stones, 2005, p. 88 as cited in Elbasha & Wright, 2017, p. 117).

Hvinden and Halvorsen (2017) summarised 'inputs for capability' as 'earnings from economic activities, income transfers, services provided by public or private agencies, various forms of support from families, friends and neighbours, voluntary organizations, positive action or efforts of potential employers as well as strengths and weaknesses of the

individual and his or her circumstances' (p. 7). Therefore, this research considers that the construction of human agency involve the impacts of political, economic, social and cultural elements. Since individuals analyze the structural elements they confront in order to develop their own capabilities to make decisions.

People could also gather information and skills from past experience to enhance their power of agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) said that people react to social changes and strategise their future by continuously reconstructing past circumstances. Hence, they manage and use information extracted from past experiences to analyse current situations. Chen et al. (2010) described 'forms of life course capitals' which contain 'economic, health, and personal resources accumulated over the life course' (p. 128). Chen et al. also explained that even minor life course capital disparities in the beginning may lead to major distinctiveness in the result because there may be sophisticated procedures of decision-making and communications with diversified societal institutions.

Therefore, it could be understood that the social environment is a giant pool of infinite knowledge, resource, information and elements for human agency to derive meaning, to isolate rational operations and mechanisms, and to exploit in order to improve the effectiveness of their life course. At the same time, past experiences also provide an information pool for the current construction of human agency.

In addition to the importance of initiative, the ability to absorb knowledge and the accumulation of knowledge in human agency development, this research also speculates that people who possess stronger human agency may be more cognisant of operating elements and layouts of logic; more swift or efficient in analysing, categorizing and arranging resources; and more responsive to changes and ongoing operations in the social environment. This is also why this research includes the concept of active ageing in its theoretical framework. As Marshall (2005) has stated, a small but increasing number of gerontology

researchers have brought focus to active ageing. They realised that older people could also possess high proactivity and create outcomes in their social environment.

Marshall (2005) has revealed resources for 'personal capacities' or one's 'stage of cognitive development, learned skills or abilities, knowledge, or physical strength and talent.' These capacities include 'economic (wealth) [and] social (social capital, networks, contractual or informal social ties and alliances)' (Marshall, 2005, pp. 11-12). The researcher discerns that Marshall's statement focused more on existing resources that human agency possesses and is able to exploit. Marshall also pointed out the importance of sorting out resources of two types: 'within the individual (e.g., education)' and 'external to the individual but at his or her 'command' (e.g., social capital)' (Marshall, 2005, p. 12).

This research treats both 'within the individual' resources and 'external to the individual' resources as existing resources possessed by or accessible to the individual's agency. Further, the research may be able to expand on Marshall's definition of personal capacities, which breaks the frames that societal background has imposed on personal capacities of possession.

Active agency pertains to extensive web of personal reflections, appraisal of past experiences and perceptions around the world. This mix contains internal negotiations, planning, making selections and decisions, interactions and debates with other social actors, and critical assessment of likely changes in the social background (Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2017). Active agency also includes stages of practice (action) that human agency undergoes, acting either individually or cooperatively with other social actors to accomplish certain goals or outcomes (Hvinden & Halvorsen, 2017). Therefore, it seems possible to perceive that active agency embodies a person's internal conversation, his or her internal capability to interact with the social environment, and the ability to sort out effective strategies to establish and achieve goals.

Shanahan (2000) discussed individualisation of the life course, arguing that people have been empowered to utilise a stronger level of agency in planning, designing and forming their lives, and thus it is more difficult to predict their life courses. In recent years, people have tended to possess more freedom in their retirement trajectories and plans when compared to traditionally restrictive paradigms, while also suffering from insufficient social security structures, increasing labour market participation in their locales, and smaller family structures.

This research seeks to understand the agentic power of older Chinese academics/carers responding to the structural environment and dealing with major turning points. On the other hand, the research also seeks knowledge of how their contextual environment has shaped their life courses and influenced their decision making at major turning points. Finally, this research attempts to understand the level of individualisation of older Chinese academics/carers in their life courses.

Hvinden and Halvorsen's (2017) idea was that active agency is reactive or responsive to the social background but that social background could not determine active agency. This research is interested in analysing the level of active ageing in older Chinese academics/carers and in determining to what extent agency or active ageing in older Chinese academics/carers is impacted or restricted by structural forces.

Active ageing is associated with encouraging older workers to stay involved in social or economic activities. According to Moulaert and Biggs (2013), active ageing primarily requires two tasks: (1) to maintain older people's capacity for independence when faced with physical and mental decline; (2) to set up state policies to eliminate obstacles hindering older workers' labour participation and address age stereotypes in the society.

The United Nations declared 1999 the "International Year of Older Persons". In their 2002 Policy Framework, they defined active ageing:

Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. Active ageing applies to both individuals and population groups. It allows people to realise their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout the life course and to participate in society according to their needs, desires and capacities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they require assistance. The word 'active' refers to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labour force (Moulaert & Biggs, 2013, p. 28).

Therefore, it could be perceived that education about and considerations for active ageing could help with a country's social needs in improving quality of lives of older people, while transforming the cultural norms and perceptions around ageing. In other words, it could be helpful in forming personal agentic capability while improving state policies to help older workers in their later lives.

This research includes the concept of active ageing in the composition of its theoretical framework. Active ageing is deemed preferable in this research as it sheds light on how older Chinese people can develop better effectiveness in later lives. There has been limited participation from lay voices in active ageing (Bowling, 2008; Schmidt & Yang, 2019; Chen et al., 2019). Chen et al. (2019) pointed out shortage of literature on the social needs of older people from a cultural perspective.

Chong et al. (2006) pointed out the undoubtedly sparse research on the subject of positive ageing from a Chinese context. Chen et al. (2019) also supported the fact that research methods and theoretical frameworks pertaining to topic of 'ageing well' are mostly based on Western cultures (p. 65) . Chen et al. called for further necessary research from the perspective of eastern Asia featuring terminology common in the daily lives of the Asian public. Hsu (2007) observed that little research was done on how older people define successful ageing or on cultural differences towards the question of successful ageing. This research addresses the limitations in active ageing study in a Chinese context.

According to the review of Menichetti et al. (2016), there have been studies measured interventions to help older people pursue active and healthy ageing. They have found general positive effects of the active aging programs on improving the physical and mental health of older people. Those active aging programs aimed at increasing social and physical activities of older people via multiple approaches (e.g. health educations, volunteering, internet based interventions such as training app) .

However, the literature has also raised critiques about active ageing. Dyk (2014) has denoted current debate in the literature regarding active ageing may tend to become an utilitarian approach in the purpose of maximizing profits, and recommend policy makers to prevent the risk of exploiting the labour of older workforce. This research has discussed that active ageing could potentially be an effective strategy to release the pressure of government in dealing with population ageing, especially in the Chinese context with a significantly shrinking working population driven by OCP. This research also contemplates that active ageing should be a helpful approach to improve independence of older people in China to achieve high quality of ageing lives. However, the critique that Dyk (2014) has raised should not be neglected, policy makers should increase concern in preventing utilitarianism and genuinely concern the actual need of older workers.

As Timonen (2016) manifested a limitation of active ageing model, that there is a gap between the consideration of policy makers and older people themselves on individual needs and desires. Timonen (2016) demonstrated that there has been little studies and attentions paid to test whether and how older people view the existing active ageing policies (based on western context) have concerned and met their actual needs. Therefore, this research contemplates that there is in great need of active ageing research and focus of practitioners and policy makers on investigating lay voices of older people, and deeply comprehending the actual needs and life goals of older people in China. Especially older workers in China are

dealing with a demanding era of severe population ageing, significant economic and social changes and pressures of FCR. This research has detected the plans of older Chinese academics/carers towards their later career and retirement trajectories, especially their perceptions towards EWL to address the gap of lacking investigations on older workers' lay voices in China.

Dyk (2014: p. 96) pointed out another critique that active ageing may lead to re-valuation of old age and "new agism" that trigger fears of "ageing with a disability". This research concerns that older workers may make different decisions towards later career trajectory and retirement, depending on their actual needs and life goals in later lives. Policy makers on active ageing schemes should avoid establishing criterion of an ideal ageing life and assessing older people's performance in later lives. In this way, it could be likely to generate 'new agism' and trigger anxieties over older people in fear of 'ageing unsuccessfully'.

Active ageing may fit the needs of older Chinese people and suit the Chinese context of an ageing population. The following two sections are structured based on two main themes of active ageing: older people's independence and state policy to encourage active ageing.

3.3.2 Independence in later lives. This section discusses the first dimension of active ageing regarding older workers' capacity developments to maintain independence against mental and physical decline. Hillcoat-Nallétamby (2014) conducted qualitative interviews from Wales, developing framework that identified a concept of independence for older people comprising multiple facets including multiple autonomies, referring to one's willingness to receive help, self-determination, freedom to purchase products, and psychological and physical capabilities.

However, as Chen et al. (2010) acknowledged, it is the case that accumulating physical decline impacts self-direction in people's later lives. For instance, there could be a

higher likelihood of mortality and disability, health issues like heart disease, obesity, hypertension and cognitive regression in later life. Kooij et al. (2008) reviewed and analysed 9 conceptual research and 24 empirical studies (primarily from the West) on age influencing older employees' motivation to work. They elaborated that older workers' motivation and decisions on early retirement could be affected by age-related factors and the decline of physical health. This research is concerned with what factors influence older Chinese academics/carers on their retirement decisions and especially whether FCR plays an important part in retirement trajectories.

Kooij et al. (2008) have discussed, the influence of physical health on retirement decisions and work motivations may depend on employment type. For example, for work that is highly dependent on physical capabilities, one's physical health condition may play an important role in influencing retirement decisions. In this research, the work tasks that the participants are involved with, such as doing academic research and teaching, do not require heavy physical work but still demand long work hours and great physical stamina. At the same time, though, comparatively more flexibility of work could be attained in academia than industrial organisations. This research investigates how older academics/carers perform in academia and to what extent they have gravitated towards active ageing.

This research considers the likelihood of older people conducting active or productive ageing proactively. Positive understanding of older people and the social norms and images surrounding them could encourage their active ageing, helping to improve the quality of their later lives. Moreover, in recent years, people have tended towards better health conditions, improved living circumstances, use of more advanced medical systems, and increased longevity. Globalisation has also brought Western values into Chinese societies. Therefore, there should be normative reforms geared towards a productive late life in Chinese society. As Clausen (1993, as cited in Shanahan et al., 1997) has noted, the term *planfulness*, denoting

the results and mechanical systems of one's life course, has a significant relationship with social actors' input of talents, level of dependency and self-confidence.

According to Bloom et al. (2010), older people now tend to be healthier and wealthier than before. Thus, they could potentially be able to work more productively with less dependence on public resources, and they tend to possess more desire for a more leisurely and flexible later life. In addition, because of the diminished working population due to the one-child policy, it could become an increasing social need and a growing opportunity for Chinese society to avail itself of its older workers.

Consequently, this research investigates how older Chinese academics/carers view ageing, older workers and age discrimination, retirement plans and EWL. The findings and analysis of this research may help with retirement policy management in acquisitions of older Chinese workers/carers' concerns, needs, and plans and perceptions towards ageing and later life, especially with respect to a changing contemporary environment in China.

Literature on ageing in China has revealed that traditional filial piety, wherein families take full responsibility for the care of older people, is far from being met in contemporary reality (Tang et al., 2009). The extended family model is no longer prevalent in most current societies in China. Due to rapid social changes and the change in people's constructs, along the with Western values brought in by globalisation, younger people tend not to live with their parents or employ institutional care to assist in the caring responsibilities of frail, older family members (Tang et al., 2009).

The findings of Tang et al.'s (2009) Hong Kong study is consistent with the literature: Older Chinese people still expect highly-filial responsibilities from their children, while younger Chinese people have reduced respect for traditional filial obligations. This may be the most important factor that has led to loneliness of older Chinese people. Yang et al. (2014) believed that the difficulty for older people in securing independent lives may be more

exaggerated in China due to adult children's incapability of supporting their elders after the one-child policy. The findings of Cheng et al. (2018) indicated that there has been less informal social support and more formal social support given to older Chinese people from 60 to 74 years of age compared with their senior parents.

Nowadays, younger people in China value more individualism or personal space, devoting more focus and efforts to their personal careers, in order to match the increasingly severe competition. Families with dual breadwinners have become increasingly prevalent; daughters and daughters-in-law tend to be more willing to participate in the labour market instead of traditionally remaining the main caregivers for older family members (Tang et al., 2009). It should be noted that the generation of only children are confronting intensive competition in the labour market environment. The resulting incapability of the only child to keep up with eldercare responsibilities may hamper the development of older Chinese workers in the future.

Bloom et al. (2010) have summarised the various reasons that could explain the need for older Chinese people to be more independent in their later lives. They pointed out that older people in China are less likely to be guaranteed the security they once had. They need more assistance and more categories of assistance relating to healthcare and income security. This is because of families' increasing incapability to provide eldercare support: Female participation in the labour market has most notably increased; there has been a rise in migration of adult children to more advanced areas as well as a decrease in birth rates; and there has also been a reduction in adherence to cultural traditions of filial responsibility around eldercare (Bloom et al., 2010).

The development of a country's eldercare system requires joint efforts from family, national government, social communities, etc., to improve both the economic and facilities security and the psychological well-being of older people. In Chang and Yu's (2013) research,

by interviewing family carers from south of Taiwan, they found that to provide high quality eldercare, a consistent system should be formed from the combined efforts of the older people themselves, carers from the families and the nursing staff. Older people should be responsible for maintaining their health, while family carers establish goals, keeping records of the care recipients' conditions, and are responsible for building trust with the care recipients. Zimmer and Kwong (2003) have indicated via their research that reforms are badly needed in China to cover the unmet needs of older people and that support for older people should eventually become composed of three entities, family, community, and the state, rather than merely depending on family as the traditional sole care provider. Despite the monetary support programs, there has been still concern in terms of the availability of physical help and emotional assistance for older people in China (Zimmer & Kwong, 2003).

However, the eldercare system in China is still far from developed, while various socioeconomic background forces in China are undermining the implementation of a mature eldercare system. Rapid development and social change are hampering single children's ability to meet eldercare responsibilities, while traditional Confucian value is deeply rooted in generations of older people. Along with social and political reforms on ageing, there is also a need to reform the position of older workers in China by educating them on active ageing and a sense of independence.

The above section has discussed the likelihood of older workers of achieving independence and active ageing. The remaining section highlights the need for independence and active ageing of older people in China from social perspective. In short, a drop in filial piety in Chinese social and cultural norms, along with an incomplete eldercare system, may indicate a crucial need for independence on the part of older Chinese people.

3.3.3 Public policies in encouraging active ageing. Active ageing, as a strategy against age discrimination, has become an accepted and promoted policy among the US, the

UK and European countries. EWL has been adopted as strategy to alleviate social problems brought about by population ageing (Howden & Zhou, 2014). Policies of active ageing aim to include as many older people as possible in social participation and employment, provided they are not too dependent or vulnerable (Clarke & Warren, 2007).

The term 'age diversity management' has been widely contemplated in Western policies on employment among the ageing populace. Western countries have attempted to eliminate obstacles to employment for older people. Simultaneously, they tend to encourage democracy and freedom in decision making, using respect instead of forcing older people to be active (Moulaert & Biggs, 2013; Walker & Maltby, 2012).

However, active ageing is still a relatively new term and concept in China. As the country with the largest population and, as expected, the most severely-skewed age distribution in the world, China may be well-served to consider active ageing to alleviate its ageing problems.

People's attitudes towards ageing may not only be due to their inner perceptions age-related changes but also to societal or cultural norms around ageing. In Gulette's (1997) classic view of 'Declining to Decline' as mentioned by Twigg (2004, p. 61), the conception of age and ageing abounds in culture, and people feel *aged* not by being informed by biological bodies but by the influence of cultural norms. Therefore, people tend to hold anxiety around signs of ageing, possess negative feelings about ageing, and start feeling aged early. According to Kooij et al. (2008), society's view towards being old could potentially trigger negative effects in older workers and put pressure on them to retire. Therefore, this research considers improving public policy on active ageing to be a crucial need for governments to alleviate negative social perceptions towards ageing; further, it is needed to help older people's self-constructs of having the confidence to engage in public responsibilities.

From another perspective, active ageing policies should also focus on preconceptions around older people themselves. Understanding of social terms may be variable based on distinctive cultural contexts. In other words, the concepts that constitute productive ageing or ageing well may be different to older Chinese people comparing to older Western people. The way that people understand age discrimination may also be different. Thus, governments need to compose their strategies according to their local needs and conceptions. Therefore, this research is interested in how older Chinese academics/carers view and understand ageing, and age discriminations.

More importantly, encouraging public policies possesses not only the potential to protect older people and improve their productivity in later lives; it is also an effective strategy to benefit whole societies. According to Moulaert and Biggs (2013), active ageing could potentially benefit all people. Because the life quality and capabilities of older people could be maximised by more labour participation and other contributions (e.g., caring) to society, the society gains full use of all human capital it utilises. Contradictory values held between generations may also be ameliorated. EWL is part of the strategy promoted to alleviate the labour shortage by labour studies with an industrialised focus (Moulaert & Biggs, 2013). Active ageing takes into consideration cultural expectations of more effective older lives as well as political and economic benefits (Moulaert & Biggs, 2013).

Furthermore, EWL may improve China's labour participation. Das and N'Diaye (2013) stated that the relaxation of the one-child policy will result in a higher fertility rate and ameliorate low labour participation in China. However, the effects of relaxing the one-child policy cannot work in a short term, as the growing number of children born will not enter the labour market until about 20 years later. In the immediate term, extending working life may be the only way for China to improve its labour participation.

Certain adjustments and rearrangements in government policies could be helpful to support the active ageing of older people in China. For instance, providing multiple employment choices could make older people's lives more flexible to adapt to issues stemming from both family-career balance and the older person's personal needs and goals.

According to Walker and Maltby (2012), there have been repercussions from the change in demography on retirement income policies. This has affected people all over the European Union in terms of their pensions from public, private and occupational employment. As has been demonstrated by the European Commission (1999, p. 17, as cited in Moulaert & Biggs, 2013, p. 30), 'particular attention should be paid to the development of policies to reverse the trend towards early retirement; to explore new forms of gradual retirement; and to make pension schemes more sustainable and flexible.' In this study, academia has been assumed as the career, carrying with it with more flexibilities compared to working for industrial organisations. This research has also discovered how older Chinese academics/carers adopt that flexibility into their WLB and associated FCR, and their satisfaction towards WLB.

Crucially, Vellandics et al.'s (2006) research findings contained data from all EU member countries, which indicated that older workers from both East and West Europe tended to possess expectations of a later age for retirement than the typical retirement age in 2006. Vellandics et al. seemed to indicate that even if not many people would decide to retire at a later time, people from most countries preferred higher taxation or EWL instead of facing reduced pensions. This could potentially indicate the success of active ageing reforms in European countries. This research has investigated older Chinese academics/carers' perceptions and attitudes towards active ageing and EWL.

3.4 Adapting LCT to Older Chinese Workers

This section explains how this research adjusts LCT, as it relates to structure and agency concept, to the Chinese context. This research aims to contribute to LCT by fitting it to the Chinese context, and to provide knowledge to the development of LCT in the form of explanations of the ageing society in China. Therefore, the following sections are structured based on four elements of LCT; Figure 2 illustrates those LCT factors that influence the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers as obtained from the literature review. This chapter provides a background to support the discussions in data analysis, discussion and conclusion chapters.

Figure 2: Factors Influencing Older Chinese Workers' Life and Career Trajectories According to the Four Elemental Dimensions of the Life-Course Model

Historical & Social-Cultural Context: -Demographic changes (mainly due to the one-child policy) -Economic reform (more pressure on the state to give pensions) -Lack of comprehensive pension and assistance schemes	Transitions/Turning Points: -Career transitions -First childbirth -Mid-life with dual caring responsibilities
Trajectories/Timing: -Focus on child education during middle and high school -Co-residence with senior parents	Linked Lives: -Role of family as the main unit to support older people's lives -*Guanxi* -Senior parents living far away or empty nest -Generational conflicts

3.4.1 Historical and Social-Cultural Contexts

This section reviews the literature regarding contextual forces to older Chinese academics/carers from the historical and social-cultural perspective of LCT. As has been discussed previously, life course studies have been developed for both micro- and macro-level analysis. However, as societies change constantly, bringing with them updated concepts and cultural changes, it is still vital for contemporary life course literature to continually update its knowledge and reshape its perspectives. This research attempts to improve that abundance of historical and sociocultural perspectives by adding insight into the Chinese context.

China faces significant pressure caused by changes to its demographic structure. Three major forces that drive population ageing have been identified in China: decreasing fertility rates, increasing life expectancy and birth and death rate differences in the past (Kincannon et al.; 2005; Zhang & Goza, 2006; Bloom et al.; 2010). Figure 3 shows the demographic changes in China from 1953 to 2000. In 1953, the demographic structure was a perfect pyramid with a small percentage of older people at the top and large number of youths at the bottom. However, by 2000, a population 'bulge' of working adults exists in the middle of the demographic tree with fewer youth at the bottom. Therefore, by 2050, when more working age people reach their later life, China could experience severe pressure from population ageing. The country will likely demand more public resources and welfare support to address age-associated health and social care issues and problems among the ageing population. Higher demand in effectiveness of resource and labour management among the older people will also become essential.

Figure 3: Demographic Structure of China in Years 1953 and 2000
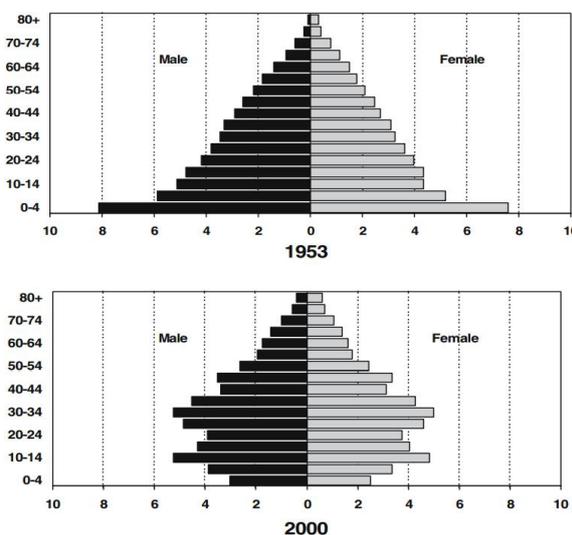
As cited from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2011), reprinted from Kincannon et al. (2005)

Figure 4: Demographic Structure of China in Years 1950 and 2050
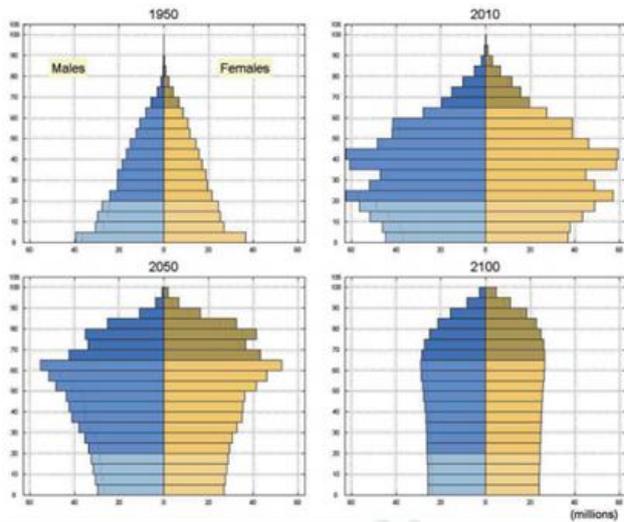
As cited from China State Council and National Bureau of Statistics, 1982, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 1953, 2000s; reprinted from Zhang et al. (2012)

Figure 4 displays a prediction on the demographic tree of China in the year 2050, in which a large percentage of older people occupying the large population can be observed. As Gong et al. (2012) have pointed out, in the future there will be fewer working adults to support lives of older people because of the implementation of the one-child policy. The one-child policy was first established in 1979 in order to ameliorate the enormous expansion in population, and ended in January of 2016, when all couples from China were permitted to have two children (Wu & Li, 2012; Feng et al., 2016).

An astonishing outcome has been released by the 2010 census of China: the ageing speed of China is faster than anticipated. It has risen by 2.93% in merely 12 years. The population of people aged 60 and above has occupied 13.26% of the total population, or 177.6 million individuals. Simultaneously, the population of people of 65 and over has increased by 1.91% compared to the 2000 census, now occupying 8.87% of the total population and more than the total population of Japan (Fang et al., 2013).

Kincannon et al. (2005) also pointed out that the US increased its proportion of older people out of the total population by 7% between 1944 and 2013. By contrast, China may merely take 27 years to increase the rate of population ageing from 7% to 14%. Hence, this researcher observes the importance of introducing the concept of active ageing to China in

order to ameliorate pressure from the shrinking labour market and improve the independence of older people.

The baby boomer generation has increased the population of working adults by 2.4% each year from 1965-1990 (Bloom et al., 2010). Thus, it could be seen that China has undoubtedly been in need of both eldercare system reforms and economic developments. The boomer generation caused a significant rise in the speed of population ageing and will lead to labour market shrinks but an increase in consumption. This could trigger severe labour market competition and significant need of employment. The near future will see an enormous and lasting need for the Chinese government to focus on economic growth and development. . Consequently, there could be increased concern and pressure for the Chinese government to provide sufficient assistance to the older population.

Furthermore, this research has considered economic developments that impact life trajectories of older Chinese people. The marketisation of China is partially driven by the development of non-governmental organisations, making personal activities in the economy an important trigger for growth during transition from a command (central planning) economy (Yueh, 2009). Therefore, reform from central planning strategy and an increase of profit-oriented private capital accumulation may generate enormous and salient opportunities for private entrepreneurship or self-employment, thus giving Chinese employees a chance for career transitions and diversified career options. Quach and Anderson (2008) and Li and Zhao (2011) argued that the economic change after the 1978 Open Door policy has generated enormous job opportunities for Chinese families in rural areas, state-run organisations and self-employment. Quach and Anderson (2008) pointed out that there was lack of study on relationship between the open economy and families in China; therefore, this research raises the question of whether economic transitions have caused career transitions for older Chinese academics/carers.

Quach and Anderson (2008) discussed implications of the open-door policy to Chinese families in their article. One of those implications is a link between the open-up policy and a decrease in extended families. In the open economy, new philosophies, science and technology were imported from Western countries. Alongside those imports, Western values were also brought into China, possibly dampening the traditional value of filial piety, which holds that caregiving support is primarily the obligation of adult children. Therefore, the pattern of extended family has become the exception rather than the mainstream principle before the open-up economy (Quach & Anderson, 2008).

The findings of Li and Zhao (2011) using annual and provincial data from the China Statistical Yearbook from years 1999-2008 indicated that self-employment was an involuntary status of Chinese people from unprivileged positions intended to overcome limitations on job opportunities and disqualification for waged jobs. Zhang and Pan (2012) seem congruent with Li and Zhao (2011); they elaborated that during the period of China's marketisation, there was a conspicuous smaller likelihood of workers from collective state sectors to become self-employed than those 'not gainfully employed'. People of 'less experience, less political capital, and lower status in wage employment' were more likely to start entrepreneurship or engage in self-employment (p. 1208).

People's living conditions are significantly improved by economic development in China. Goh et al. (2009) disclosed that the average family income per capita from inland areas increased from 982 yuan per month in 1989 to 2338 yuan in 2004, while that of coastal areas increased from 1149 yuan to 3537 yuan between 1989 and 2004. The poverty rate has also dropped from 22% in 1989 to 9% in 2004 in inland areas while coastal urban areas of 16% to 6% in the same time span, based on a poverty line of US$1.50 per day (Goh et al., 2009). This was facilitated by the reform of an export-oriented economy and the open-up policies introduced by Deng Xiaoping since 1978. Before that, China's development in the

international market was extremely slow during the inward-oriented strategy. Deng Xiaoping's initial aim was to decrease and terminate poverty (Yao, 1999).

Due to the drastic economic growth in the past few decades, the economic situation of people's wealth has improved enormously. In 2012, the average household wealth in China was 439,000 yuan, of which housing comprised the major part of 80% of the total net wealth (Li & Wan, 2015). Actually, home ownership is a mainstream pattern for Chinese people and Chinese families to store and represent personal wealth. According to Wah (2010), in the traditional Chinese feudal culture, there is an expectation that the male, as a head of the family, to own accommodations for the family; this could also be family-inherited accommodation.

However, economic development has also brought negative consequences to lives of Chinese people. There has been a list of studies working on nutrition, health issues, the medical care system, the ecosystem associated with tremendous urbanisation, and other various issues from economic growth and demographic changes that significantly affect people's lives in China. These studies include Du et al. (2004), Mocan et al. (2004), Li et al. (2008), Hubacek et al. (2009), Huang et al. (2014), and Liu et al. (2016).

Environmental problems are another issue raised by economic development in China. Gong et al. (2012) reported three major consequences caused by urbanization along with economic development: increase of urban migration, worsening lifestyle and health conditions along with increased possibility for accidents, and environmental pollution. China has begun adopting eco-compensation strategies to react to the increasing pressure on the environment. However, government officials, researchers and the public have been confronting problems in generating harmony between the sustainability of the ecosystem and the developing economy (Liu et al., 2016).

Economic development in China has also come with tremendous inequality. Wei and Liefner (2012) noted that 85 to 90% of foreign direct investment goes to the three global cosmopolitan areas: the Yangtze Delta, the Pearl River Delta, and the Beijing-Tianjin area. The prosperous economic development of coastal areas in China has become conspicuous compared to the inner lands and other areas (Gries & Redlin, 2011).

Not just provincial inequalities but also income inequalities among the population is also clearly visible. In 2012, more than 33%, 50%, 62%, and 79% of the national net wealth was attributed to the top 1%, 5%,10%, and 25% richest members of the population, respectively. At the same time, merely 1% and 8% of the national net wealth have been attributed to the poorest 25% and 50% of the population (Xie & Jin, 2015).

The above discussion illustrates a significant inequality in wealth distribution among the Chinese population, with a noticeably small proportion of people possessing a large amount of wealth. The significant wealth inequality of Chinese people could potentially indicate an essential need of Chinese citizens across the country for pension assistance. Wang et al. (2014) stated that of the population aged 65 and over, 22.3% in the rural areas and 4.6% in the urban areas have been in poverty; this translates to 18 million people in China in 2011. According to Zimmer and Kwong (2003), the pension system in China mostly covers older workers from urban areas while benefits such as health care resources and insurance are significantly limited for older people in rural areas. The senior parents of participants in the current research live mostly in rural areas. The researcher was interested in whether the pension system and inequality in China have influenced older Chinese academics/carers on their eldercare responsibilities and how they deal with subsequent challenges.

Economic transition and development have also triggered mass rural–urban migration. According to Garriga et al. (2014), there was a 'gradual growth stage (1984-1994)' with a stable migration from rural areas across provinces by an average of 3.2 million people

annually; and a 'highly active stage (1995-2000)' (p. 6) of rural–urban migration in China, wherein the rate of rural–urban migration increased from 3.5 million people per year to 10 million. This research has detected the importance of rural–urban migration to older Chinese academics/carers, which will be thoroughly discussed in the data analysis chapters.

After discussing the potential consequences driven by economic development, this research will discuss political development in China. This research has explored the impact of national policies on older Chinese academics/carers' life courses. Compared to Western societies, the external environment of the Chinese context seems to be more affected by institutional change due to the significant effects of political control from the central planning economy.

Researchers identified three categories of approaches that state governments could take to impact people's life trajectories: 'regulative norms' that include laws and legislations on legal marriage, school entrance age and the like; 'entitlement', pertaining to programs such as mandatory social insurance; and 'bureaucratic administration', which encapsulates social services for older people in need (Zhou & Hou, 1999; Hung & Chiu, 2003). Compared with democratic countries in the West, Chinese government policies usually have a more profound impact on people's life trajectories.

Historical sociocultural or political changes can have a significant and long-lasting effect on a country or people's lives in consecutive years or even decades. For example, before manoeuvring to next stage of drastic economic development, China had adopted a command economy to protect the initial stability of employment. The research participants' generation entered the labour market under the command economy system, and their general life and career trajectories were mostly covered by the command economy era. Hence, this research questions to what extent the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers have been affected by the command economy system.

The command economy had been gradually vanishing starting at end of the 70s, and it was officially replaced in 1992. As Leung (1994) stated, 'the free-market economic reforms of the last decade have dramatically transformed social policy in China, which is gradually retreating from an egalitarian and collective approach and moving towards a pluralistic and 'residual' orientation' (p. 341).

Despite free market economy and pluralistic reforms taking the place of the government's central control over employment, there could be lasting effects of the command economy on the life courses of people in contemporary China. For instance, the *Hukou* system was initiated for the purpose of data collection in the pre-1949 era and, during the 1950s, was implemented to control the mobility of rural and urban populations. As a central element of the command economy, though, *Hukou* is still being implemented through various transformations and changes is still affecting people's lives in contemporary China (Chan, 2009).

According to Ross (1998), China was applying standard procedures for a long time in order to manage social welfare systems and scientific, technological and business development throughout the country. It is clear that political control possesses significant power to influence and unify older Chinese academics/carers' life courses, especially for the birth cohort of the research participants, whose major life courses have been located in the prevailing command economy era.

The 'iron rice bowl' appeared at the start of the Second Five-Year Plan (1958-1962) of China's command economy, the term coined to indicate national compensation for income, childcare, education, estate ownership and medical care. It started being eliminated alongside diminishing relevant profits as the command economy ended in the mid and late 1990s (Burnett, 2010). However, those who had gained the 'iron rice bowl' before the dismantling of the command economy are still enjoying full-life employment in contemporary China. The

conspicuous and attractive benefits of the 'iron rice bowl' (please see Appendix B) inspired droves of northern Chinese to take up the government's offer, and a significant majority of them have stayed their entire working lives in the employment of the government, the public sector, state-owned enterprises or institutions such as universities.

There were enormous benefits provided by national policies to employees of state-owned enterprises. By accepting the assigned job, people could be assured of significant subsidies for their lives, while the potential risks and uncertainties that may happen for those working in private sector industries could be eliminated. Appendix B describes various welfare benefits of assigned jobs under the control of China's command economy, from which it can be seen that subsidies and allowance covered almost all perspectives of one's life including housing, daily expenditures, children's education, pension, etc. By contrast, employment from private sector organizations did not offer those benefits.

Zhou and Moen (2001) investigated new categories of life course associated with stratifications in the Chinese society of urban areas associated with the 1980s and 1990s economy reforms. Their empirical study contains interviews of life histories from 5000 Chinese couples in 20 cities. Figures 1 and 2 exhibit their findings. From these two figures it can be seen that in the 1980s and 1990s, most of the working population chose jobs in government, public sector, or state-owned or collective firms; there was a contingent of rural population that stayed on farmlands, while merely a small proportion selected career trajectories of self-employed or hybrid forms.

Figure 1:
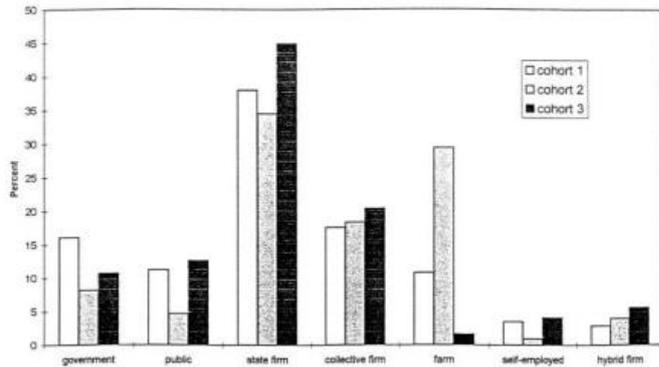
FIG. 1. Distribution of first-job destinations, by cohort. Cohorts based on year of entry into the labor force (Cohort 1, 1949–1965; Cohort 2, 1966–1979; Cohort 3, 1980–1994).

Adapted from Zhou and Moen (2001)

Figure 2:
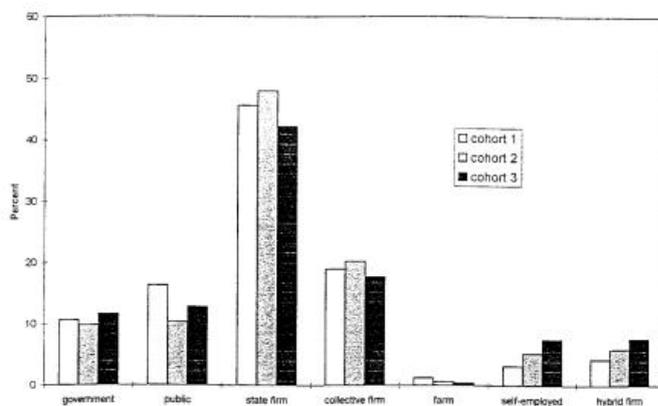
FIG. 2. Distribution across type of work organizations in 1993, by cohort. Cohorts based on year of entry into the labor force (Cohort 1, 1949–1965; Cohort 2, 1966–1979; Cohort 3, 1980–1994).

Adapted from Zhou and Moen (2001)

Hung and Chiu (2003) demonstrated how Chinese government policies usually have significant disrupting effects on Chinese people's life trajectories. For example, state policies such as the implementation and relaxation of the one-child policy (OCP) play a major role in shaping Chinese people's lives. As unique policy peculiar to China, OCP has thoroughly influenced the family structure, distribution of family responsibilities, and living expectations of the Chinese people.

In Hung and Chiu's (2003) opinion, one problem deserves special, focused attention in the social study of the Life-course: the influence of major social and political factors (such as economic recessions and war) on people's life trajectories along with how large-scale

shifts in society undoubtedly change and mould people's life trajectories. These changes lead

to long-term impacts on the people's performances and thoughts. For instance, in order to

make adjustments during the economic reforms of the past two decades, the social security

system in China has been increasingly shifting into a self-contribution form, emphasising the

responsibility of working people. Previously, it was dependent primarily on the provisions of

families and organisations (Barlett & Phillips, 1997). Therefore, it has become a habitual

incentive for Chinese people to prepare and plan for their retirement instead of relying on

national welfare.

The national culture of filial piety is not a negligible topic when discussing ageing and

FCR in China. Yue and Ng (1999) have suggested that the foundation of filial piety in

Chinese society has deteriorated due to dramatic changes brought on by urbanisation,

industrialisation and westernisation, such as scientific and technological developments and

public education reforms. Hence, this research has explored the issues and challenges that

older Chinese academics/carers have experienced with eldercare responsibilities associated

with either extended families or taking on distant care for senior parents.

Zhang et al. (2012) stated that it has been widely accepted by Chinese families and

older people that nursing homes or institutional elder homes are a substitute strategy for the

accommodations of older people instead of staying in their own homes. However, the

traditional cultural value of filial piety towards eldercare in China strongly argues against

moving into a geracomium (an institutional care home for older people), which was usually

the solution for childless older people or older people whose children were not able to

provide eldercare at home (Zhan et al., 2011). In other words, moving to eldercare institutions

may reveal an incapability of one's adult children to support eldercare, or it may be

interpreted as poor filial piety, both of which put both the senior parents and adult children in

an awkward situation in public. Simultaneously, resource availability in providing support

(time, finance, attention, etc.) to safeguard a high quality of older people's later or retired lives could also become a challenge to contemporary Chinese families.

Above all, this researcher again strongly recommends older people's need for independence over the next few generations in China, a trend which may break the tradition of utilising family as the primary resource for eldercare and retired life. More significantly, this should begin with the current older people in China, who form the generation of the research participants. The older Chinese academics/carers will be part of the first generation in China to confront severe population ageing and experience a certain level of independence in their later lives. It is essential to study current older workers in China for developments in the fields of ageing and retirement. The experience, opinions, concerns and needs of current older workers could be helpful for the development of retirement and pension policies in China.

3.4.2 Transitions/Turning Points

The study of life-course need not only refer to contextual analysis. Investigation on turning points could also develop understanding of life course. Elder (1998) claimed that historical–sociocultural contexts and trajectories–timing are major principles of the LCT; their impacts on people's trajectories could be reflected and interpreted by the other two elements of transitions–turning points and linked lives. The researcher suggests, since social actors react to contextual forces and make decisions during major life turning points, that transitions and turning points in life trajectories could potentially be interpreted as mediation of structural influences.

As Shanahanl et al. (1997) illustrated, there is a link, mediated by human agency (one's decision making and plans about his or her life course), between biography and history. Individuals construct their own life courses by selecting paths among different choices while encouraged and restricted by opportunities associated with education and occupation (Shanahan et al., 1997). This researcher acknowledges that agentic capability may be

105

restricted by its social roles and associated social capital. At the same time, agency

contributes to the formation of life course by the way one deals with turning points.

Additionally, Elder (1998) supposed that past experiences of trajectories and major

events could have a significant effect on later life trajectories. Emirbayer and Mische (1998)

believed that social actors' agentic tendencies are directed by any emerging circumstance in

the past, the present or the future. Elder's study proved that people who experienced

hardships during childhood in the Great Depression were more negatively impacted,

demonstrating increased likelihood of academic performance problems and behavioural and

mental difficulties. This research does not emphasise the influence of past experience,

focusing rather on analysing contextual forces and the interplay between structure and agency.

Furthermore, people can undergo more than one transition or trajectory at the same

time. For example, marriage is a life trajectory, and career is a life trajectory, and an agent

can play both roles during the same phase of his or her life. The samples used in this research

contain various roles played by older workers and family carers. Harper (2006) demonstrated

that various trajectories of people's lives appear at the same time due to the concurrent, rather

than sequential, emergence of age-graded stages of production, education and leisure in a

cohort. 'Various role transitions and trajectories, and developmental pathways including

transitions and trajectories related to physiological health and psychosocial characteristics,

such as identity, efficacy and happiness' comprise the pathways of the life-course (Harper,

2006, p. 80).

The researcher contemplated potential major turning points in life trajectories of older

Chinese academics/carers during the literature review process prior to data collection. In

China, a big turning point that could significantly influence Chinese workers' lives could be

having one's first childbirth. A new child brings new and more complex duties to the family,

especially to the grandparents, who are usually assumed to be an important childcare resource when the young parents are busy at work.senior parents

According to Kincannon et al. (2005), most older Chinese people mainly depend on their own personal accumulation of resource or on support from adult children for old age. Grandparents have become a major resource in assisting the care for young child in the family. Kincannon et al. (2005) noted that over 1.5 million households have both a child and one or two older people (grandparents). In 2000, one out of five households in China included an older person.

Because of this structure, distributing and managing FCR and financial responsibilities among young parents and senior parents has become a major challenge to Chinese families. Due to smaller family structures resulting from the OCP, it has become much more difficult for working adults to provide FCR while simultaneously facing increasing competition in the labour market and fast socioeconomic development. Additionally, manageing generational differences between working adults and their senior parents, especially in co-residence situations, is another challenge for Chinese families. The researcher was interested in the complexities and conflicts derived from FCR between generations. However, as has been discussed previously, the extended family has started to vanish in China. This research has determined how older Chinese academics/carers balance eldercare and childcare responsibilities with their senior parents.

Another major turning point in people's life course could be mid-life, which is associated with dual caring responsibilities. The existing literature discusses 'sandwiched' families: families that require both eldercare and childcare responsibilities. The majority of the work done on the topic of sandwiched families has been conducted in North America (Evandrou et al., 2002). Hämäläinen and Tanskanen (2019) also pointed out that the existing research investigating sandwiched families has focused enormously on Anglo-Saxon areas.

While Falkingham et al. (2019) described the significant limitation of sandwiched adults to provide FCR in China, most similar research about sandwiched adults has been conducted in Western cultures. This research addresses the limitation of sandwiched families from an Asian context by applying LCT to investigate FCR (family caring responsibilities) and WLB (work life balance) of older workers in China.

According to Keene and Prokos (2007), it had been hypothesised that the increasing prevalence of sandwiched families is due to lower fertility rates, greater longevity and chronic diseases, which have sparked a great deal of discussion and concern since older people may develop various problems with age that require family care. In the US, 75% of long-term disabled older people depended on their adult children in their daily lives, while 80% of home care for older family members with long-term impairment were supported by family relatives (Keene & Prokos, 2007).

However, Keene and Prokos discovered from their review of empirical studies that people under sandwiched conditions, possessing dual caring responsibilities, made up a small percentage of the respondents. Their result (a survey among participants with a mean age of around 41) showed an upward trend of dual family carers at midlife from 2.3% to 6.5% between the years 1992 and 2002, while people who expected to become dual family carers also increased from 4.5% to 14.8% within the same period. The findings of Evandrou et al.'s (2002) research revealed a low rate of merely 2% among males (45-64 years old) and females (45-59 years old) who were involved with simultaneous employment and FCR in the US. In the meantime, these numbers are based on an environment wherein merely 7% of people of this age range possess eldercare responsibilities.

Nevertheless, this researcher suspects that FCR is a distinctive issue in China especially, since it is associated with the turning point of middle age and the trajectory of sandwiched families. This is not merely due to lower fertility rates, longer longevity and

chronic diseases which had sparked a great deal of discussion and concern; it is also because of the intimate bond of family members in collectivist Confucian culture.

Social and cultural values and norms usually play an important role in shaping people's thinking and directing life decisions, especially in the traditional collectivist culture of China. According to Cao's (2009) opinion, a trend is emerging of moving from traditional collectivism to individualism in Chinese society in the most recent decade. This researcher has observed that, rather than taking risks and dealing with uncertainties, Chinese people may prefer to pursue a stable life course so that life trajectories can be under control. Cao has pointed out one of the characters of collectivist culture: an 'emphasis on behaviour determined by social norms and duties rather than by pleasure or personal advantages' (p. 44).

Simultaneously, conditions of FCR and care roles may be different between countries. Evandrou et al. (2002) reported that 19% of females in the UK and 35% of females in the US from 55 to 63 years old possessed at least one elder parent and one child. Simultaneously, western European countries had developed identical tendencies on demography to the US, bringing significant concern to midlife sandwiched individuals (Evandrou et al., 2002). It is worth adding a comparison of Asian cultures regarding FCR and sandwiched families at middle age, especially due to the distinctive national condition known as the '4-2-1 problem', which describes the imbalance faced by the ageing population, who has fewer children to support their lives in the future. The 2011 China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) reported that 46% of participants averaged eight hours per day on childcare for grandchildren, while 26% averaged 4 hours per day on eldercare. (Wang & Gonzales, 2019). The 2011 CHARLS data also shows that 23% of sandwiched individuals had eldercare responsibilities, 58% of them had childcare responsibilities to their grandchildren, and 15% were involved with both (Falkingham et al., 2019).

The last turning point covered in this section refers to retirement. Unlike China, which is implementing mandatory retirement, 'the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Belgium and Canada have abolished mandatory retirement; this practice is still in effect in many countries around the world' (Higo & Klassen, 2017, pp. 70-71).

Retirement ages in eastern Europe also vary according to the crucial statistic of the number of children in a given family. For example, Poland is the only country in eastern Europe without any link between family size and retirement age. In the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Lithuania and Romania, policymakers have considered lowering the retirement age when there are more children in one's family, especially for women (Vellandics et al., 2006). Lacking a mandatory retirement age, Western cultures may instead trend towards diversified retirement trajectories.

Sanderson and Burnay (2017) analysed data from a 2001 socioeconomic survey and discovered that in Belgium, a diversification of retirement age exists among males: less-educated males possess more propensity towards earlier retirement than higher-educated males, while such diversification does not seem to exist among females with respect to education.

More importantly, older people's attitudes toward retirement age should not be neglected. This could be a significant factor influencing retirement trajectories. Solinge and Henkens' (2017) findings have shown that older workers with higher social status or higher-level professions tend to have more relaxed attitudes towards EWL schemes, while those with lower social status or less education tend toward concern about EWL. Solinge and Henkens suggested that policy makers in the Netherlands collaborate more with vulnerable older workers and allow for more flexible retirement ages. Older workers from vulnerable groups may expect to stay in the labour market to safeguard income needed to support their lives and families. This research has investigated perceptions and attitudes of older Chinese

academics/carers towards retirement and extended working lives, which is an important step in exploring turning points of retirement and active ageing.

3.4.3 Trajectories/Timing

This research has mainly investigated career and family trajectories. Since these are the two major trajectories in people's life course associated with social, work and family duties. The career trajectories that this research focuses on include entering employment and starting first job, career transitions, and retirement trajectories, which have been extensively discussed and justified from above literature review. This research will deeply investigate and analyse how the structural factors have influenced older Chinese academics/carers' decisions on their career trajectories. Simultaneously, this research is particularly interested in whether and how FCR have influenced the career trajectories of older Chinese academics/carers.

This research has investigated family trajectories associated with intensive FCR among older Chinese academics/carers. As Moen and DePasquale (2017) have demonstrated, tasks regarding caring responsibilities require a variety of forms of mental and material support. The thesis also seeks to broaden the collective understanding of caring responsibilities as they are conducted in specific places and times, from specific historical or sociocultural backgrounds, and in correspondence with arrangements, values, criteria, and routines of institutions.

Little research has been done in terms of family carers who have children at the middle or high school levels in the west. This may also relate to cultural differences: Intensive focus by families on children's education in middle and high school, or *gaokao* (national higher education entrance examinations), is outstandingly prominent among east Asian cultures. Kim and Lee (2006) claimed in their research that studying Korea could be beneficial to investigations of those cultures in which higher education largely depends on the regulation of the national governments, which is similar to the gaokao system in China. According to Zhou and Jiang (2017), Chinese families' aim for education is to foster

competitive, talented students who are able to achieve high scores and pass *gaokao*. This is a benchmark of students' potential to achieve successful careers, higher social status and the assurance of a good quality of life, especially due to the increasingly-severe environment of competition.

Cultural differences between the West and East could lead to robust comparisons and diversifications in research. As according to Zhou and Jiang (2017), American families are more likely to dedicate educational resources to sports education rather than academics, and they focus on students' character development. Comparatively, Chinese families pay significant attention to academic performance in children's education. Therefore, during the three to six years when children are studying in middle and high school, Chinese worker/carers' lives could be significantly affected. Loerbroks et al.'s (2017) research gauging Chinese women's work–life stress from five cities (Beijing, Shenzhen, Shenyang, Nanjing, Xi'an) revealed conspicuous anxieties towards care and education for children.

This researcher speculates that the issue discussed above could potentially pertain to the unique and distinctive traits of the Chinese single-child culture. Hence, disproportionate quantities of caring responsibilities and attention fall upon the only child in the family. As Loerbroks et al. (2017) mentioned, the population ratios result in extensive care being given to a single child by both parents and grandparents in Chinese families. Therefore, this research has investigated caring responsibilities during the specific trajectory of middle and high school education among older Chinese academics/carers.

More significantly, in light of the awareness that new turning points/trajectories emerge in people's life course, there could arise an institutionalisation or standardisation of life course. Collectively-similar timing of major turning points such as entering the labour market, first marriage age, retirement age and the like deserves investigation. The sociocultural, historical, political, economic or interpersonal reasons behind these turning

points could generate enormous mechanisms. Studying both the more recent and long-standing origins of institutionalised trajectories could enrich our understanding of how people age alongside particular societal symbols.

For instance, Lane (2001) summarised the institutionalisation mechanism: people utilise certain positions and appraisals, along with internal constructions that connect them, to understand everything. People function using 'typificatory schemes', which are constructs created by the individual based on recognition of the social environment, and forms of mechanism. Therefore, the contextual environment symbolises pre-identified forms of mechanisms that are comprehended and managed in interpersonal experiences. This results in a person's unique orientation versus any number of other orientations (Lane, 2001). There has been some research studying standardisation and de-standardisation of life course, including Shanahan (2000), Lane (2001), Bruckner and Mayer (2004), Kohli (2007) and Moen and DePasquale (2017). Standardisation accommodates the findings of this research, which will be discussed in details in data analysis chapters.

According to Leisering (2002) as cited by Kohli (2007), there has been a growing standardisation of human life course in China, in contrast with the diversification of its Western counterparts. However, there lacks research in testing, exemplifying, or explaining in depth the standardisation of life course in China. In the analysis chapter, this research has analyses in depth the relative standardisation of older Chinese academics/carers' life course as it relates to career pathways and FCR.

Moen and DePasquale (2017) stated that, in addition to diversifying trajectories over time, life course also mediates diversified policies in terms of health care, social welfare, and the labour market, leading to standardisation of gender-graded (different life course between genders) and age-graded (life course during different age stages) phases. 'Care is institutionalised across the life course, with different expectations, durations and definitions

of care at different ages and life stages, and across different cohorts' (Moen & DePasquale, 2017, p. 49). This research also covers gendered life course in its research findings and discussions.

Subsequently, this researcher contemplates that the life trajectories of people in the West may be significantly different as there was no command economy. Under marketised or mixed economic systems, and with less intervention of the state, people from Western countries may have been granted more autonomy in life trajectories. There lacks research based on different cultures testing the effects of economy regimes, or differences between command and marketised economies, on standardisation or individualisation of people's life trajectories. However, research in the literature has at times leaned toward a diversified trend of people's life courses in Western countries. For instance, Walther (2006) said that, because of various reasons such as diversified lifestyles, growing flexibility of the labour market, an increase in women's labour market participation, prolonged education period and general propensity towards individualisation, the turning points of entering adulthood or school-to-work transition have been relatively de-standardised. This research fills the gap to enrich life course studies in Asian cultures, especially China, with comparisons to Western life course studies associated with standardisation and de-standardisation.

Drawing from de-standardisation studies from a different era, Bruckner and Mayer (2004) reviewed the works of Held (1986), Beck (1986), Buchmann (1989), Myles (1993) and Heinz (2003). These Western researchers had determined that people's life courses have become more individualised and diversified, less stable, and less easy to predict or define in advanced cultures.

Bruckner and Mayer also believed that institutionalisation happens to people's life course when manipulated by contemporary societal arrangements around organisational, political and formal principles. Standardisation that has been brought to life course is

associated with procedures that, through particular affairs or situations, or due to their chronology or timing, appear to be more unified (Bruckner & Mayer, 2004). This research looks at elements and logic of how older Chinese academics/carers' life courses are relatively standardised, including the institutionalisation of state policies, social and cultural norms, and institutional regulations.

This researcher contemplates that studying diversification of people's trajectories is important for life course studies, sociology studies, and studies of gerontology and ageing. This could include not only timing of retirement but also timing of other life events such as receiving higher education, entering and withdrawing from the labour market, or starting or ending marriage. The reasons behind those life course transitions may be extensive, and it could be analysed under the lens of endless historical lines of social and cultural influence, state policy restrictions, heritage from social network and family linkage, or individual choices. Exploring standardisation and diversification of life course and understanding the reasons and logic behind them could help LCT to observe and comprehend how societies evolve, predict trends of societal evolution and indicate objective approaches to help societal reformations.

According to Leung (1994), under the command economy system, labour mobility and unemployment were rare, graduate students from colleges and schools did not possess personal autonomy in selecting jobs, and organizations lacked the authority to recruit or dismiss employees. The Personnel and Labour Department was the central entity that directed the employment of all potential employees, including graduates and veterans who were distributed to various sectors (Leung, 1994). It is reasonable that older Chinese academics/carers' life courses are manipulated by political and organisational arrangements that led to relative standardisation.

3.4.4 Linked Lives

This researcher hypothesises that family and workforce are two major contexts to be discussed when exploring the linked lives dimensions of LCT. As Bandura (2006) denoted, autonomy of personal circumstances is not where people's life trajectories reside. Instead, people have to achieve their life goals under interdependent input through cooperation with others. This research contemplates that linked-life factors could have a significant impact on individuals' life and career trajectories. Hence, the factors or difficulties associated with FCR deserve investigation in families of older Chinese workers; in addition, to achieve a more active and effective later life, older people may need help from their families.

The concept of work-life balance has long been applied and discussed in business studies as a metric with which to measure employee well-being and a factor that could potentially affect work performance. Tsai and Chen (2017) explained that it has been widely noticed that employees' physical and psychological health could be affected by work-life conflicts. Frone's (2000) national study, a survey of 8,098 individuals in the US, also demonstrated that pressure from work-life conflicts is a detrimental factor to employees' mental health which triggers anxieties and psychological problems. Gallie and Russell (2009) analysed data from a survey of 7 EU countries on work-life conflicts. The countries had different conditions: Their results showed that Norway and Netherlands possessed the lowest work-life tension and had shorter working hours; that of France was the highest, ranking above the UK and Germany.

On the topic of interpersonal relationships and their effect on life course, Gilbert and Powell said,

> Family are made up of interpersonal relationships within and between generations that are subject to both the formal rhetoric of public discourse, and self-stories that connect them together. The notion of family is, then, an amalgam of policy discourse and everyday negotiation and as such alerts us to the wider social implications of those relationships for the social construction of informal care. (Gilbert and Powell, 2005, p. 54).

Because the family transmits values and habits during interactions between family members in daily discourse, it could be extrapolated that agentic orientation may have an intimate relationship with the nurturing process embedded in family life. Thus, people's ways of perceiving the world and their behaviours are shaped. The domain of family could not be neglected in developments of informal eldercare.

The family is still the main unit supporting the later lives of older people, and the Chinese government has also been promoting that family should support older people's lives as it is still a significant pressure for the state to give pension (Bartlett & Phillips, 1997; Woo et al., 2002). This researcher is inclined to observe that China has been following a long and profound tradition of working adults taking responsibility to support their older family members. This could be rather relevant when the country is bearing the pressure of supporting laws and schemes that provide public services and resources for older people. According to Barlett and Phillips (1997), family law states that spouses, parents, children and grandchildren are legal supporters for older people in the family. Chinese family law refers to the 1980 Marriage Law, which is 'part of a policy to regulate the country through law, to enhance morals and to protect people's rights regarding marriage and the family, thus safeguarding the common interests of society as a whole by consolidating socialist rules on marriage' (Zhang, 2002, p. 399).

There could be pressure, caused by changes to the family structure, from Chinese society that influences older Chinese workers' work and family lives. As Zimmer and Kwong (2003) noted, due to the implementation and relaxation of the one-child policy, the number of available and traditional supporters (adult children) for the aging population in China was significantly reduced, so they will require more support from the government. The proportion of traditional supporters has is predicted to decline from over six working adults for each

older person in 1998 to approximately two working adults for each older person in 2040 (Zimmer & Kwong, 2003).

Transitioning state policy to pension reform, which possesses a much wider frame based on its design, may become necessary for contemporary China to pursue (Cai & Cheng, 2014). This research argues that the independence or possibility for independence of older Chinese people deserves investigation, and relevant data could be a valuable resource in studying older Chinese employees and recommending retirement policies.

According to Cai and Cheng (2014), two factors could drive potential change of older Chinese people transitioning from depending on family for physical and financial eldercare assistance. The first factor is the smaller family size (4.4 individuals in 1982 down to 3.1 individuals in 2010) driven by booming migration and decreasing fertility. This has made Chinese families more unstable and too fragile for eldercare. The second is the market-driven economy, which has sparked enormous economic activity that is designed around individual eligible employees and gives relatively less consideration to their families.

As this research has discussed previously, pressure for Chinese families to provide eldercare seems to have increased. The number of available adults to provide financial support to the older people in the family has been reduced, and opportunities to provide non-monetary care have largely been eliminated because of the increasing demand by employers for more career dedication alongside the competitive environment and expectation of migration. Marks' (1998) findings indicate an accumulation of mental stress and anxiety by giving eldercare to weak, sick or disabled older people in the family (Marks, 1998). Marks' (1998) quantitative research explored the impact on caregivers of employment during mid-life, demonstrating a link between providing eldercare to disabled or frail older family members and worsened mental condition in terms of both work and family lives.

According to Wu and Li (2012), senior parents in China receive intergenerational financial transfers, which are mainly contributed by adult children in three major forms: regular transfers (monetary support), non-regular transfers (gifts/hongbao on social events such as weddings, birthdays, funerals, vacations and medical emergencies); and non-monetary transfers (in-kind gifts). The generational bond is more intimate in China compared to Western countries. Cooperation between generations of senior parents and younger adults towards family economic well-being and household responsibilities have become a prevalent phenomenon in China. As Kincannon et al. (2005) related, in 2000, 40% of Chinese retirees above 65 had been assisted by pension schemes in retirement. However, 50% of the retirees depended mainly on family support to finance their life. In addition, female older people (82%) and the oldest old, aged above 80 (71% for males and 89% for females), relied more on family support.

In reality, many older people are also the main contributors to their families both in household responsibilities and economic wealth. Prince et al. (2016) conducted a large study consisting of individual interviews among 3,177 older people from urban and rural areas of Peru, Mexico and China. This study indicated that older people from urban China, by applying their received pensions, are major contributors to the income of their households. In the current research, investigation was conducted on how families of older Chinese academics/carers cooperate to support FCR and how older academics and their senior parents are applied as resource for FCR.

Moreover, in urban areas of China, living with senior parents is widely adopted as a problem-solving strategy to complement housing deficiency and limited government provisions for childcare and eldercare resources (Chen, 2005). This research has observed that the 'combined family' of three generations tends to become a family strategy for economic rather than virtual purposes. Here, the virtuous perspective refers to compliance

with the notion of '*Xiao',* a duty and respectful virtue of people to support their own parents' later lives. Because it is clearly economical and effective that senior parents take more FCR to release younger adults from such pressure in their work-life balance, it also seems necessary for working adults to take care of and support the later lives of the old.

Many families take the strategy of asking the senior parents to migrate to live with the adult couples in their new cities so they can take care of the grandchildren. Problems such as intergenerational conflicts, difficulties in managing time and FCR may occur. As Bartlett and Phillips (1997) have indicated, smaller family sizes and interruption of migration have become two big factors creating challenges and difficulties for eldercare.

Du and Yang (2010) have illustrated as shown in a survey of older Chinese populations in 2000, older Chinese parents have made significant contributions to their families. They provide support with childcare, housework and maintenance, which has helped younger workers greatly to focus on their career and improve their working efficiency. In 2000, 40% of urban older Chinese people supported their adult children with household and childcare. 75% of rural older people in China took care of their adult children's houses. More than 50% assisted their adult children with housework and 45% of took part in the care of their grandchildren. Out of the support for their adult children discussed above, more females than males have taken part. Older females have significantly relaxed the pressure of adult children and social pressure (Du & Yang, 2010).

There have been some studies on the ageing population in China, but these have primarily focused on the individual level: for example, Cai et. al's (2013) research on older Chinese workers' behavioural and attitudinal characters on retirement and Wu et. al's (2005) research investigating the psychological health of older Chinese in Hong Kong who participated in voluntary work. However, there lacks research in exploring the relationship between work and family among older workers in China.

As has been discussed previously, EWL may become an efficient strategy for China to improve the labour shortage. Nonetheless, this solution to improve labour participation may neglect the challenges associated with linked-life pressure from Chinese families. As Loretto and Vickerstaff (2012) have stated, retirement is not only an individual decision but a family issue. Family has significant impacts on older workers' lives and career management in China. Cai et al. (2013) illustrated that the cultural value around the group or the family has been described by a number of studies. In collectivist Eastern cultures, the profits of the group or family have been traditionally valued above individual profits. Similarly, the Confusion concepts of relationships among family members, support to old parents, and the profits, needs, and harmony of the family are largely agreed upon among the ageing Chinese population. Therefore, decision making around career and retirement trajectories may be significantly influenced by family needs.

Stratham et al. (2002) explained that undertaking FCR would push the ageing Chinese population out of the labour market. Thus, they would decide to retire in order to take on FCR. As such, the remaining elder people in the labour market, who can provide adequate support to family caring regimes, deserve attention. However, people's conceptions about family and retirement may be different than before. As discussed previously, decreasing filial piety and extended families along with growing migration may lead to less FCR for older workers than before.

'Empty nest', which refers to the condition of older people living without proximity to their adult children or descendants as caregivers, may be a factor that influences older Chinese workers' life trajectories. Studies such as Chen (2005) and Liu and Guo (2007) researched empty nest older people in China, especially from rural areas. By contrast, much less research related to empty nest has been done in the West. This researcher hypothesises that this is because FCR issues involved with empty nest stand out more in the Chinese

context than in the West. More importantly, empty nest phenomenon is a prominent issue that this research needs to take into consideration when studying life course of older Chinese academics/carers.

Compared with the West, empty nest is a social phenomenon that deserves significant attention in China. As Su et al. (2017) have pointed out, non-traditional family types, including empty nests, that emerged and are on the increase in China deserve focus when formulating ideas to improve pension schemes. Chinese families with empty nest older people have increased to 40% in 2010; those living alone themselves increased to 12%. Out of these empty nest older people, those in urban areas composed 40% while those from medium and large cities could reach no less than 50% (Su et al., 2017). Therefore, in the future, effects associated with empty nest families may become major social problems in China, requiring monumental investigation

The number of people participating in China's internal migration has reached over 200 million, even with *Hukou* system's rigorous restraint of rural–urban migration, which impeded migrant workers from obtaining ownership of housing and settling in the local cities (Chen et al., 2013; Tao et al., 2015). Due to urbanisation, many senior parents, especially those from rural areas, may have to experience life trajectories that include an 'empty nest'. Older people in this situation will have to be fully independent for they do not have children to rely on (Zhang et al., 2012). Empty nests triggered by the vast migration have started to challenge the lives of older people in China. It could also be a force that leads to the increasing trend of independence among China's older population.

Chen's (2005) findings showed changing patterns of residential conditions between generations of adult children and senior parents in China. Drawing from data based on the China Health and Nutrition Survey in the years 1991, 1993 and 1997, they found a decrease in co-residence of Chinese couples and their senior parents as well as a decrease in

interactions between the two generations. This researcher can identify certain concerns in that empty nest may trigger difficulties and inconvenience for older Chinese workers in providing eldercare. The empty nesters have to be fully independent and tolerate the loneliness, which could be extremely difficult for older Chinese parents. China's National Committee on Ageing reported 49.3% of whole Chinese older population were living in empty nest in 2010 (Zhang et al., 2019). Therefore, it merits investigation to look into approaches to improve the life quality of empty-nested older people.

The literature around the empty nest in China has come to a consensus that there is a negative effect on the life and well-being of the empty nesters of senior parents. For example, Liu and Guo (2007) did a survey from Yuan'an County in Hubei province. They compared 275 older people from empty nests and 315 who are not empty nesters in the rural area. The result of their investigation suggested feelings of loneliness in both of the groups, while empty nesters showed a greater intensity of loneliness. Another study which also indicated a negative effect on the health of older empty nesters is that of Duan et al. (2017), which pertained to damage in cognition triggered by mental depression.

Studies have investigated the ageing Chinese population through the familial perspective in terms of the level of support from adult children to their senior parents. For example, Li and Xiao (1998) tested theories around the factors influencing financial support to senior parents in China. Cai et al. (2006) examined the effectiveness of children's support to older retired parents with low retirement income. Zimmer and Kwong (2003) investigated the relationship between family size and support given to ageing parents in China with comparisons of current effects and future implications. Their result shows that the number of children in a family could impact the support seen by senior parents; however, Zimmer and Kwong indicate that the decrease of support for older people in the future will not be as drastic as expected. By contrast, this research proposes to focus not only on the

interrelationship between family members or familial operations influencing older workers'

careers and lives. This research includes a multi-levelled investigation into the sociocultural

environment.

Li et al. (2012) revealed that few studies investigated receivers of eldercare in China

and that even fewer investigations were conducted around caregivers or eldercare receivers

from the rural areas of China. Li et al. studied eldercare receivers with chronic diseases and

the caregivers who spent most of their daily lives with them, and made comparisons between

those people from rural and urban China. However, this research has gathered information

about care receivers living primarily in rural China, specifically the senior parents of the

sample participants. Long distances separate them, creating further challenges to eldercare in

contemporary China, which is an urgent issue in need of investigation.

Another factor in linked-life perspective discussed in this section is that of

generational differences. This research has explored generational conflicts in Chinese

families and thus older Chinese people's life and career management. Chen et al. (2010)

theorised that cohorts from different ages could be impacted differently by a similar historical

or social event. Giele and Elder (1998) pointed out that life trajectories of individuals and

cohorts are influenced by social meanings and rules, as demonstrated by cohort differences

between generations. Thus, it could be observed that people from different generations may

possess different perceptions and identifications towards same event.

According to Egri and Ralston (2004), Chinese history has seen radical social, cultural,

political, and economic changes, from an extremely poor economy and instability in the

Republican Era, from 1911 to 1949, to prosperity driven by social reforms and modern

society under Deng Xiaoping's leadership since 1978. During these 70 to 80 years, China has

experienced the major social changes of the Great Cultural Revolution, or political reforms

merging traditional Confucianism with Maoist and Marxist-Leninist ideology and Western

124

elements (Egri & Ralson, 2004). Between generations, people had been living under wildly varying social backgrounds, political economies, education systems, and levels of globalisation. Therefore, it is not difficult to infer that there could be major changes between different generations in contemporary China.

The findings of Egri and Ralson (2004) also indicated the prevalence of more entrepreneurial and individualistic values in the younger generation compared with former generations. Egri and Ralson (2004) stated that 'generations growing up during periods of socioeconomic and physical insecurity (e.g., social upheaval, war, economic distress) learn modernist survival values (e.g., economic determinism, rationality, materialism, conformity, and respect for authority). Alternatively, generations growing up during periods of socioeconomic security learn postmodernist values (e.g., egalitarianism, individualism, interpersonal trust, tolerance of diversity, self-transcendence)' (p. 211). This research considers that people from different generations may develop different strategies and habits in dealing with work-life issues and relationships with colleagues. This deserves focus in studies of management and leadership as well as work-life balance.

According to Wang and Wang (2017), people's values and social interactions are changing rapidly along with the sudden increase of quality of life between about 2015 and 2017, as China completed its transformation into a market economy. This has led to immense variations between workplace managers belonging to different generations. Wang and Wang's (2017) study in China showed that managers from the new generation have achieved better team performance than those from the older generation. Simultaneously, younger managers in China are less proficient at *guanxi*. Compared to their older counterparts, they have been limited in accumulation of *guanxi* and thus see fewer advantages to it. Wang and Wang found that younger managers' strengths lay in organizational performance, which could not necessarily be linked to *guanxi*. This researcher suspects that it is not only

125

managers of different ages that could bring significant differences: older Chinese workers are situated in an environment with colleagues from all levels, forming immense gaps stemming from rapid socioeconomical and technological changes along with significant regional cultural differences.

The major social, economic and political changes have led to significant distinctive characteristics among people from different generations in China (Sun & Wang, 2010; Ma et al., 2016; Shan et al., 2016). Shan et al. found a conspicuous increase in the perceived value of luxury brands among younger generations than older generations in China, while the traditional value of thriftiness has declined. According to Ma et al. and Shan et al., older Chinese possess more propensity towards Confucian and conformity conceptions, while younger Chinese grew up in a social background that gives more weight to individualism, independence and self-awareness. Sun and Wang's (2010) study from Shanghai indicated that young Chinese have immensely accepted modern values replacing traditional values and tend to be more secular and individualist. This researcher is interested in whether generational gaps are experienced by older Chinese academics/carers and how they deal with the changing environment and interacting with work colleagues or family members from different generations.

According to Yi et al. (2015), there has been a list of studies working on generational differences in the workplace from the Western context, especially the US, while relevant research from other cultures is still lacking. Fewer studies still have been done in investigating older Chinese workers/carers' perceptions and experiences towards generational gaps. It is important to study ageing in China and to learn and understand older Chinese workers/carers' well-being, especially of a psychological nature. Cheng et al. (2018) pointed out that there is shortage of research in how eldercare in China could be influenced by the

major socio-economic reforms, fast urbanisation and ageing environment, in contrast to the emerged economies who have already passed the experience of population ageing.

The last linked-life factor covered in this section is the topic of *guanxi*. This research has discussed *guanxi* previously in section 2.2 on the working culture of China, mainly referring to its organizational context. As the aim of this research is to analyse Chinese context and agentic orientations of older Chinese academics/carers, the remainder of this section pays attention to individual orientations towards *guanxi*.

It has been addressed in the literature, including Bian (1994), Zhang and Zhang (2006), Cheung et al. (2008), Wei et al. (2010) and Wei et al. (2012), that *guanxi* favours rewards to employees or advancements of employees' careers. As Zhang and Zhang (2006) have mentioned, there lacks investigation into how *guanxi* affects organisational performances. Few studies have measured the extent to which *guanxi* has been valued in organisational cultures in China, or how the efficacy of organisational performance could be enhanced through the mechanism of *guanxi*. However, *guanxi* is important in the linked-life perspective of older Chinese workers' life courses as a cultural factor deeply rooted in Chinese societal and organisational histories. The focus of this research is not to measure the impact of *guanxi* on organizational performance; however, this research has investigated how older Chinese academics/carers perceive themselves in experiences of being influenced, facilitated or challenged by the structural factor of *guanxi* and their reactions toward related issues of *guanxi*.

According to Zhang and Zhang (2006), the historical pattern of building up personal connections pertaining to *guanxi* in Chinese culture, which is distinct from contemporary networking in the West, started to exist around 200 years ago. It has direct and significant impacts on organisational operations and social values in the contemporary, fast-changing

environment. It also has been predicted that *guanxi* would affect Chinese organisational operations and sociocultural values in a long term (Zhang & Zhang, 2006).

In the reciprocal type of *guanxi* summarised by Zhang and Zhang, each individual or group could benefit, and all actors from a family or social network including family members, close friends, neighbours, classmates, etc. can participate in the exchange of benefits, trust and assurance. They may also work together as a group to generate difficulties for competitors. There is an expectation towards the person who has accepted favours from someone to pay back another favour or provide help in return (Zhang & Zhang, 2006).

The utilitarian type of *guanxi* is associated with reciprocal exchanges between general acquaintances and seperating themselves from strangers or people with anonymity. Crucially, unlike the obligatory type of *guanxi* (commitment and obligations from family members) and reciprocal type of *guanxi*, utilitarian *guanxi* requires a 'buyer–seller relationship' and a necessary repayment of favour, and the 'buyer–seller relationship' is a formally legal or contractual relationship and strictly defined. (Zhang & Zhang, 2006, pp. 382-383). Additionally, as Zhang and Zhang illustrated, utilitarian *guanxi* is often utilised between people of unequal positions in a hierarchy, in which those at a lower level provide monetary repayment to the higher-level employee, who provides certain career benefits such as the opportunity for promotion.

Wei et al.'s (2010) viewpoint was that the reliance on *guanxi* in the workplace could presumably be detrimental to employees with weaker political capabilities. Wei et al. tested supervisor and subordinate relationships and enumerated *guanxi*'s detrimental effects on employees with fewer political skill capabilities. According to Chen and Francesco (2000), in Chinese culture, employees' organisational loyalty is significantly emphasised in terms of superior domination by the top manager, while the organisation's leaders have been assumed as symbols of the organisation. 'Indeed, this is especially true under Chinese leadership,

which emphasises people and relationships more than job tasks' (Warren et al., 2004, as quoted in Wei et al., 2010, p. 441).

3.5 Summary

In this Chapter, the researcher has discussed the theoretical framework with extensive reviews from the literature covering LCT, structure and agency, and active ageing. This research has identified research gaps in terms of lacking studies on older workers with FCR in China, especially male carers. There also lacks studies on exploring individual experiences of achieving WLB and employee well-beings especially from developing countries. This research has found that most LCT studies have focused on specific situational factors or impacts of early life events to later life trajectories. There is a need of LCT studies based on comprehensive context, while contemporary China provides a rich background of economic transition and major social changes that deserve investigation. It also deserves investigations of the distinctive Chinese cultural factors including generational differences, Guanxi, and FCR for life course studies in China. There has been limited investigation on lay voices towards active ageing in the existing literature. Studies on active ageing in China is significantly underdeveloped.

This research established research question 1. What factors have influenced older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories? to address the gap of LCT studies in China with investigations on distinctive factors embedded in the Chinese culture (e.g. Guanxi, filial piety, widening generational gaps) and their influences to life courses of Chinese older workers. This research established question 2. How do older Chinese academics/carers

navigate major turning points in their life courses? to address the gap of lacking

investigations on active ageing in China, and agentic orientation of sandwiched older

employees in managing WLB and dealing with major turning points associated with FCR in

their life courses in China. This research established question 3. How are the life courses of

older Chinese academics/carers linked to the Chinese broader political and socio-economic,

organizational, and linked life contexts, as well as human agency? to fill the gap of lacking

context based research on life course especially focusing on Chinese socio-cultural, political

economic, and family contexts.

More importantly, it has been deemed that this research will in large part be structured

around four aspects of LCT and agency and agentic orientation in order to explicitly

displaying the findings, as will be shown in the data analysis and discussion and conclusion

chapters. Section 3.4 provides important knowledge and abundant information to back up

data analysis and discussions of this research. Section 3.4 has reviewed the LCT factors from

literature listed in Figure 2 and justified application of LCT to Chinese context. The data

analysis, discussion and conclusion chapters will address which research findings show

consistency with or contradiction to this chapter's literature review.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter encompasses theoretical justifications that back up its methodology of this research, and demonstrates in details how research methods were designed, progressed, implemented and processed. The researcher conducted fieldwork comprising 35 biographical interviews based in Shenyang, China, which provided valuable and enriching resources for the analysis of this research.

4.2 Research Philosophy

'Research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge' (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 124). This research focuses on the development of China's ageing society and endeavours to develop the knowledge to explain social phenomena around ageing in China. Simultaneously, this research aims to contribute new knowledge to LCT by demonstrating and analysing the interplay between agency (older Chinese academics/carers) and structure (the Chinese context). Saunders et al. believed that a researcher develops new knowledge during the process of answering a research question. The research questions covered by this thesis are: 1. What factors have influenced older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories? 2. How do older Chinese academics/carers navigate major turning points in their life courses? 3. How are the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers linked to the Chinese broader political and socio-economic, organizational, and linked life contexts, as well as human agency?

During the process of answering the research questions, a researcher could produce a range of assumptions in various categories. Those assumptions may be epistemological

(associated with legitimate, reasonable and acceptable human knowledge); or ontological (about the reality in which the researcher investigates); Saunders et al. (2016). Therefore, this researcher has continuously conceived of assumptions based on the literature review and the data collected along the way as the project was conducted. In the previous sections, the researcher speculated on potential factors that influence the life trajectories of older Chinese academics/carers and used them as primitive guidelines for the epistemological construction of this research. Questions included in the qualitative biographical interviews are developed based on the life grid model, and potential factors are derived from the literature review.

'Philosophically, researchers make claims about what is knowledge (ontology), how we know it (epistemology), what values go into it (axiology), how we write about it (rhetoric), and the processes for studying it (methodology)' (Creswell, 2009, p. 6). There are four schools of knowledge including postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2009). Crucially, this research has taken a constructivist approach to building new knowledge in LCT and the Chinese context of population ageing.

The aim of advocacy and participatory research is to address issues of marginalised people that the postpositive approach fails to cover. For example, there are issues in contemporary societies which deserve more social justice such as inequality, alienation, domination, etc. (Creswell, 2009). By contrast, traditional social science studies focus on comprehending social orders (Bradbury-Huang, 2010).

Pragmatic worldview addresses behaviour, circumstances and outcome but does not focus on former conditions like postpositivist worldview. Pragmatism prefers mixed methods of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in research to develop knowledge surrounding the social problem (Creswell, 2009). Applying a mixed-method strategy may be able to help develop a richer understanding of the social phenomenon. For instance, a researcher could apply a qualitative method to explain the questions that quantitative method is unable to

explain comprehensively, while a quantitative method is essential clearly demonstrate or categorise the phenomenon.

However, there could be a shortcoming of applying mixed methods. Qualitative and quantitative methods are usually two contradictory approaches which emphasise different values, as discussed previously. In mixed-method research, focus must be allocated to two approaches so that the value of each approach may be addressed. As Saunders et al. (2016) stated, applying mixed methods could potentially diminish the the value of the data sets collected from qualitative and quantitative approaches. More specifically, using mixed methods runs the risk of the research losing its explanatory or exploratory abundance when the qualitative data is quantitated. This research aims to investigate the sophisticated contextual environment for older Chinese academics/carers composed of numerous dimensions and factors interplaying and synchronising with each other. Thus, this researcher determined that a qualitative method is what this research needs so as not to limit the richness of analysis from multi-diversified levels.

The postpositivist worldview is mostly applied in quantitative research rather than qualitative research: It is deterministic in exhibiting what triggers results or effects. It is also reductionist, restricting conceptions into a narrow and discreet scale of ideas to measure factors to address research questions or hypotheses (Creswell, 2009).

There have been quantitative studies in the literature regarding ageing. For example, Zhou and Hou (1999) used a covariate model to appraise and compare the economic well-being, patterns of entering the labour market, and the relevant major life events between the sent-down youth and those who remained in cities. Their results imply negative impacts of these policies on sent-down youth in their later lives. Quantitative research usually holds a stronger position in proving data's objectivity and accuracy. However, it also limits abundant demonstration and deep analysis of the social phenomenon by simply displaying categories.

133

In this case, a qualitative approach avoids this potential shortcoming of a quantitative approach with regard to this research.

Social constructivist worldview is the typical approach for qualitative research. Rather than assigning values around social phenomena and sorting them into small scales or categories, social constructivist researchers endeavour to explore and understand sophisticated and diverse viewpoints and explanations. Social constructivist researchers derive subjective assumptions from their experiences with the targets they investigate (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative studies are more discreet and straightforward, and they preferable for objectivity. By contrast, qualitative research is more capable of grasping the multifaceted and complex nature of explaining social sources and phenomena. The viewpoints and experiences of older Chinese people, which could contain extensive factors on both the macro and micro levels, are essential to analyse and answer the research questions. This research needs a qualitative approach, which is more appropriate for investigating and explaining the sophisticated situations and life trajectories of older Chinese people with caring responsibilities.

The main aim of this research is to investigate the life trajectory and experience of older Chinese academics/carers; therefore, hearing actual, personal voices speak from their psychological states is important in this research. Denzin and Lincoln (2002) stated, 'Qualitative research is conducted not to confirm or disconfirm earlier findings, but rather to contribute to a process of continuous revision and enrichment of understanding of the experience or form of action under study' (p. 331). This research attempts to enrich and improve the study of the experiences of older Chinese academics/carers and how they they manage their later careers and FCR. This research aims to discover more in-depth details to explain the ongoing social phenomenon of the ageing Chinese population.

Qualitative interviews are required in obtaining a deeper understanding of older workers' lives and experiences; quantitative research could not suffice for aim of this research. Qualitative methods (interpretivism) are necessary to explore understudied phenomena or to solve problems, giving researchers opportunities to unveil the complexities embedded in the phenomenon with deep investigations of different dimensions, human behaviours, and daily life experiences based on a thorough framework (Khan, 2014). This research intended to uncover and understand the complexities of older Chinese workers' experiences in balancing their work with FCR as well as how they could solve any problems they have encountered.

Consequently, applying qualitative research could possess advantages in studying population ageing and answering the research questions on which this study is based. Qualitative studies seek the more in-depth depictions of social phenomena and the more detailed analysis of human behaviour and reactions towards ageing that are needed by ageing and life course studies. Hung and Chiu's (2003) work is representative of qualitative studies of life course and ageing. They conducted open-ended interviews in 1999 with 80 people who were redundant (43 women, 37 men, 19% of whom were in their 30s, 72% were in their 40s and 9% were in their 50s). They applied snowball sampling, and their findings identified a 'lost generation' in their 40s to early 50s who were having the greatest disadvantages in employment due to both age and the collective major social event of *Xiagang* (caused to lose one's job by organisational redundancy) in which they were involved.

To pursue the research questions, the researcher has deemed a constructivist view most appropriate. The social constructivist approach emphasises richness in explanations and analysis of sophisticated social phenomena which benefits from qualitative data. This research aims to construct the social phenomenon of factors influencing older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories. Consequently, the researcher has attempted to

manoeuvre continuous and iterative processes of conceiving and revising epistemological and ontological assumptions in order to build the new knowledge of the Chinese ageing society. This research is theory driven by LCT. The next section demonstrates the development of this research during data collection processes.

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 Recruitment. This research accessed ten universities from Shenyang City in Liaoning Province of PR China and obtained interview participants consisting of older academics who also have FCR. The researcher had decided to choose academia for fieldwork, due to its richness in the resource of older employees with FCR, and especially older female employees in order to keep a gender balance of participants; Rhoads and Gu (2012) also claimed a figure of around a 45% rate of female faculty in higher education in China, undoubtedly high compared to many other countries. However, female representation from seniority or higher ranks is still low in academia, including in China (Zhang, 2010; Rhoads & Gu, 2012; Tartari & Salter, 2015). More importantly, university academics tend to possess stronger human agency in dealing with major turning points responding to structural restrictions and opportunities. Comparing to factory workers, academics are highly educated and possess bigger social capital. This research is interested in how older academics adopt and negotiate their agency to manage personal autonomy in making life decisions.

Additionally, there is reported to be more work flexibility in academia. This research is interested in how older Chinese academics/carers utilise this flexibility in managing WLB and taking FCR. However, literature from an international perspective has made the consensus argument that gender inequality exists in higher education due to FCR faced by females in a male-dominated cultural and social context that lacks policies to assist female carers (Rhoads & Gu, 2012). It is also found that the main challenge for female academics stems from the work–family tensions in switching between the traditional and modern conceptions (Zhang, 2010; Rhoads & Gu, 2012; Tartari & Salter, 2015). Therefore, the

researcher has been interested in gender differences in keeping WLB with FCR, and whether and how older female academics deal with the relevant challenges. This research may be limited in merely focusing on the field of academia. Future studies on life course or ageing societies in China may attempt to investigate other career fields including public government or different types of industrial organisations.

According to Saunders et al. (2016), there are different levels of access to participants in business and management or social science research, referring to traditional access, which contains face-to-face interactions, internet-mediated access, intranet-mediated access (by an internal researcher who belongs to the organisation being researched) and hybrid access. This research utilised traditional access with face-to-face interviews to avoid inconveniences and communication barriers triggered by long-distance, internet-mediated communication based between a researcher in the UK and respondents in China. Travel to China was necessary for the researcher to obtain this research. Instead of undertaking intranet-mediated access, the researcher held a position as an external researcher to the targeted universities in China.

Firstly, the researcher arranged to contact the gatekeepers of the target universities as the main strategy of accessing participants. The researcher then asked the gatekeepers to distribute information leaflets (please see Appendix D) to the university staff requesting voluntary participation as respondents. However, all paper documents used in communications with gatekeepers, potential participants, and the 35 interviewees during the data-collection process were written in Chinese, and all the interviews were conducted in Mandarin. According to Saunders et al. (2016), a concern should be considered by the researcher that the targeted organisation's gatekeeper may reject the request for access and have no interest in cooperation with the research. Saunders et al. (2016) pointed out three main reasons that the gatekeeper may decline to cooperate with researcher: First, there is not sufficient value of the research to the organisation, cohort or individuals. Second, there may

be too much sensitivity in the topic nature, or confidential information is involved. Moreover, the gatekeeper may have concerns about the competence and credibility of the researcher.

In order to gain successful access to participants, the researcher first contacted gatekeepers for potential participants in advance and negotiated access to the university or university schools to recruit participants. The researcher then contacted people at the senior level (dean of the school) and provided documentation (the leaflet) with detailed information on participant criteria and the objectives and purpose of this research for purpose of negotiation and dissemination. Ritchie and Lewis (2014) advised the researcher to be sensitive to the structure and hierarchy of the organisation and seek authorisation from gatekeepers at the senior level. Ritchie and Lewis also suggested that the researcher give clear information about research objectives, purposes, plans on the process, uses of the findings, and issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity.

Appendix E was used for notetaking when contacting potential participants for convenience in identifying and measuring their eligibility for this research. Participant recruitment was an incremental and iterative procedure throughout the data collection process: The researcher could complete the first part of the research and afterwards seek further access (Saunders et al., 2016). In order to ensure at least 30 biographical interviews, the researcher initiated interactions with as many universities as possible throughout the four-and-a-half-month data collection period in China. This ensured recruiting a sufficient number of participants who have reached the sample criteria of this research with gender balance.

4.3.2 Sampling. Qualitative research applies non-probability sampling while quantitative or statistical studies apply probability sampling. In non-probability sampling, participants are selected based on traits of the population studied. Hence, qualitative research is usually designed as small-scale and in-depth, while the sample is not statistically

representative (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014). Consequently, this research recruited 35 participants (19 females and 16 males).

As this research exists to study the sophisticated condition of the ageing population and the complex issues around FCR in contemporary China, the researcher conducted non-probability sampling, which emphasised the characters of the older Chinese academics/carers whom this research aims to investigate. Figure 5 is the grid of respondents delineating the recruitment criteria and the characteristics of participants for this research. The participants recruited in this research have fit the listed criteria. More importantly, most of the participants have eldercare responsibilities, while some of the participants have childcare responsibilities or dual caring responsibilities.

Please see Appendix F that details the demographic information about the participants collected during January-April in 2017 when the interview were taken place. All of the 35 participants are university academics, except Jennie (library staff) and Mike (head of department). During the data collection period, the researcher decided to include these two participants in case she could not find sufficient number of participants that have reached the sample criteria. However, during data analysis, this researcher has found data from these two interviews could undoubtedly contribute to this research on answering the questions. More importantly, though Jennie and Mike are not academics, they have still been working in universities for many years. Their life courses have been significantly influenced by the policies and environment of state arranged organisations as similar as other participants.

Figure 5:

Age:	50+ years old, including those beyond retirement age who have returned to work.
Gender:	16 males and 18 females
Academic position:	Academic staff from different levels (teaching staff, professors, academic staff without teaching responsibilities, administrative positions such as director, dean etc.)

FCR:	Either have eldercare responsibilities, or childcare responsibilities, or have both.
Family status:	Currently married or divorced

This research follows a purposive sampling strategy, as the aim of this research is to study a particular group of people with particular characteristics and situations. Ritchie and Lewis (2014) advised that if researchers intend to investigate and study central aims and questions with details, they should employ purposive sampling criteria. Thus, the sampling in this study was purposive, and participants were selected because they possessed specific characteristics or features, positions or responsibilities, behaviours, or experiences (in this case, older academics with FCR; Ritchie and Lewis, 2014).

Hung and Chiu's work used a snowball sampling strategy, which is a particularly effective strategy for case study, especially when it requires a large number of participants, because it can be convenient and effective in acquiring a large number of participants in a short time. They involved 80 participants; by contrast, this research focuses on more in-depth analysis on the sophisticated social phenomenon of the Chinese population ageing and resulting FCR. Thus, a small scale would be more appropriate. According to Bryman (2016), the minimum requirement of qualitative interviews for published research is 20 to 30. Zhang and Goza (2006) worked on research of older Chinese people's condition under the influence of OCP in 2000, conducting 15 interviews of 15 working-class couples from both urban and rural areas of Inner Mongolia, Hangzhou, Shanghai and Zhejiang provinces wherein all participants had only one child. The number of samples in this study is 35.

Liaoning province ranks ahead of other provinces in China in population ageing, especially in the rural areas and agricultural sector due to decreasing fertility, greater longevity and rural–urban migrations. Liaoning's average population age is the highest in the whole country. For example, 15.4% of the population was aged 60 and above in Liaoning

compared to 13.3% at the national level (Li & Sicular, 2013). Therefore, significant social problems related to ageing may arise along with FCR issues for older workers living in Liaoning. This is especially true of participants whose senior parents are mostly living in rural areas without sufficient resources to supporting their eldercare, either economically or manually, from government assistance or families.

Interviewing more than one participant at same time would seem to allow the co-participants a chance to communicate with each other. However, this may influence the responses of each participant in a given interview. Thus, the researcher conducted individual interviews wherein participants were given sufficient time and focus to think and answer with their own voices and opinions.

The researcher mainly accessed participants in the city of Shenyang due to time, resource and accessibility limitations as a PhD student. Hence, this research may not be able to represent the whole aging population in China. Zhang and Goza's (2006) findings were that people from rural China have more urgent difficulties in supporting eldercare compared with urban families. Zhang and Goza's research possessed the advantage of covering more locations. Nonetheless, as discussed previously, small-scale sampling could be viewed as more appropriate for this research as a qualitative study with the purpose of in-depth analysis. More importantly, accessing a smaller number of participants from similar social groups or cultural backgrounds could be more helpful in acquiring richness for in-depth qualitative analysis.

Ritchie and Lewis (2014) stated that if qualitative researchers found existing data collected insufficient to gain valid evidence, or if they are not clear enough, they could add more participants as a supplement or add a second sample to the same study. Therefore, the final sample size was edited to 35 from the originally-planned 32 with a gender balance of 16 males and 16 females since two of the interviews with older female academics/carers suffered

from initial concerns of recording quality. After the transcription process, the researcher has confirmed that all of the 35 interviews are valid.

4.3.3 Data collection. Data collection took place over four and a half months in China. Qualitative interviews (e.g., face-to-face interviews, telephone or internet interviews, focus groups) could attempt to extract perceptions and viewpoints from participants through unstructured or open-ended questions (Creswell, 2009). The researcher intended to conduct semi-structured interviews. Hence, there was a list of open-ended questions designed to inform the interviews while ensuring retrieval of the essential information and answers needed for the research question. Simultaneously, semi-structured interviews have allowed participants to give extra expanded ideas about their experiences and perceptions that fixed questions may have ignored. Bryman (2016) advised that semi-structure interviews are applicable when a study possesses a clear focus instead of a general topic and it could be used to address problems and issues more specifically.

However, there are shortcomings to semi-structured, open-question interviews. For example, as Bryman (2016) has pointed out, the open-question strategy often makes the interviews time-consuming, which requires more effort from participants who need to talk longer and give more information. Thus, this researcher endeavoured to show patience and a friendly attitude towards the participants and spoke in objective and mild ways. These are essential interviewing skills that the qualitative researcher should bear in mind. Also essential is contacting participants in advance to ensure convenient scheduling of both the participants and the researcher as well as the time management skills to leave enough time for the interviews.

Most of the interviews took more than two hours, ranging from a minimum of 50 minutes to a maximum of three and a half hours. Some of the interviews had to be broken into two different dates due to unpredictable interview times, the participants' schedules or

unexpected work tasks. For example, one of the participants had to stop the interview to

attend a meeting at work. Thus, the second half of interview was conducted another day.

Bryman (2016) reminds us that the extensive and complicated information drawn from

respondents in long-form interviews with open questions may create challenges for

researchers in coding and analysing data. Therefore, note-taking and recording devices were

used during the interviews.

During the interviews, the researcher took notes on participants' responses that held

key information while the interviews were recorded by three tapes. Afterwards, transcription

of the interviews was completed in Mandarin. The researcher then translated the contents of

key quotes (paragraphs or lines of notes) that were used in the Data Analysis chapter. This

research does not include full transcripts of data as this is unnecessary and time-inefficient,

since transcripts of each interview generally occupied 30 to 60 pages, of which only the small

percentage holding the most important information was used in the analysis.

The design of the interview questions makes use of the life grid approach to

structuring interviews for qualitative study of life course and older workers (Parry et al., 1999;

Bell, 2005). This research decided to adopt the life grid approach, since it is significantly

relevant to investigating life course. Life grid approach designs a structure of interview

questions to acquire information of lived experiences led by three parts of past experiences,

current situation, and future plans. Based on this approach, the researcher could thoroughly

investigate whole life trajectories of participants. Within each part of the life grid model, the

researcher has designed a few questions that are essential to answer the research questions.

Comparing to traditional semi-structured interview method which is mainly directed

by the interviewer, life grid approach provides an opportunity for interviewees to construct

their own narrative and control the conversation with the interviewer (Rowland et al., 2019).

During the interviews of this research, this researcher has allowed the participants to select

and talk on the topics according to their own interests. Therefore, during more circumstances, this researcher has followed the participants in depicting their life courses, and this may not follow the order of the interview structure designed in Appendix C.

Rowland et al. (2019) demonstrated that the life grid approach allows more autonomy of interviewees to construct narrative, which helps with establishing rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, life grid approach facilitates more rich qualitative narratives. Rowland et al. (2019) recommend researchers applying life grid to undertake flexibility as well, in order to gain nuanced and in-depth qualitative data. In this research, after the researcher asked the designed questions from Appendix C, the participants usually could expand to more issues and information that they are willing to express. Thus life grid has been a valid tool for this research to grasp abundant and essential information of data to support the answers to the research questions.

This research exposed one disadvantage in using the life grid approach: Consecutive changes could not be involved in the questions. According to Bell (2005), the life grid approach is more event-centred, meaning questions are displayed in chronological order of sequential turning points for life trajectories. This suits the aim and objective of this research in terms of studying turning points of older Chinese academics/carers' life courses. However, the actual interviews did not result in an absolutely chronological order of questions. The flow of the discussion was decided by the participants' interests or the natural process of dialogue between the interviewees and the researcher. Nonetheless, all interview questions provided in Appendix C were included in each interview. Some of the participants contributed more beyond those questions.

As Bell discussed, in the life grid approach, participants are limited to talking about day-to-day experience. The information they give is centred around major events or turning points, so gradual changes in people's life trajectories could not be covered (Bell, 2005).

Consequently, the study structure includes more contents than the traditional application of the life-grid approach. At the end or middle of the interview, the researcher asked questions about how participants think previous turning points have influenced subsequent turning points, or about how they think they have changed after experiencing those turning points.

Bell (2005) mentioned another potential problem of applying the life-grid approach: avoiding discursive narratives and advance the interviews. Bell elaborated that researchers conducting life-grid interviews may feel hesitant to stop interviewees from giving more discursive narratives and return to the major topic. Thus, during interviews, the researcher was sensitive to what was said by interviewees, keeping talks on topic and taking good control guiding the interviews in a timely manner.

Rapport, or quickly establishing a good relationship with interviewees, is among the interview skills that researchers need to possess. Interviewees who get along well with the interviewer could feel more willing to cooperate and provide satisfactory answers to interviewers. Otherwise, interviewees may provide ineffective answers or even decline to continue the interview (Bryman, 2016). The researcher interacted with interviewees with friendliness and respect. Before the start of each interview, the researcher explained to the interviewee the aims and purpose of the research. The researcher also promised the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewee and allowed for withdrawal in order to build mutual trust. During the interview, the researcher monitored the interviewee's physical and mental condition and ensured their comfort, especially if sensitive topics arose.

The interviews with participants Victoria and Chrystal were conducted twice, broken into separate dates by sudden changes in their work plans. The last half of Victoria's interview was conducted long-distance online. On the whole, the researcher has taken good control, ensured the success of the interviews and acquired sufficient and valid data. When interviewing Ann and Yuri, interviews were stopped several times when the participants had

to receive phone calls. The researcher politely stopped the interview, did not take records of their phone calls and patiently allowed them to finish the calls. No interviewees displayed signs of harassment before, during or after the interviews. The researcher has also left contact information with each interviewee for further requests. At the end of Yuri's interview, she cried when talking about her mum, who had passed away. The researcher swiftly stopped the interview to let Yuri to calm her emotions and then finished the last five minutes of the interview.

Bryman also stated that conducting a pilot study before initiating the investigation is invariably helpful. Researchers might access people out of the main study's participant group and acquire feedback from the pilot participants. This allows the researcher to undertake a preliminary analysis on various important issues to improve the interview structures. For instance, whether certain questions are ignored or whether people tend to reply to a question in similar ways (Bryman, 2016).

The researcher completed three pilot interviews before engaging in the actual fieldwork. The first pilot study was taken in distance online with a male Chinese older worker aged 51, working as a managing director from local government in Liaoning Province of China. The other two pilot studies were taken place in China town of Newcastle upon Tyne. The second pilot interviewed a female Chinese lady aged above 60, who has been working in family run restaurant in UK. The third pilot interviewed a male Chinese older people aged above 70, volunteering at the Chinese social community in China town of Newcastle upon Tyne. The most important aim of the three pilot studies were to test whether interview structure and questions are effective to gain sufficient information needed in this study. Simultaneously, the researcher took the chance of the pilot studies to practice interview skills and experiences.

The pilot study confirmed the effectiveness of the interview structure and questions. Crucially, to specifically fit the questions of this research, the researcher made certain amendments to the initial interview structure by including more questions. Initially, the interview questions followed chronological order according to the life grid approach, with the milestones of major events and turning points in participants' life and career trajectories. However, the most important part of the interview involved the interviewees' current life trajectory. To make this clearer and give focus to the interview, questions about the interviewee's current situation were moved to the beginning instead of strictly adhering to chronological order. The final sequence of interview questions started from the current stage followed by past experiences and future orientations. The final version of interview structure is shown in Appendix C.

More importantly, as a PhD student who had not yet conducted qualitative research and biographical interviews, the researcher underwent training from Newcastle University regarding these topics. The pilot study helped the researcher to gain practical experience and skills and built up the researcher's confidence and preparation skills to do the fieldwork.

4.3.4 Data analysis. Silverman (2013) stated that researchers should start data transcription and analysis once the first interview is recorded rather than after all the data have been collected. By reviewing the interviews, the researcher has the opportunity to test the concepts, methods and findings. Accordingly, this researcher conducted simultaneous data collection and data analysis. Hence, time and opportunity were gained to adjust the concept and methods before finishing data collection. Additionally, the researcher was able to identify whether existing data were effective in answering the research questions or if more interviews needed to be done.

Moreover, this researcher understands that critical thinking skills are an essential ability researchers should possess in data analysis. Thus, the researcher will not allow

objective reality to distract from the participants' emotional assumptions. Denzin and Lincoln (2002) argued that the practice of pragmatic rationality requires the trait of being persuasive and rhetorical. In other words, participants' persuasive capability in producing conversations and delivering information could be judged by participants and listeners in the dialogue.

During biographical interviews, it is normal that participants offer information coloured with personal subjectivity and emotion. Therefore, it is important that the researcher possess the capacity for critical judgement and the vigilance to distinguish the actual truth of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln stated that whether alternative voices are heard is an important criterion to evaluate the engagement, openness, and potential problematic nature of qualitative research.

This researcher has decided to adopt thematic analysis approach. This research contemplates that thematic analysis is significantly suitable to this research.

> "Thematical analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data...TA provides accessible and systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from qualitative data. Codes are the smallest units of analysis that capture interesting features of the data (potentially) relevant to the research question...Themes provide a framework for organizing and reporting the researcher's analytic observations. The aim of TA is... to identify, and interpret, key, but not necessarily all, features of the data, guided by the research question " (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p. 297).

This researcher significantly adopted the approach demonstrated by Clarke and Braun (2017) which is illustrated in details in the following paragraphs. This research considers thematic analysis as a sufficiently valid approach to identify key information from the abundant qualitative interview data. By distinguishing patterns of meanings, the researcher could gain a logical rationale to identify and summarise findings to answer research questions. Therefore, this researcher has started generating codes and collecting nodes in order to code the data detailed in the remainder of this section.

From the very beginning, the researcher repeatedly scanned all the transcribed drafts of 35 interviews. During these scanning, the researcher initially developed as many codes as

possible based on each participant's response. Therefore, based on those codes, the researcher determined factors that influenced the older Chinese academics/carers' life trajectories that could be linked to any of the four elements of LCT or agency.

For example, based on the responses of participants, this researcher has identified that 'a crucial turning point in older Chinese academics/carers' life course was that the renew of Gaokao gave them opportunity to receive higher education and immediate state arranged employment'. Thus based on this identification, this researcher created a code of 'participating Gaokao and entering university' (a code could also represent a factor to influence life course of older Chinese academics/carers) on Nvivo data analysis software. This researcher cut all relevant contents (nodes) from the transcribed drafts and put them into this code as evidence to support this identification. Similarly, this researcher has identified a number of codes along with evidence from the data on Nvivo.

Based on the nodes and codes initially discovered from the data, this researcher has created an analytical framework, an important guidline for the researcher to code the data by using Nvivo. The building of the analytical framework was also an iterative process consisting of repeated reviews of interview transcripts and coding nodes; during this process, I discussed regularly with my supervisors until arriving at the finalised framework. The analytical framework has helped this researcher to generate themes from the data, in order to construct the research findings. The creation of analytical framework and themes derives from an iterative process of reviewing data and referring back to literature review.

Appendix G is an attachment displaying a portion of the final analytical framework used in this study. In Appendix G, it can be seen that for each element of LCT, and in each aspect of agency, this approach has yielded five levels, or categories, for clarifying and organising the identified factors: the macro level, workplace, family, personal development, and others. Within each folder of the five categories, the researcher has created as many

codes as possible that could be evidenced as factors to influence life course of older Chinese academics/carers. Simultaneously, the researchers extracted as many nodes as possible from the transcripts and put them into relevant codes. Sometimes, a node from one transcript could support more than one code.

Accordingly, the researcher has analysed the data according to the theoretical framework of LCT. There were creation and deletion of codes throughout the iterative process of the researcher reviewing transcripts, extracting and categorising nodes into codes. Above all, attention was paid to exceptions among research participants: those who have differed from the trend set by the majority of participants in their principles and routines.

After coding the data using Nvivo, the researcher was able to summarise findings of this research and started writing the data analysis chapters. Firstly, the data analysis chapters were structured, with the help of the researcher's supervisors, to generate findings from this research. The findings demonstrated in the abstract and introduction, elaborated upon in the analysis chapters and summarised in the conclusion chapter, were not composed at the beginning of the analysis process or before writing the analysis chapters. They were attempted, conceived, edited, and finalised alongside three drafts of the analysis chapters.

Critical capability is essential in analysing data because it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure the credibility of data collection and to conduct an accurate and objective analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2002) pointed out another important criterion in qualitative research in terms of critical subjectivity and reflexivity: awareness of high quality, a strong intention to discriminate subtle variations in the individual and the psychological conditions of other people, or the capability to access a substitutive condition of consciousness.

For information provided by participants in the interviews, the researcher consciously maintained critical evaluation of the data, distinguishing the truthfulness of the phenomena

throughout the processes of constructing analytical framework, coding data, extracting quotes for use in analysis and writing the analysis chapters. During the last stage of writing the thesis, the researcher has also kept a reflexive review of work produced and information collected. The researcher has conquered the challenges and difficulties in coding an exhaustive information body from a large amount of data, found logical routines and principles to answer the research questions, and identified valuable findings to the literature of life course studies and studies of ageing societies in China.

The quotes used in data analysis chapters (statements of participants during the interviews) are all statements extracted from the coded nodes on Nvivo. The researcher translated these quotes from Madarin into English. As a native Chinese, the researcher is confident in having thoroughly and accurately understood the responses of the participants. The process of translating the transcripts has generated more theoretical challenge. Since the researcher is required to keep the authenticity of meaning during the translation. During the translation, this researcher has been significantly cautious in translating every vocabulary in order to avoid misunderstanding of readers due to linguistic and cultural barriers. Each social or cultural dialogue or common saying in Chinese culture used from the quotes have been carefully and explicitly explained in the data analysis chapters.

4.3.5 Developments of method. Initially, the researcher proposed to conduct a case study of 30 interviews from universities in China. In the case study, this research intended to select 10 university professors. From each professor, this research planned to gain two other participants (one from the family network, one from the workforce). This would facilitate triangulation of the situation of older Chinese workers by acquiring information and perceptions from people on different side of older workers' lives, which would in turn

comply closely with LCT in terms of structural influences to agency, especially the linked life element.

However, this research has changed method from a case study to directly interviewing no fewer than 30 university professors. The reason for this amendment was that interviewing only ten university professors may not have been sufficient to represent older people from a social background. A research sample of 30 could be better in this case. Additionally, a triangulation approach might complicate the situation as people from different sides of one's life and networks may possess contradictory perceptions, thus weakening the research findings. This may actually worsen understanding of and explanations for the experience of older people's life trajectories. Furthermore, the method of triangulation brings with it the potential of ethical problems. Participants may feel pressured to open up their mind to talk and give opinions since people from their close network will also be interviewed. Therefore, this researcher has decided to do a case study of at least 30 interviews of balanced gender.

At first, interviews were intended to take place starting in February 2017 for approximately three months. However, due to the longer examination process for ethics approval from Newcastle University, and winter vacation of Chinese higher education taking place in January and February, the final data collection period was extended to May 15, 2017.

At start of data collection, the researcher proposed to conduct data collection in at least two universities in the city of Shenyang, with sample criteria of 50+ years old and in the position of a university professor. However, in the first two weeks of the data collection period, the researcher found that finding participants to completely suit the five criteria was a big challenge. Of the first nine professors that the researcher contacted, only three reached the requirements and attended the interviews. Hence, the researcher decided to contact as many universities as possible in Shenyang.

Participants were recruited via three channels. The first sampling channel for this research was to access at least two universities to obtain participants. The researcher contacted the gatekeeper within the universities' management chains. The gatekeeper then disseminated information including the purpose of this research to the department faculty and asked them if they were interested in taking part in the interviews. The information leaflet (Appendix C) introduced potential participants to this research and contains a grid of participant criteria required for this research along with the researcher's personal contact information. There are five criteria in the grid, but the researcher was not able to gather participants that fit those criteria. The researcher ensured that all respondents were involved with either childcare or eldercare responsibilities.

As a contingency to supplement a lack of interviewees, social clubs for older people in China (i.e. the Association of Older Professors in Shenyang) were contacted with the same process as above. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher also attempted to contact gatekeepers from universities in Xiamen and Guangzhou as another supplementary approach to gain sufficient participants. However, the final 35 interviewees were all found and identified via the first channel.

During the first month of data collection, the researcher found that recruiting participants of over 50 years old was too difficult, a fact that is also due to decreased participation over age 50. As has been discussed previously, for studies of ageing, data collection could target people over 40 years of age; therefore, the age requirement was lowered to 45. Similarly, the researcher has moved from restricting interviews to university professors to including all academic staff from all levels.

This research gained ethics approval from Newcastle University before starting the first interview. During the university's administrative process in reviewing the ethics form, the research negotiated with the examiner and reached an agreement to send a summary of

153

each interview, explaining how data will be used in this research, to each participant. After receiving each participant's feedback, the researcher obtained agreement and confirmation from all participants and has been confident in using, interpreting and analysing the data with objectiveness and neutrality.

4.3.6 Ethics. The main anticipated risk of this research is that of the confidentiality of participants' personal information and the data provided in the interviews. Some participants may not want their identities revealed or their opinions regarding their work experiences and lives heard by a third person other than the researcher. Therefore, the researcher has taken the actions below in order to prevent confidential problems.

The leaflet, in the Chinese language, was given to the gatekeeper and all people who expressed interest in taking part. The gatekeepers contacted the researcher by phone to introduce potential participants and advise the researcher to contact them. During the phone calls between the researcher and potential participants, the researcher asked for more information about them, identified valid participants, and informed them whether they would be recruited.

All participants received an information leaflet about this research and had the chance to consider it in private before speaking to the researcher. Information leaflets detailed the following: why the study was taking place; what was the purpose and objectives of this study; what participants will be asked to do; why they have been asked to take part; about the audio-recording of the interview; about their right to withdraw; and about anonymity and confidentiality (Appendix D).

Only once the participants had the information leaflet, had time to consider it in private and had the chance to speak to the researcher and ask questions would an interview be arranged to collect consent and carry out the interview. At the beginning of an interview, the researcher once again asked the participant if he or she had any questions. Once the

participant has asked any questions and expressed a desire to continue the interview, the researcher asked them to sign a consent form (Appendix H). This consent form asked the participants to confirm some details: They have received sufficient information; they have had all questions answered fully; they understood they could withdraw from the interview at any point; they understood that taking part would not affect their benefit claim; they understood what would happen to their data; they understood the interview could be audio-recorded; and that they voluntarily agreed to participate.

When the researcher was contacting the participants before the fieldwork to gain confirmation and arrange a time and date for the interviews, the researcher also collected demographic information from the participants. Appendix E is the demographic form used for the records. Thus, participants' personal information was not audio-recorded during the interviews as the researcher did not ask participants about any of their personal information in the interviews. Participants were also asked for permission to be addressed by title (such as Professor Li), while their real, given names were eliminated during the interviews to maintain their anonymity.

Participants were given a choice of where the interview and meetings were to take place: in a room either in a nearby community centre or a meeting room in the university. The venues were quiet rooms that held only the two persons, the researcher and the participant, while each interview was taking place. Therefore, the participant could not be overheard speaking, and all speech was ensured confidential. The researcher also tried to accommodate other locations when participants requested. Nonetheless, all the venues were utilised under the confirmation of each participant.

Interviews were guided by an interview guide (Appendix C). This was the initial guide containing a prescriptive schedule of questions focusing on topics that were most relevant to the participants and the research questions. As occurs in qualitative research, the

topic guide could be revised as a result of the pilot study as well as throughout the data collection. For instance, the researcher may have added another topic to the interview guide if participants spontaneously raised another issue that the guide has ignored. During the interviews, participants were given a document with a shorter, summarised list of questions extracted from the interview guide. Hence, participants could have a clearer idea on where the interview was going and what kind of questions they were expected to answer.

Before commencing with any data collection, the researcher verified with the participants that they were still happy to take part. When one of the participants (George) showed some signs of suspicion during data collection, the researcher kindly reminded him that his participation was voluntary and that he could stop if he wished to. However, that interview was conducted successfully, despite being shorter than others, and George has agreed with the debrief to have the information used after the interview.

Participants might be distressed after having discussed sensitive topics around their past experiences, family issues, health, well-being, etc. It could be anticipated that some participants may have worsening mental health, suffering from stress and anxiety around their families or later lives. The researcher used polite, neutral and objective language with a calm and neutral attitude throughout the interviews. If any participants appeared to the researcher to be distressed, they were permitted to skip any questions, ask to take a break, withdraw from or change date of the interview, or ask for other support to comfort their emotions at any time during the interviews.

Participants have been debriefed following the data collection. A copy (Appendix I) summarising the data collected from the interviews was sent to each participant respectively. Thus, participants were aware of how the information they had provided was used, coded and analysed. Participants had the right to respond to or comment on the outcome of the data collected. However, they did not have the right to add or change contents of the outcome as

they were permitted the right to stop, skip any questions, or withdraw at any time during the interviews. Participants were also welcomed to make any enquiries both related to the interviews and uses of the data any time in the future.

The researcher was attentive to any cues that the participant was unduly distressed or upset after talking about their experiences. Participants were also given the opportunity to identify potential sensitive information in the debrief sent to them after data collection. The researcher would rephrase contents to avoid sensitive information that participants did not want them to be released. At the end of the debrief letters, the researcher thanked the participants for their cooperation, asked them if they had any final questions and reminded them that they could still get in touch if they think of any at a later date. Each debrief took place in person.

Participants were assured complete anonymity in this project. Each participant has been given a unique identifier to be used instead of real names in the interview notes, transcript, translated transcript, and in the final PhD thesis submitted. Information provided during the interviews would not be passed to anyone except the researcher's supervisors. It was made especially clear that the information would not be passed to anyone in the participants' workforce or management team. This is to protect the confidentiality of participants, who might not want the information they provided in the interviews being heard by their colleagues or managers.

The hard copies of the demographic information forms, consent forms and interview notes have been locked in a safe place. Audio records of the interviews and typed data have also been saved in password-protected files on the university server and the researcher's personal laptop. All the data are only accessible to the researcher and her supervisors. The researcher has hired a transcriptionist to transcribe the interview audio records; a contract was signed by the researcher and the transcriber, committing not to disclose the tape contents.

4.4 Researcher Reflexivity

"The interview, conducted by a different interviewer, would generate different data" (Mann, 2016: p. 68). It is important that social science researchers keep awareness of self-reflexivity through all stages of study. A researcher should be highly sensitive on his or her role in impacting on the collection and analysis of data, and generation of findings (Mann, 2016; Evans et al., 2018). The data collection of this research was conducted between the researcher (young earlier female academic) and older Chinese academics with a wide age gap (between two next generations). Therefore, the co-construction of data is determined by the communications between the researcher and the participants growing up from significantly different family, education and social backgrounds. Hence, this researcher and the participants have had significantly different life trajectories.

Mann (2016) manifested that early qualitative researchers need to raise awareness of keeping neutrality towards the participants throughout the processes of interviews, analysis, and writing. However, it may be difficult for early interview researchers to keep neutrality while maintaining rapport with the interviewees. In this research, this researcher has observed that the participants were significantly willing to emphasis their values and ways of making decisions on major turning points, and persuade the researcher to agree with their values. During the interviews, I have not attempted to give my own opinions or narratives, and I consistently kept neutral towards the participants. The major role of this researcher during the interviews was being a listener, not to argue with the interviewees or lead the interviewees to specific answers. The researcher has attempted to encourage the interviewees to give their narratives. Simultaneously, in order to keep good rapport with the interviewees, the researcher has consistently kept friendly, polite and modest attitude while comprehending the interviewees.

Comparing to experienced researchers, early researchers may feel difficulties in setting up the interviews and getting interviewees start to talk (Mann, 2016). During the data collection of this research, the researcher has found that some of the participants were not willing to provide extensive details or reveal themselves. The researcher respected the right and confidentiality of the participants and has not pushed the participants towards answering questions. When interviewing some participants with comparatively more introversional or prudent characters such as Shirley, George, and William, the researcher has experienced a few situations of silence and short answers. The researcher has paid patience to interviewees. When reached half of the interviews, the situation could be better, and the participants became more willing to give narratives.

According to Mann (2016), comparing to experienced qualitative researcher, early researchers may get overwhelmed with data and less determined to make assumptions. The early researchers may feel difficulties to grasp multi-leveled and nuanced meanings (Mann, 2016). A major challenge to this researcher refers to the coding process as well as the start of writing data analysis chapters. These processes require high level of creativity, perceptiveness, critical evaluation and objectiveness. In order to grasp patterns of meanings from the data with high level of accuracy, this researcher adopted an approach of iterative processes in reviewing the extensive nodes, generating themes, reviewing nodes and themes on Nvivo, and summarising findings. These iterative processes require extensive efforts and patience of the researcher which is crucial part for identifying valid research findings.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has documented the full research methodology and methods. This chapter has justified constructivist qualitative method as more appropriate approach for this research than positivist quantitative method. Since this research aims to conduct in-depth analysis on the lived experiences of people's life course instead of quantifying data. This chapter has justified the research method of taking 35 biographical individual interviews,

adopting life grid model to design interview questions, and thematic analysis to generate

findings. This chapter has also justified the sample criteria (older academics above 45 years'

old with either childcare or eldercare responsibilities or dual caring responsibilities) and

recruitment process (snowball sampling via gate keepers based on 10 universities in

Shenyang City of China) that have reached the academic proficiency and the need of this

research. These are effective approaches for this research to collect and analyse data, and

generate findings to answer the research questions. Subsequently, this chapter has

demonstrated how data were collected, applied, coded and analysed, strictly following formal

approval from Newcastle University on ethics and professional techniques and procedures in

undertaking qualitative interviews. The next four chapters itemise the research findings after

an iterative process of analysis.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis on Structural Influences

5.1 Introduction

This chapter answers the first question of what factors have influenced older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories? Specifically, this chapter demonstrates the research findings regarding macro-level and linked life factors that impact the life course of older Chinese academics/carers. The macro factors are categorised as: 5.2.1, political influence; section 5. 2.2, economic transformation; 5.2.3, technological development; 5.2.4, cultural reform and the independence of older people. The Linked life factors are categorised as: 5.3.1, importance of *guanxi*; 5.3.2, importance of FCR; 5.3.3, generation gaps.

5.2 Macro Level Analysis

5.2.1 Control of state policy over life course. The first life course factor identified in the historical and sociocultural perspective in this research refers to the policy structure from the former command economy system. The researcher finds that the tremendous influence of the command economy over older Chinese academics/carers' life courses comprises three major aspects: benefits included in the 'iron rice bowl' provided to state-owned enterprise employees; the national poverty and low level of personal wealth in late twentieth century; and the traditional Confucian values of conservatism and risk avoidance.

The central planning political system significantly influenced the generation of the research participants. Actually, both the starting point and their main career pathways were mostly under control of the command economy system. In Henry's opinion, graduates in his time 'did not have to seek jobs by themselves'. Instead, they expected the country to offer jobs for them.

Henry: Graduates' first jobs were basically state arranged… Since 1995 or 1996, graduates have had to seek jobs by themselves.

As mentioned in the literature review, any university graduate, or graduates of any higher education institution, could be guaranteed lifelong employment. Until the late 90s, people greatly relied on the central planning economy for their employment decisions. Michael assumed that they did not have any option but to take the assigned employment from the state. Compared to the reciprocal employment choices between applicant and employee in later years, it was very prevalent for students to take the assigned job after graduation in the command economy era.

Michael: At that time, we didn't have options; the state determined the distribution schemes for graduates... Nowadays, it is autonomous, reciprocal choices. But in the old days, graduates took the jobs arranged by the university.

As discussed in the literature review, the assigned employment under the central planning system provided an 'iron rice bowl' that conveyed enormous subsidies and benefits, which were extremely attractive to graduates. For example, the most conspicuous benefit could be home ownership. Vick's family benefited from ownership of a flat given to them by his wife's working organisation, which solved their major living problem: *'The first flat [we had] was distributed by her working organisation...'* Vick also said '*when came to Shenyang, we didn't have a flat.'*

As mentioned in the literature review, in traditional Chinese culture, ownership of accommodation has been important. Home ownership is a label of social status, personal dignity and family wealth, and it is also traditionally assumed to be a basic requirement to start a family. Consequently, state-assigned jobs were enormously attractive to labour market

candidates, especially graduate students from lower-income families who eagerly wanted a job and males who intended to be breadwinners and urgently needed housing ownership.

In other words, housing prices and people's wherewithal to purchase housing significantly influence Chinese people's lives. In 1998, China started encouraging private real estate procurement to generate a secondary housing market and improve slow economic development since 1998, which triggered a tremendous increase in housing costs (Rosen and Ross, 2000). Rosen and Ross (2000) suggested that household income should be 5-10% of the cost of the house. With China's increasing housing costs, the vast majority of people struggled to afford accommodations. This situation may have enhanced people's determination to choose to remain working in state-owned enterprises so that they did not have to purchase housing on their own, or at least so that parts of the price could be covered.

In addition to solving the problem of accommodation, another substantial benefit of the command economy system to graduate candidates is that of direct and full-life employment. For example, Jack believed that going to study in university was an important approach to take in order to gain a job: '*As long as you went to study in university, then you must be able to get a job; it was all safeguarded by the country.*' Therefore, large numbers of students in China strived to enter university for the purpose of winning employment opportunities.

More significantly, participating in *gaokao* and studying in university was also a primary way for people born and raised in rural areas to migrate to work and live in urban cities and rise above poverty. As Michael highlighted, *'it could solve the problem of economic dilemmas'*. Michael also stated, *'I changed my income* [meaning his income is much higher than it would have been if he had stayed in the countryside] *and changed the living conditions of my next generation.'* Likewise, rural participants who had experienced extreme poverty, limited resources and limited opportunities in childhood all expressed that

going to university was an opportunity to completely change their 'fate'. They believed that the renewal of *gaokao* completely changed their life trajectories, and the employment they received afterwards provided them the economic basis to give good lives to their children and complete filial piety to their parents. As Michael said, *'because of knowledge I have today, I have my job and am able to take care of my parents.'*

Michael expressed that as long as he could get into a university (and thus gain a job), he did not mind which university he attended. Leaving the countryside was the only thing at which he aimed. He assumed studying in university and receiving employment from the state was *'a safe choice'*, since he could be guaranteed a job in the city and a full-life employment with enormous 'iron rice bowl' subsidies to solve the *'economic dilemma'*.

Michael: As long as I could enter a university, I didn't care which university to go to … As a student from a rural area, it was better to select a safe choice, the most important thing is to walk out of the village. That was the only thing I was thinking about.

Older Chinese academics/carers may not have had a chance to think about which subjects they were interested in or which type of job and career they wanted to pursue. All they could consider was whether or not to gain a valuable job that could cover their life expenditures and help them get rid of poverty. Zach said in the interview that people who stayed in village *'envy'* people like him who were able to live and work in cities.

Zach: For me, living was the first need because during the 80s, the countryside was extremely poor. People from the countryside envy me very much… I just wanted to make more money, an idea to let life become better.

A limitation of the state-given employment from a command economy was that people did not have a chance to choose work locations or organisations. As Jack mentioned, *'when you were distributed a job, locations of workplaces and organisations could be different'*. This may have caused inconveniences in the lives of Chinese people during their early career years under the command economy. For example, despite Michael appreciating that he received a job, the job option he was given may not have completely suited his interests.

Michael: But personally, I wasn't too happy because my character was not suitable for being a teacher. I just wanted to do some practical jobs on the job site. I hadn't thought of staying in university.

As a student studying engineering, Michael preferred working on the job site, where he could enjoy doing practical jobs. He was less confident being a teacher. A similar situation has happened to Victoria who was studying construction design. Both of them thought that the best choices for them were industrial organisations requiring practical work rather than the field of education. Nonetheless, as rejecting the job would result in unemployment, they both decided to take the jobs and have kept those jobs until the conducting of the interviews.

Victoria: It was not chosen by me. I primarily wanted to work in a design institute very much ... The organisation had decided to arrange for me to work as political assistant in the university.

As discussed previously, each graduate was offered a designated job position. However, some students were offered more than one option. For example, according to

Chrystal, students whose academic performances were at the head of their class could gain the privilege of entering their careers with more than one job option and making their choices ahead of other students.

Chrystal: I and some of my colleagues actively selected our jobs … Actually, not everyone has a chance to make choices. It depended on the general academic results from university. There was a rank: People at the top could make choices first, then other people could only choose from the rest.

Lisa also had the privilege of selecting a job, mainly due to the her top academic performance. More importantly, she seemed to be an exception from that era: one who could arbitrarily select a job, even be yond choosing from several options as Chrystal did.

Lisa: I could arbitrarily make a selection because my academic result from university was top academic performance from the entire grade.

Henry was given three job options as end of the command economy approached: *'It was optional to us. I was given 3 options … Actually, by the time we graduated, it was already optional.'* There were also people like Kelly, for whom job prepared for her and the job she wanted in the first place were the same. As a girl studying geomatics engineering, she thought working in a university would be much more suitable for her than in a production organisation.

Kelly: Because I am a girl. And studying geomatics engineering, there were comparatively more jobs in wild lands … I directly aimed for university. I didn't think about production organisations.

The second factor discussed in this section refers to poverty in early life experience. Despite the fact that government control under the command economy was undoubtedly powerful in influencing the careers and life trajectories of state-employed people, this researcher has found that the most substantial reason that state-arranged jobs were widely accepted lay in the living situation of people from that era. Due to economic scarcity, Chinese people born in 1960s had experienced significant poverty in childhood trajectory and a lower quality of life at 20 years old in their life course. Therefore, it was definitely difficult for them to reject assigned employment with its iron rice bowl.

As Meng et al. (2005) stated, investigators and politicians started bringing their focus onto the issue of poverty in urban areas from 1990 to 1999, the era corresponding to the emergence of radical urban reform in China. According to Meng et al., the poverty rate of urban areas in China reached its peak in most of the 90s. The population was dealing with the oppressive effects of poverty in that decade, during which the participants of this research were for the most part in their 20s, being adult workers and family breadwinners.

On the other hand, Meng et al. points out, due to the need for economic development, there had been changes to product prices in the 90s. For example, low-priced food products essential to families with low incomes began to be replaced due to the increasing income of urban areas; government-supported non-food products also had increased in price. This increase in commodity prices also increased the living pressure on employees who had still not completely gotten rid of poverty.

In accordance with the scenario Meng et al. (2005) described, Vick depicted the time when he was at a younger age, when poverty was seen as a common social phenomenon among his peer group. He and his wife were experiencing much poorer living conditions and lower income. According to Vick, the period around 1990-2000 seemed to be the poorest time for him and his family, and also the entire society in which his peer group lived: *'It should be said that the ten years since we graduated — maybe like between 1990 and 2000 — at that time the economy was not really good.'* Being poor seemed normal to him and the people around him. He continued, *'it could not be said that* [the poverty] *was bad, because it was just like that in the time we had.'* This may mean that there was rarely a distinctive income gap within a peer group. Thus, people seldom felt embarrassed being poor in a society where everyone was poor. This researcher interprets this to mean that the collective social background of extreme poverty during childhood and the significant living pressure during their twenties have strengthened the determination of older Chinese academics/carers to accept and keep, by all means, the state-arranged employment.

The third point in this section refers to cultural perspective that had enhanced people's willingness to comply with state policy and the arrangements of the command economy. The traditional Confucian collectivist culture discussed in the literature review seems to be reflected in the data on the life courses of the research participants.

For example, in Mike's statement, it was so prevalent among people from his peer group to accept the arranged employment that he interpreted it as unrejectable: *'So, for the personal autonomy in actively selecting jobs, this phenomenon existed, but* [it was] *very rare. It was like most people comply with the distribution.'* More explicitly, Chinese people may tend to hold strong beliefs in collective social and cultural values and norms. Thus, they may tend to believe more in the likelihood that the choice the majority of people have made is likely to be correct or effective. As a result, following the way of the majority, which was to

be guaranteed a lifelong job and subsidies for improving living condition and home ownership, had become prevalent among people in the command economy era. In addition to taking the state-assigned job, Mike also mentioned another career choice: entrepreneurship. However, as Mike disclosed, it was an option only for people who were obviously adventurous and willing to take risk: *'So, at that time if* [you] *didn't have a particular spirit of taking risks or entrepreneurship, generally* [you] *would comply with the country's distribution.'*

Of himself, Mike stated: *'So, from the perspective of personal choice, there was not any choice.'* Here, he may not mean exactly 'no choice' in the literal sense. He may have meant that due to the significant poverty of past experience and the condition of low income, he lacked sufficient resource for entrepreneurship and supplementing risk. Compared with working for private sector organisations, which did not offer subsidies as state enterprise did, taking the state-arranged job could instantly solve his living problems and cover the needs of his family. Likewise, most people around him had selected a safer career pathway, and he would not make 'non-traditional' choices that only exceptional people did.

Frank brought up an alternate scenario during the command economy era for those who did not take the state-arranged job and decided to seek for jobs themselves: if they could not find a job, they were able go back to work in their home city, town, or village where their *hukou* were registered and find work with the help of the local education sector. As mentioned previously, most of research participants were originally from rural areas and did not want to go back and work in their hometowns. Thus, it could be understandable that a large majority of people chose to take the state-arranged job.

Frank: There were also other situations when people could not choose a suitable opportunity after a long time. Then you went back to the place where your hukou was registered, and then the local education sector provided relatively good job opportunities.

This section has analysed how the former command economy system has influenced the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers. Due to an early experience of poverty and resource scarcity in their early 20s, it was very difficult for the now older Chinese academics/carers to reject the state-arranged employment and its iron rice bowl.

5.2.2 Economic transformation. After discussing the influence of the political force of command economy, this research will analyse another structural factor of economic transformation in this section regarding the macro historical and sociocultural perspective of LCT. Since the opening up of the economy in the 1970s and 1980s, China has experienced a fast and enormous increase in its national economy.

Most of the research participants mentioned the significant change and improvements in living quality in the past two decades. For example, Frank talked about his experience with the economic conditions in the past 20 years. He thought that all aspects of his life were significantly improved and that there were many more opportunities to enjoy advanced facilities that have significantly increased his level of comfort.

Frank: Your ability to manage resources, the level of comfort in life, including improvements of living accommodations [all improved]. *Originally, there was no home ownership.*

The economic change has been an illuminating topic in the social and cultural lives of Chinese people in the past two decades. This may be because, compared with Western industrialised countries with contemporary marketized economies, China had experienced a

tremendous increase in the wealth of its citizens since the opening up of the economy. Hence, the astonishing change of life has dramatically impressed older Chinese academics. Jack mentioned *'we did not have enough food and clothing.'* In the past, during the research participants' childhoods, starvation and shortage of clothing seemed to be a common social phenomenon.

Furthermore, most participants have mentioned about their home-ownership ability, an important topic in Chinese people's lives. For example, Frank used the words *'one flat ... a big flat ... two flats'* to describe the gradual increase of personal property and the improvement speed of personal economy. These are things he hardly would have expected 20 years ago.

Frank: Then there was one flat, then there was a big flat, and then two flats, and then owning a private vehicle and so on. Life has changed so much…

In Hilary's opinion, the economic development has helped with her WLB. Due to being free from childcare responsibilities and more importantly improved economic ability, she can enjoy doing things without concern for economic support. Here, she may mean things she could do to fulfil her leisure time, such as travelling, socializing, taking classes for hobbies, and so forth. By contrast, in the past she may not have had sufficient economic ability and resource opportunities to experience those multiple leisure activities in her life.

Hilary: Now, because the child is also working, I feel relaxed in general. Whatever I want to do, there is a certain economic support.

The data of this research also shows that in the past, people tended to focus on gaining enough money to support their families. Now, with the needs of basic physical living conditions met, people tend to progress their thinking into how to develop healthy lifestyles, paying more attention to the environment, and advancing the family's living standard into further levels.

Frank and Hilary spoke about change in the economy and physical living conditions. Jack mentioned changes in people's thinking and the in focus of their lives from a spiritual perspective. Resources and commodities for life have become much more abundant compared to the past, when resources and options for consumption were both scarce. In the past, when there was scarcity of food and limited living qualities, people's attention was on how to earn money to safeguard sufficient intake within the families. According to Jack, what people tended to focus on in the past was what to eat and how to get enough food. Nowadays, people tend to consider how to develop healthy lifestyles. As Jack described it, '*the questions and problems people think about are different in different stages of time.*

Jack: In the past, we did not have enough food and clothing; now we think about what to eat and eating healthily ... Now we all focus on environmental protection.

Zach talked more about change from spiritual perspective. Due to the significant poverty in the past, the social and cultural lives of Chinese people were saturated with what Zach has called *'money worship'* or the *'pursuit of materialism'*. It may be inferred that in the past, Chinese people were busy working and earning money, as meeting the economic needs of life and family were the most urgent issue to them. Hence, people may lose attention for or even sacrifice their WLB. By contrast, in contemporary Chinese society, people have started

to pay attention to WLB. As Zach mentioned in the quote below, he now expects a more healthy and balanced work life.

Zach: There have been changes in my way of life, for example how you view life. The time in the past seemed to be money worship, pursuit of materialism … Now it is more of a spiritual state; there has to be balance between material and spirit, and a balance between health and career.

What is interesting here is that Zach said *'it is mainly because of the national development of Chinese society that living conditions improved; it feels like if the class we are in is not too poor in the society, then we start to' lose motivation.'* It could be perceived that making money was a major motivation of older Chinese academics/carers to work in the past. In the severe scarcity of resource and economy, people did not have the opportunities, resources, and support to enjoy more in leisure time, entertainment, or spiritual life. He thought he was *'not too poor in the society'*; this may mean he and his family have gotten rid of poverty and that his main life goal at a young age was realised. He said *'then we start to lose motivation'* may mean if he is no longer 'poor', then he could be more relaxed and capable of a balanced work life instead of using up all his strength to work and earn money.

However, this research acknowledges that the above discussions may not be applicable to people from other groups such as industrial organisational employees. The job of academics has enabled them with more flexibilities. Since the research participants generally come from privileged groups, they could receive better support from income and pensions. As such, they could pay more attention to keeping WLB. By contrast, the economy's fast development may exacerbate the work-life conflicts of people working in

other fields, such as what was discussed in the literature review regarding extra working hours in contemporary China.

Nevertheless, this researcher suspects that despite improved living conditions, economic development may have also had negative impacts on people's life course in China. As will be discussed later in the analysis on agency, older academics/carers in this research seem to collectively expect stability and a more relaxed life, and they hope to retire early. This could also be due to the economic development. If the basic living standards and family needs are still not met, or if people think of themselves as still 'poor', with insufficient funds to pay for retired lives, they may expect to work longer or possess more motivation to work.

Increased competition in the labour market stemming from fast economic growth may also have exacerbated employees' anxieties. Economic growth brings with it increasing demand on high-skilled talents, which could be a good incentive that encourages work motivation. On the other hand, anxieties and concerns about uncertainty and competition may influence the employees' well-being.

The significant emerging inequalities in China, along with economic development, may have triggered people's mental anxieties about lagging and being poorer than others. As Ellie reported: *'We were all very poor at that time. When we first started working, our wealth and salaries were all very low, and the general level of the society was also not high. So, I thought I was ok; everyone was pretty much the same'.* In the past the whole society was in poverty and inequality was rare. Being poor was normal and quite acceptable. However, in contemporary China, being poor may trigger significant trauma in people's psychological health, personal dignity, and social image. Chinese people seem to fear being poor. This may be partially because of past experiences with poverty and the desire not to be poor again. Additionally, the severe competition and inequalities that impose pressure on them may make them fear being laid off. Moreover, these fears may be due to the rapid increase of prices, the

observed rise in materialism (Podoshen et al., 2011), consumer characteristics turning to individualism and an urge to consume driven by more hedonic reasons over merely utilitarian reasons (Wu & Yang, 2018). Hence socially, people are confronting increasing demand on their economic ability to support their consumption.

To summarise, economic transformation has significantly improved living conditions of older Chinese academics/carers. However, there are also negative impacts derived from increasingly severe competition that have imposed mental pressure on older Chinese academics/carers around inequality.

5.2.3 Technological development. The structural factor regarding macro sociocultural perspective discussed in this section is technological development. Since digitalisation emerged in the late 90s, the technological reforms and transformations all over the world have reached unprecedented speeds. The research findings are congruent with the continuous discussion in the literature across countries regarding the concerns of and pressure on older workers to adapting to rapid technological changes. It has been an era that noticeably challenges the older workers of the world to adapt to the heaping technological advancement. Older Chinese workers, who experienced significant poverty, resource scarcity and poorer advancement in the past are especially challenged in this way. The participants of this research are all above 45 years old. Most of them have expressed lacking technical proficiency and related concerns in applying high technologies in their work.

Similarly to what is happening in Western countries, technological development has been shaping people's work and lives. For example, the technological development and reform have significantly shaped Jennie's work and life. She has been working in the university library for more than ten years. However, in recent years, her main work responsibility was replaced by the technological improvement of automation. Previously, her

main job responsibility was to provide manual service to students; now, this job has been completely replaced by automatic machines.

Jennie: Our way of work has been changed. Before, we had working counters, now it is machines that help students with borrowing and returning books. Now this part no longer needs us.

Helen's experience at work is a bit different from other participants of this research. Helen's university has been transformed into online-run education system for several years. She and other teachers from the university have all been responsible for giving online classes on to students registered for distance studies. However, as the program is still in the initial phase of implementation, there exist various problems that have caused Helen concern. Since students normally have classes online instead of going to a classroom, attendance monitoring is rather difficult, and many student absences have been happening every day during their classes. Helen talked about being not able to deliver knowledge to students, especially for her as an English teacher with few chances to interact with students. Below, Helen laments that there is '*no way to put in the effort*'; she wants to help her students but cannot find any way to do so as they do not come to class.

Helen: If students don't come, how can the knowledge be effectively delivered, especially for linguistics? There should have been interactions, shouldn't there? At that time, it feels like nonsense being a teacher, just feeling like there's no way to put in the effort.

Malul (2009) argued that older workers are socially understood to possess limitations on adopting new technology and skills, and in flexibility of performance, while acting as

resources of experience with a lower workplace turnover rate. The challenge in accepting technological development has happened to all research participants regardless of subject matter, especially for those whose subjects are highly associated with technology. Lisa's working field, social media, is highly associated with the emergence of new technologies. She has expressed feeling significant pressure to follow the social trends and updates of media. Rose has emphasised the urgent need of older workers to learn IT techniques. Both Lisa and Rose emphasised that learning and proficiently managing the new high technologies are crucial to today's education. However, this has been significantly difficult for them, and being slow in accepting new technology and skills may influence their work. According to the participants, training in new technology is very urgent for current older workers in China. Most of them have expressed a desire and need for those trainings.

Lisa: When the speed of development is too fast, we obviously feel unable to follow. In this field we need massive trainings and studies, both for ourselves and the external world, otherwise we will be too obsolete in the research in news media.

Rose: Especially for chemical structures, the molecular formula, it is so difficult to make slides. Then in the application, now we advocate paperless working. This is an inevitable trend… We are at an older age, and weaker in this aspect compared with younger people.

Victoria from landscape design, and even Frank from sociology were also experiencing difficulties in technological development. As Frank said: *'The technology to make teaching materials, running data, now we actually lack the knowledge and ability in this subject.'* Most participants like Frank and Victoria assumed themselves less capable of accepting and learning new technology skills than younger workers.

Victoria: Some applications, and some other 3D shading software … we have become relatively slower in the ability to accept than others [younger people]. *I truly have a feeling of urgency, this is true, a bit of pressure.*

In addition to both facilitating and challenging the older academics, the current technological development may also have generated obstacles in people's work and lives. For example, Charles talked about the experience of teaching while students were distracted by mobile phones. This is significantly challenging today's education.

Charles: While students are playing with their phones, I am still able to give a lecture, and get them to absorb knowledge. I think this is too difficult … This really has bothered me, so I have to think of ways to stop them from playing with their phones.

The data above has presented that older Chinese academics/carers generally reveal themselves as slower than younger workers in adapting to technological reforms. Research participants are calling for relevant training for older workers in order to strengthen their competitiveness in technological learning.

5.2.4 Expectations of more independence of older people. This section discusses last structural factor regarding the historical and sociocultural perspective in terms of the increasing need of independence among older people. The researcher contemplates that there should be more independence expected of older people in the future. Here, the researcher refers to current older workers (45-60 years old) or future older people from the next generation, but not to their senior parents (the current oldest old), who are still primarily dependent on family. There may be certain level of change in people's conceptions, differing

from the traditional way of relying on families for eldercare. Three factors that may have contributed to the change identified in this research are: (1) smaller family structures, (2) insufficient welfare, and (3) the increasing trend of empty nests.

Older Chinese academics/carers seem to have sensed the need for independence among older people in the Chinese sociocultural environment. Despite having expressed fear over the absence of their single children in taking eldercare responsibilities in person, older Chinese academics/carers seem to have a more open, positive and prepared attitude towards the prospect of needing to be independent in the future. Many of the participants have thought about their plans for their own eldercare in later lives.

The researcher observed that the changing conception towards eldercare in Chinese social and cultural society could be represented by the attitudes of older people towards going to institutional care. As discussed in literature review, in China, people traditionally tended to assume that going to institutional care was a sign of the adult children's incapability or worse performance in filial piety, which was also disgraceful to the senior parents. On the other hand, people used to expect family, and especially adult children, to take full responsibility for eldercare. However, the research participants seem to view going to an institutional eldercare home as an effective strategy in preparing for their own eldercare. In essence, they see this option as a way of reducing their only children's life and FCR pressures.

Vick talked about the 4-2-1 problem in China, which will also happen to his family. Vick understands that there could be significant pressure on his daughter, an only child, to provide eldercare. Therefore, Vick has considered taking mutual responsibility with his wife for eldercare in the future. They also considered going into institutional care with friends who are in the same situation.

Vick: At that time, [my spouse and I] *will firstly take care of each other.* [We may] *think about this issue when either of us fades away. Then friends can also keep an eye on each other and all go to institutional care. Those with better health conditions take care of the weaker ones.*

Alice's son has been studying in the US. She seems to assume this is a first step to adapting to independence from her child. She also mentioned that she could possibly go to institutional care in the future. An interesting point she has mentioned was not being able to have second child because of the OCP. This may have increased her need to be independent, since she only has one child to rely on in the future.

Alice: Since I chose to send him to the US, that means actually I've made the decision that I can be independent from him in the future. Just maybe I will go to institutional care ... While the policy allows us to enjoy having a second child, I am already over 40.

Michael discussed taking good care of oneself and keeping a healthy body, which could reduce the pressure on their children in the future, as important duties for them: *'What we talk about in our future is to take good care of ourselves, which will release a bit of pressure from our children.'.* Older Chinese academics/carers seem to be afraid of 'increasing trouble' for their children.

Tang et al. (2009) supports the argument for the increased need of independence among older Chinese people. Their findings show that middle-aged and older people in China tend to assume that independence for older people is important more than it is for younger adults. Tang et al. have stated that there is an expecting increasing rate in use of institutional care in China. They found that middle-aged workers increasingly intend to adopt institutional

care for their senior parents in order to ease the pressures of maintaining multiple duties as caregivers, parents and employees.

Crucially, due to insufficiency of the social eldercare system, greater longevity, and smaller family size caused by the OCP, contemporary older workers in China are pressured with significant family responsibilities, most especially eldercare. This researcher has discovered a greater share of eldercare responsibilities on older Chinese workers compared to their children due to incapability of a single child to keep up with the workload. Additionally, disparities between the urban and rural eldercare welfare systems have further increased responsibilities on older Chinese academics/carers since the pension system has not covered the later lives of their senior parents. Therefore, it is clear how urgent the need for independence is among older Chinese workers.

Insufficiency in governmental support given to eldercare may have increased the need for older Chinese academics/carers to prepare for more independent later lives. Jack raised the topic that he believes there is going to be a trend of moving from traditional, family-based eldercare to society-supported eldercare in the future: *'In the future when we may not be able to depend on our adult children, the trend may go to social eldercare as opposed to traditional eldercare.'*

Vick was also concerned about the sufficiency of the government's ability to support eldercare for the ageing population. He assumes that the country is not fully prepared to confront the era of tremendous population ageing. It will likely need a long time to achieve sufficient eldercare facilities and political maturation. It could be observed that concern about one's future retired life course has emerged among the cohort of older Chinese people in contemporary China, making them consider preparing for more independent later lives.

Vick: For social eldercare in our country, I think from the national perspective, there is a lack of ability. It does not have the full preparation, for *issues of public facilities, public social eldercare and so on. For the country to solve the problems of eldercare, the country cannot undergo this in the short term.*

Moreover, instability and insufficiency of the medical care system and facilities have also increased the concerns of older Chinese academics around eldercare and preparing for more independent later lives. As Lily stated, citizens from China expect to receive medical treatment from tertiary hospitals. However, this has generated significant challenges for Chinese families that have older members with severe health conditions that need high-quality medical treatment. Since there is a long *'queue'* of patients waiting for medical treatment from large hospitals in big cities, sometimes it may take upwards of half a year.

Lily: Tertiary hospitals are just the best hospitals; resources like this from the whole country are comparatively limited … Receiving medical service is really difficult. Like, in this kind of big hospital, one cannot be in the queue at all, or even hardly be registered.

As discussed in the literature review, although there has been significant improvement, availability of eldercare facilities to older people in China is still limited. People need to travel from across the country to first-tier cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou or Shenzhen for medical treatment, especially those suffering from severe diseases. However, long wait times for a turn to receive treatment from the hospital may greatly threaten older people's health and lives. Zhao et al.'s (2018) findings indicate that there are differences in the quality levels of treatment provided by hospitals in differently-tiered cities in the Chinese city ranking system.

James has also talked about the condition of the nursing service in contemporary Chinese hospitals. He seems dissatisfied with the quality of nursing services provided by hospitals to inpatients, especially for older patients who need extra care while family members are busy with both work and FCR. More recently, when inpatients' families have a limited ability for care, they may hire *hugong*, caregivers without formal certificates or relevant training, from companies contracted by the hospitals (Dong et al., 2018). James hopes that there might be relatively standardised professional caregivers provided by public hospitals.

James: [Hospitals] *could assign more specialised nurses to provide care, and not just like what they are doing now, merely visiting* [patients] *and giving an injection. I think maybe* [hospitals] *should do more in providing professional care.*

In the literature review, there has been discussion about the current social phenomenon of the empty nest in China. This has also caught the attention of the research participants. Likewise, Jack even had a seemingly pessimistic view towards family eldercare, holding '*few expectations*' of relying on their adult child. Jack thinks that merely living nearer could help with eldercare in the future, otherwise the adult child may be able to help with '*nothing*'.

Jack: People from our generation consider that they actually will, to a large extent, hold few expectations [on eldercare from adult children] *in the future. It may be better if* [parents and children] *live next to each other, otherwise they may help with nothing.*

There may be significant inconvenience and difficulty in giving eldercare to empty-nested senior parents in the upcoming era of severe population ageing, when the only-child generation would play the major role of family caregivers in China. People expect government assistance, and social eldercare is in an urgent situation in need of development. Most of the participants seemed to be sad when talking about their future as empty nesters. Most participants, like Vick, seem to fear loneliness when their child lives far away from them, and the common topic they usually raised was that of making preparations for that day to come.

Vick: The concept of loneliness, maybe I cannot understand it now, but I have to make preparations for it. Just like when we talk about [ageing] *with our colleagues, we are actually talking about how to prepare for it with each other.*

Aside from the seemingly pessimistic view towards the topic of empty nests, many other participants share Rose's opinion, which was discussed above: She should not create 'troubles' for her child. She has an only daughter who has emigrated to the US. Rose hoped to be independent in the future instead of relying on her daughter.

Rose: I don't want to create difficulties for my kid. Because kids have their own careers, they have their own things to do, I don't want to affect her. I just want to depend on my own ability to live well during the rest of my life.

Presented from the data above, this research has uncovered an increasing need for independence among ageing population in China. The researcher has found a changing conception among older workers in China so as to adapt to the cultural change of decreasing

filial piety. Older Chinese academics/carers have started preparation for independent eldercare in the future out of concern for the unavailability of their only children for eldercare responsibilities.

5.3 Linked life Analysis

5.3.1 Importance of guanxi in workforce. This section discusses *guanxi*, an important factor in Chinese culture from the linked-life perspective that could significantly influence older academics/carers' WLB and life trajectories.

In this research, guanxi is not revealed to be an important factor to maintain employee commitment, according to Hom and Xiao (2011) and Cheung and Wu (2011). As discussed previously, their current jobs in academia were previously assigned to the participants under the command economy, which guarantees full-life employment. In addition, older Chinese academics/carers are significantly less likely to reject or suspend the 'iron rice bowl' of their waged employment. It is clear that the iron rice bowl, with the enormous benefits, stability and security it offered, is an essential factor that retains employee commitment among older Chinese academics/carers.

Most of the participants in this research agreed that keeping good *guanxi* is important at work. One of the major reasons was to keep a harmonious working environment that is comfortable for everyone, putting them in a good mood to work. As Mike discussed, good personal relationships among colleagues in the workforce could possibly facilitate better employee performance since working in a happy environment, where they and their colleagues like each other, helps employees to stay in a good mood at work. Cheung et al.'s (2008) findings confirmed their hypothesis that the satisfaction of employees on job could be positively influenced by relationships between subordinate and superior. Mike said that people all prefer work that has a happy environment with harmonious relationships among colleagues.

Mike: Good personal relationships amongst colleagues could also make people work happily together … People all like to have this kind of work.

Ellie's opinion adds nuance to this way of thinking. She believes that keeping harmonious relationships, so that people can fully concentrate on improving their work abilities, is important for the organisation's working environment as well. In other words, conflicts with colleagues may hamper employees' attention, motivation and efficiency at work.

Ellie: When you have a harmonious relationship with others, you may have more energy for improving your work ability, and you don't have to be distracted by dealing with problems in relationships with others.

Another important benefit of *guanxi* was reciprocal assistance among colleagues, especially during urgent situations like the kind FCR can bring. For instance, when an older Chinese academic/carer must leave work to deal with an older parent's severe health condition, colleagues help each other by covering each other's job responsibilities such as teachingsenior parents. The opinions of participants like Vick, among others, reflected the reciprocal guanxi discussed in the literature review summarised by Zhang and Zhang (2006). Vick assumed it should be the responsibility of both superiors and fellow employees to maintain harmonious relationships in the workforce in order to achieve organisational coherence. Using his own language of 'vertically', meaning relationships between superiors and subordinates, and 'horizontally' among colleagues at parallel levels are both necessary at work, he stressed the importance of keeping good work relationships. These relationships

generate a harmonious work atmosphere, which is convenient for the reciprocal assistance while confronting urgent FCR situations.

Vick: I really value this part ... Horizontally, you should get along well with your colleagues ... Vertically, how you deal with your superiors and subordinates?

Vick's discussion also fits with Wei et al.'s (2012) belief that interactions could provide more opportunities for knowledge transfer and sharing of resources, thus enabling reciprocal rewards and benefits gained through exchanges between employees. Vick believed that '*if you facilitate others, then you facilitate yourself; if you leave others paths and space, then others would leave you paths and spaces.* What Vick means by *'leave others paths and space'* is providing help to others willingly. This has long been a social expectation in relationships and connection networking in Chinese culture. There is an expectation that the person who has accepted favours from others will pay back another favour or provide any help in return.

Despite most participants agreeing with importance of persevering good relationships in the workplace, the level of satisfaction among research participants towards *guanxi* in practice were mixed. Some of the participants were satisfied with the *guanxi* at their workplaces, and some were decidedly not. These participants were found to have significant concerns and discomfort due to *guanxi*. Participants have indicated different strategies and viewpoints in dealing with *guanxi* in the workplace.

Likewise, Emily prefers to compromise with her superior when conflict arose between them. She admitted that the manager could possess a broader view and think more thoroughly than she does. Hence, the most effective approach may be to comply with the manager's

requirement. Regardless, she still chose to speak her opinion instead of withdrawing from the conflict and staying silent.

Emily: The superiors may have more holistic considerations ... Sometimes there could be some conflicts, but I will speak out my viewpoints. However, according to the way things used to be, despite speaking your point of views, we still have to comply with overall situation, comply with the management of superiors.

Henry also distinguished himself as a different type of administrative manager from others. He retains the belief that work of an administrative nature is not as simple as that of being a teacher. He possessed a double position as both administrator and teacher, and he seemed to have difficulties in meeting expectations from superiors, identifying himself as *'not suited to be an officer'*. He chose to keep his own way of work, even if it seems to conflict with the organisational style of administrative implementation.

Henry: I may not be able to reach a high level of recognition from the university or from society ... Sometimes I know that what the superior says is official jargon, and I still try my best to implement it. But I just cannot be that kind of officer; I cannot speak that kind of official jargon to my employees. I am, frankly speaking, not suitable for being officer; being a teacher is ok to me.

Findings of this research seem consistent with Wei et al. (2010) and Wei et al. (2012), that *guanxi* could presumably be detrimental to employees with less political capability. Research data indicated a variety of ways that *guanxi* affects employees' career pathways. What concerned participants the most was the way employees would commonly utilise a

surplus of good *guanxi* with superiors or the organisation's board to win career opportunities or promotions. Bruce added that people who possess good *guanxi* may gain academic titles faster than others: *'If you have* guanxi*, ok, for example you may be faster in wining academic titles.'*

Frank expressed concern about the phenomenon of employees seemingly competing for better relationship connections in the workplace rather than their own personal capabilities. He shared his experience of losing a competition to his colleague who had attempted to win votes by putting effort into creating a group that would have good *guanxi*. Frank called these *'inappropriate methods'* and seems to vehemently disagree with the function of *guanxi* in the workplace, feeling that it could potentially deteriorate his career opportunities and incentive to work. Frank described his feeling of being *'terrified'*:

Frank: If it does not depend on personal capability, then it becomes a kind of, um, competition of personal guanxi*. Because in voting ... For those who like to form a faction of people with closer relationships, they use inappropriate methods to gain those kinds of rights or autonomies. I think this kind of* [slight laugh]*, this kind of thing makes me feel terrified.*

Nonetheless, there are other participants who view *guanxi* as a positive factor that enhances career progress. Lucy believed that she gained a promotion opportunity in part due to a good relationship with the general office staff. In stark contrast to Frank's experience with *guanxi*, during the voting for promotion, Lucy won unanimously because of her good relationship with her colleagues. She seemed to be grateful that she could win the trust of her colleagues.

Lucy: Because I have a very good relationship with the people from the staff room, there was one year that 100% of the people from the staff room voted me for Party branch secretary.

The researcher hypothesises that effectiveness of *guanxi* in organisations depends on general performance among employees. However, it is difficult to determine whether an employee's work is successful simply due to the influence of *guanxi*. For example, it could not be claimed that Frank is less successful at work because of losing the competition by having worse *guanxi*. On the other hand, it is also understandable why people would take strategies to adapt to the *guanxi* environment in order to win competitions. This researcher discerns that *guanxi* may complicate the valuation mechanism of employee performance.

Emily seems to indicate that employees have found that going through normal operation without participating in *guanxi* is not sufficient to gain career progress. Therefore, employees usually have to spend lots of time and effort in building up and keeping *guanxi*. This seems to be a difficult task for her, and she seems unwilling to spend such effort and time on *guanxi*.

Emily: If you depend on normal operations, it will be really difficult. It mainly depends on personal guanxi. *You have to spend a lot of time focusing on the relationship. This is a difficult point.*

People who experience disadvantages due to challenges with political skills can be divided into different types. The above examples, Frank and Emily, may possess a character that finds it difficult to socialise. Others, such as Bruce, are the type that come from a family background with a less-privileged position, through which they could not enjoy resource or access to *guanxi*. Family has long been the most important and most powerful resource to

provide the obligatory type of guanxi in traditional Chinese culture (Zhang & Zhang, 2006). Emily, who self-described as not being good at utilitarian *guanxi*, described the effort as time-consuming: '*You have to spend a lot of time focusing on the relationship.*'

Bruce is an example of one who lacks obligatory *guanxi*. He described himself as being an *'outsider'* at his current workplace. He mentioned that as a person who grew up in a poor family in the countryside, he has the status of an *'outsider'* who just moved into the organisation a few years ago. Therefore, he does not possess the *guanxi* facilitated by family connections or previous career trajectories. He expressed that he started feeling ignored, that '*no one listens to you; no one pays attention to your issues.*'

Bruce: Like me, belonging to those who come from outside … When you come here, you don't have any guanxi. *Without* guanxi, *you have to work alone. This makes you feel miserable … Some things are not transparent; some things are a kind of feeling of depression. In life it makes you feel restricted … Your work outcome has big relationship with* guanxi.

Bruce may mean that while assessing employees on rewards they should gain or the attention and treatment they could potentially receive from other employees or superiors, whether or not one has good relationships could play a big part. That is why he depicted his life as being '*restricted*', that he could not elaborate his talent in the workplace. His statement that *'some things are not transparent'* could indicate *guanxi* at work since it could not be made public if employees win relevant, promotive changes in career pathways through *guanxi*. This has given Bruce a feeling he described as *'depression'*.

Going deeper in the logic behind how *guanxi* functions in Chinese organisational culture, Zhang and Zhang (2006)'s explanation of utilitarian *guanxi* could presumably explain what the research participants expressed and support some of the arguments in this

section. Sometimes the strategy of keeping good *guanxi* with superiors may have a positive effect since maintaining good mannerisms in order to make good impressions on employees and superiors could improve organisational culture.

Nonetheless, when monetary exchange goes too far or even becomes out of control, it could be noticeably detrimental to organisational management and the well-being of employees. According to Zhang and Zhang (2006), for employees to gain benefits or achieve the specific objectives at which they aim, keeping utilitarian *guanxi* could become a long-term endeavour, which is significantly costly and time consuming. Hence, this researcher submits that when gifts are given in the process of keeping *guanxi,* there may arise issues of unequal competition. This may indicate what Bruce has described, *'some things are not transparent',* and Frank's mention of *'inappropriate methods'.*

Aside from those coming from less-privileged families like Bruce, another group of people with weaker political skills may be those employees with less personal capability or willingness to establish and maintain *guanxi* in the workplace. This is the type of employee that Wei et al. (2010) focused on in testing supervisor–subordinate relationships. Wei et al. indicated detrimental effects on employees with fewer political skills, mirroring Frank's experience. Crucially, there may also arise a situation in which an employee possesses lower personal political skills and has no choice other than to learn to join utilitarian *guanxi* in order to reach certain career objectives. Failing that, such employees may lose their career objectives to those proficient at utilitarian *guanxi.* This type of employee could be likely to feel 'terrified' as Frank did.

Another factor potentially indicates the negative impacts of *guanxi* on employees and organisational cultures. As mentioned in the literature review, Chen and Francesco (2000) brought attention to the privileged organisational position managers tend to occupy in employees' minds. Ann mentioned that invisible regimes seemed to have formed, reinforcing

the responsibility of employees to establish and maintain *guanxi* with superiors. 'Indeed, this is especially true under Chinese leadership, which emphasises people and relationships more than job tasks' (Warren et al., 2004, as quoted in Wei et al., 2010, p. 441).

Ann: There is a kind of privileged autonomy of leaders, and subordinates should keep friendly to superiors… [The superior] *just wants me to keep a good relationship with him … For those who want to attentively do some work, firstly the conditions are not there, no support given to do it. Secondly, when things are done, there could be no confirmation* [of value] *obtained* [from the superior].

Along these lines, this researcher contemplates that if possessing *guanxi* could be assumed as a form of competition, it may trigger a deteriorating workplace culture, wherein employees compete to have good *guanxi* rather than put effort into improving personal capabilities. Ann described the organisational autocracy and the accepted custom that subordinates should keep good relationships with superiors. This means that employees who are weak in political capabilities or are reluctant to spend time and effort to build up and keep *guanxi* may be suppressed and restricted in their careers. More importantly, accomplishments in personal capability and achievements in work performance may not be recognised merely due to lack of *guanxi*. This environment could potentially be depressing for both employees and organisational cultures.

Juliet said she was feeling tired about the *guanxi* at workplace, that the tracking of relationships among organisational members was too sophisticated. This even became one of the reasons that made her wanted to retire earlier, exiting a life of being restricted by others.

Juliet: I just feel tired. Why do people have to live in such a tired way? … To people like me, this is extremely exhausting. This is why I want to retire. I think after I retire, I will have my own time, and I can arbitrarily manage my time. Just, when I get to this age, maybe I don't want others to restrict me.

Nevertheless, some participants possessed different perceptions towards these topics. Mike seemed to be quite satisfied with the environment of *guanxi* at work. Importantly, he described the superiors as having good character, being caring and easy going. He was also very happy with his peers and colleagues. As discussed above, organisational *guanxi* depends on the general performance among employees. This could be a subjective topic since the character, perceptions and working habits of each employee all affect this perception. Mike may be one of the employees for whom better political skills permitted swift adaptation to the *guanxi* environment.

Mike: I think I don't have problem in this aspect. The superiors are all very caring and nice, or maybe the superiors I meet are all very nice. My colleagues around me are also very nice. No matter [whether they are] *older people, younger people or people at the same age, we can all get along very well.*

Tom had a very positive outlook towards *guanxi*. In his view, work should be prioritized first during work time. In the time off of work, the most important thing is to be friendly to each other and keep a harmonious relationship with colleagues. He preferred to completely separate work and spare time when dealing with *guanxi*. Here he may mean that good relationships built by efforts in one's spare time with colleagues may improve trust or motivation while working with each other, thus improving work performance and

effectiveness. Furthermore, he also suggested that work and life are not separate; merely focusing on work tasks without considering connections with people is also not good for employee performance. In this environment, people may even feel bored working with each other.

Tom: When I work, it is all work. During spare time, we can be good friends, and we all get along very well in normal times … Work and spare time are not completely separated. They are systematically incorporated. It could be detrimental to work if there is not a harmonious working atmosphere, right? If you only work and are not able to deal with relationships with colleagues, you can feel very tired at work.

Alice pointed out an important benefit of working in a group of people with similar goals and values: it has given her sense of contentment. Alice commented '*nowadays, it is already not a time of working alone.*' She had very pleasant experience of working with colleagues who were possessing same values and targets. Alice was one of the few participants who expressed herself completely '*enjoying*' her work with others.

Alice: I have some other colleagues who have similar aims and values, and we work as a team to do research … I think currently we have entered a very good track. This is what I think which could be called 'enjoying'. I cannot say it if should be called 'enjoying'; I just feel a little bit the condition of being contented.

Finally, despite contradictory viewpoints towards the relationships between people in the work atmosphere, participants mostly expressed that their colleagues and managers are usually able to offer help for them. When asked if there was any help from colleagues or

managers, most of them instantly answered yes. Juliet seems dissatisfied with the *guanxi* system in terms of career pathways, but she greatly appreciated that her superiors and the organisation consistently understood her while her father was badly ill. She was allowed high flexibility at work and was permitted leave each time her father was in an urgent health situation. This consideration has helped Juliet considerably with WLB, especially since she is her parents' only child.

Juliet: Superiors from the school have been constantly providing me major help ... My father used to have very poor health; he was sick, usually lived in the hospital ... Sometimes I had to be absent from classes. Sometimes I had to stop teaching and leave after receiving a call while giving a lecture, because I am an only child.

Frank shared an idea similar to Juliet's on this point, despite being restricted due to weaker political capabilities. Anytime he needed flexibility to meet the needs of FCR, he had sufficient support from his superior and the university. The researcher acknowledges that this may be due partially to the flexibility inherent in working in academia. The conditions in industrial organisations may be very different.

Frank: For example, if I need to participate in a parent's meeting, asking for leave is permitted. Or when my child went to gaokao, *I needed to transfer my class; this is also ok. Otherwise, for example, if either I or my wife is sick, or if any parent of ours is very sick, or if there is any situation of bereavement, the organisation assigns a car, permits leave, or assigns a delegation to complete a visit* [to home].

Edward also mentioned colleagues helping him with his FCR. This may be an example revealing the importance of keeping good relationships at work. Because of these relationships, it is easier for employees to secure help during urgent situations of FCR.

Edward: In an emergency situation, at least they can provide me some mental support. For work, for example if I have some urgent issue today, I can make a call and tell them I cannot teach today, really cannot, but the class cannot be cancelled. My colleagues could replace me. This can be sorted out. The superiors also understand; this is no problem.

In summary, the research findings do not seem to reveal as great an influence of *guanxi* on employee commitment as some of the literature did. It may be that keeping the iron rice bowl may be the biggest factor keeping employee commitment high among older Chinese academics/carers. Most of the participants agreed that keeping good *guanxi* is important at work. The most common strategies used by employees to deal with problems raised by *guanxi* were to compromise to and comply with superiors and to put effort into building good *guanxi* with colleagues. However, the research findings also show some contradictory opinions from the research participants towards *guanxi*. Many participants were happy with the *guanxi* environment at their workplaces, while many others expressed significant concern about it. The research findings are consistent with the literature in that the *guanxi* system seems to be detrimental to those employees with less political capability. Lastly, nearly all participants felt that they had received sufficient support and flexibility from *guanxi* while their FCR were in an urgent state, including those dissatisfied with the *guanxi* environment or having fewer political skills.

5.3.2 Importance of FCR in family lives. As discussed in literature review, FCR could play a major role in both life and career trajectories. In this section, the researcher

highlights the importance of FCR and how they have affected the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers regarding linked-life perspective.

It is effective to predict a person's life course in different stages associated with different levels of FCR. For instance, this research has identified two trajectories under the most conspicuous or biggest influence from FCR: a life trajectory with senior parents living at a distance (especially those staying in rural areas) and a life trajectory with childcare responsibilities involving the education of middle and high school students. These factors will be both discussed in this section and in the next chapter of major transitions and trajectories.

In the literature review, simply defining the character of research participants as having older, empty-nester parents was described as not being thorough enough. It is more valuable to discuss the situation of older Chinese academics/carers whose senior parents are living far away from them. This was also an issue that significantly concerned older Chinese academics/carers and was depicted by Michael when discussing his hometown. Michael's parents are empty nest older people living from rural area since, uncommonly, Michael is an only child from his generation. From the way he described his hometown, one can perceive the major social issue that confronts the population of older people from rural areas in China. He perceived the empty nest as a prevalent phenomenon, and that the younger generation prefers to migrate to work in cities, making those above 50 years old the major source of farming labour.

Michael: There are too many empty nest older people, not only from urban but also from rural areas. In rural areas, young people all no longer do farming but seek jobs in urban areas … They are all older people above 50 who are doing the farm work.

A few difficulties or concerns may arise for the older academics/carers in taking on eldercare responsibilities while their senior parents live far away. Unlike Michael, who is an only child, some of the participants, including Edward and Charles, found that their siblings living in the same village with their senior parents have played an important role in assisting them with eldercare responsibilities. However, living so remotely means they are unable for them to be near their senior parents in urgent situations. This has made the older Chinese academics/carers feel guilty. As Edward mentioned, '*if the senior parents are ok, you feel more relaxed.*' Again, apart from monetary contributions, taking as much time as possible to pay visits or make phone calls seems to be the main or even the sole way that older Chinese academics/carers can achieve their eldercare responsibilities. This is both a way of checking on their senior parents and partially assuaging their own guilt from being absent from their senior parents' proximity. Nonetheless, they seem dissatisfied with themselves on their completion of eldercare responsibilities. Likewise, Charles admitted to '*still feeling not enough*' on what he has done for his parents.

Edward: Like my mum, she has some health problems, and she fell on the ground and got hurt less than a month ago. She has been staying in my older sister's home. I called her every day; otherwise I felt uncomfortable in my heart. Once she said she was not well, if tomorrow is Saturday, I must hurry up to arrive at their home. Even if it is just a visit, I have to go. This is actually a responsibility, but also a kind of pressure.

Charles: Spending time in their company and affording parents some expenses regularly still feels not enough … We don't live with our parents; there is a certain geographical distance. They and my older brother are living together in the same village.

There was some discussion from participants about taking their senior parents from the countryside to the current cities they are living. Quite a few participants claimed that, even if they genuinely hope for it, such a plan is very difficult to implement. The major problem is that senior parents from the countryside are not willing to come to live in the city. Charles said that if, in the future, either of his parents pass away, they will have to convince the other one convinced to come, '*even if they don't want to come*'.

Charles: But they didn't come. In the future, if one of them who has passed away, if that day comes, the other one must be taken to us even if they don't want to come.

The major reason that senior parents do not want to move to cities was stated to be fear of loneliness. This could be perceived from Zach's statement that his senior parents have their own life and social network in their hometown. However, moving to the city means they have to adapt to a completely unfamiliar environment above the age of 70. In addition, the adult children and other family members would be working entire days. The significant loneliness could absolutely be difficult for senior parents to conquer. On the other hand, Zach feels very guilty about always letting his younger brother take care of his mother in their hometown.

Zach: What is the only difficulty that has prevented her from coming here and living with me? Once we are at work, she would be alone, very lonely, but we work whole days … We cannot go home in the middle of the day; this is the biggest problem … My younger brother is also very busy with his family. As the eldest brother, I think I haven't taken enough responsibilities. I want to do more.

Not only do older Chinese academics/carers feel guilty about their incapability of providing more eldercare for their senior parents living in the distance, senior parents from the countryside also seem in need of eldercare from their adult children. Vick thinks that he mainly provides financial support without other types of care. Bruce was in a more severe situation; his father was badly ill for years until he passed away. Due to insufficient economic ability, he could only leave his father in the village, where the medical system was less advanced. He mentioned that he experienced dramatic *'mental distress'*. Bruce felt the passing away of his father to be the biggest adversity felt during his life course. He became significantly emotional when he said '*when we have* [economic ability]*, now the parents are already gone'.*

Vick: When I left, she always did not want me to leave, still hoped for me to for another one or two days ... She lives next door to my younger sister ... They take care of her more; I am mainly in charge of finance.

Bruce: We couldn't afford to go to the city and could only stay in village, seeing parents being sick in the village. Recollecting it now, there seemed to be a kind of mental distress, a kind of unhappiness caused by parents' disease ... We wanted to heal him, but we didn't know how. We didn't have the ability.

Zach had been thinking about dealing with the problem of eldercare responsibilities. He had not only teaching and research responsibilities but also had been working as a university administrator; he works a fixed eight hours each workday (administrative positions do not offer flexible working time). He said that when he is in the situation where he must take his mother to live in his home (when she is very old), he will attentively give up his

administrative position at work. However, there was an obstacle to taking eldercare

responsibility as of the time of the interview: He felt that giving up his work position too

early would be detrimental to his career. He wanted to wait five years, when it would not be

counterproductive to his career pursuits, stating '*then my power for sacrifice* [for eldercare]

may be bigger'. Zach is at a comparatively younger age of between 40 – 45. In his current

situation, he has chosen to sacrifice his opportunity to conduct FCR in pursuit of his career,

while in five years, perhaps after completing his academic goals, he may feel more confident

and ready to 'sacrifice' his time dedicated to career in order to perform more FCR.

Zach: I may end up with fixed working hours … This question of solving the problem for my

mum now is not easy. This demands a sacrifice of my working position … At least in five

years, when I don't have any regrets, then I can step down. At that time maybe I will already

be incapable [to work]*; then my power for sacrifice* [for eldercare] *may be bigger.*

Moreover, there is a less-sufficient pension scheme to rural areas compared with

urban areas in China, and many people in rural areas have to depend completely on their

adult children for eldercare due to lack of pensions. This inevitably makes older Chinese

academics/carers all the more concerned and challenged in taking eldercare responsibilities.

Michael's and Vick's parents do not have pensions at all, and they depend completely on

their sons for eldercare responsibilities. The older people from rural areas may also depend

on the farmland to support their livelihoods. However, the oldest old may not possess the

physical capability for farm work. Especially for those who only have one child, like

Michael's parents, it may be insurmountably difficult to safeguard their late lives.

Michael: Speaking of those like us, from rural areas, the farmers from rural areas don't have any pension or welfare. They totally depend on protection from sons or daughters or on the farmland from home.

Vick had the opportunity to be more relaxed with eldercare responsibilities since he has several siblings who could assist him. Like most of the older Chinese academics/carers who work from cities while their parents live in rural areas, Vick fully supported the expenses of his parents' lives. People like Vick usually feel a duty to provide full financial support to their senior parents, as they work in the city and have better economic conditions compared to their siblings staying in the rural area. As Vick said, he never asks how much his siblings pay for his parents' lives. He only makes sure that he pays everything to cover them fully.

Vick: My mum doesn't have pension, so it basically depends on me … But for my sisters and brothers, I never ask how much they pay. It is ok whether they pay or not, as long as I can gurantee her expenses.

There are also exceptions among the research participants, such as Jack, for whom both his and his wife's parents possess a pension that could be sufficient in their later lives. Their parents may be part of the privileged group from the rural area; for example, they may have worked for the village's local administrative government. However, they are in the minority. As mentioned above, Jack conducted his eldercare responsibilities by making as many contacts and visits as possible, to accompany and communicate with senior parents as frequently as possible. In this case, flexibilities gained from academia greatly help with eldercare responsibilities.

Jack: The senior parents on both sides are all not bad on economic conditions; they don't need me in economic support ... I call them as soon as I am free, communicate a lot, talk more, and hear each other's voices, providing care in this aspect. We go to visit them when we have time during festivals and vacations.

Crucially, after discussing how eldercare responsibilities for distant senior parents affect older Chinese academics, this research is likely to reveal how the participants deal with the situation of urgent eldercare responsibilities. It is found that research participants experience more, and more conspicuous, FCR while having one or more sick senior parents.

Chrystal's viewpoint towards managing WLB seems to be strategic. She viewed life trajectory in different stages and set different priorities for each stage. She experienced bigger work pressures when her older parent got sick and needed extra care. During this time, she put more weight on FCR instead of work.

Chrystal: This depends on viewing it from different stages, and putting the most important as a priority. For example, when older people from your family get sick, in these times you feel a big work pressure ... As for work, you can only put it aside.

Frank had a similar experience of taking care of sick senior parents. Frank did not have much FCR while the interview was conducted since both of his parents had passed away. However, the last years of his parents became one of his life trajectories with the most major FCR. He mentioned providing financial and mental support; however, he felt uneasy because he was not able to accompany them all the time.

Frank: My parents passed away years ago; during their last years, I was mainly providing financial support, um, more so [than mental support]. *And then, mentally, I tried my best. I also tried to accompany them more. But I couldn't take all the time* [I wanted] *to accompany them, I couldn't make it.*

Jack and his wife had to take 2.5 months of leave from work to take care of his mum once she was badly ill and receiving medical treatment in Shanghai. As discussed earlier, the insufficiency and inconvenience in the medical system, which requires a period of travel and a complicated registration process, may create major difficulties for older workers who are having urgent eldercare responsibilities.

Jack: My mum got mammary cancer in 2014. My wife and I asked for leave from work for two and a half months to go take care of her in Shanghai.

Lucy seems to have had the most difficult situation with eldercare responsibilities out of all the participants. While her father was badly ill, he needed a 24-hour caregiver. As discussed in the literature review, working from academia gives significant flexibility; for much of the time, the academics/carers could choose to work from home or anywhere outside of the office. The way that Lucy had chosen to complete her eldercare responsibilities was to stay home for her father. In addition, she chose to ask her sister for help by replacing her as a caregiver every Saturday so that she could take 'one day off' and work in the office.

Lucy: We had to take care of him from morning to night, while I couldn't do anything for my work. Nowadays, I have to let my younger sister come back home on Saturdays to take care of him, and I just have this one day on Saturday, staying in the office, working on my stuff.

Participants spoke at length about taking eldercare responsibilities from a distance. As Michael emphasised, even if his parents are living in the countryside, which is far away from him, he still has the duty of taking FCR. When parents are in the situation of greatest need, such as getting badly hurt or being unable to work and gain the income to cover their life, it is imperative for adult children to provide care and safeguard their lives. As discussed in the literature review, China has consistently encouraged the traditional culture of filial piety.

Michael: Despite not living together, it is still a family, a big family. If parents get hurt out there, and no longer able to work, or create wealth, as adult children it is necessary to take care of parents. This is common virtue of Chinese tradition.

Lisa's family took the strategy of siblings exchanging the primary caregiving responsibility for their senior parents as a routine. Thus, she was the main caregiver from 2006 to 2012 for her parents. Nowadays, her parents are living with her younger sister in Dalian, and she frequently goes to visit them whenever she has time. As most participants have mentioned, paying visits as many times and taking as many days as possible has been the best way to taking eldercare responsibilities for their senior parents living in the distance.

Lisa: From 2006 to 2012, for six years, I was around him every day in Shenyang. Later, for four years, my parents moved to my younger sister's home in Dalian. As long as I had three days' holiday, I had to go there.

However, there are also participants who said that they do not seem to have substantial eldercare responsibilities. They live a much more relaxed life with better WLB

compared to those with major eldercare responsibilities. This group tends to fall into two categories: either their senior parents are very healthy, or their parents have sufficient pension to support themselves. In Vick's words, the eldercare responsibility he had was not a crucial point. This is mainly due to the excellent health condition of his mum. Kelly is also in a lucky situation in that that all parents, hers and her husband's, are in very good health conditions. This has given her the chance to put all her focus and effort into childcare responsibilities.

Vick: Actually, to tell the truth, my mum doesn't need us to provide care. She can completely take care of herself; she can do all those things. Actually, I didn't provide her too many care responsibilities.

Kelly: My parents have got very good health, and my parents are living far away. My husband's parents are also very healthy. They don't need us to spend energy. I mainly put the focus in life on my child.

Emily and Victoria both expressed that because their parents have sufficient income, they seemed not to have as strong or urgent feelings toward eldercare responsibilities as many other participants did. Emily's father used to have a 14,000 – 15,000-yuan monthly income, which is exceptional in China. Victoria's parents were the rare university students in their generation. Thus, they gained better job opportunities and an excellent pension income.

Emily: Now [my FCR is] mainly for my child. My parents both have very good conditions; my father even earned more than I do … He passed away last year; he was an old man with an income of 14,000 – 15,000 yuan a month.

Victoria: My parents, from their generation, they are graduates from universities, so they gained more opportunities. So, their salaries after graduation have also been good. Basically, they do not need me to take responsibility [for eldercare].

However, their parents having decent income is no guarantee that the participants would have no eldercare responsibilities. Tom explained that his parents' wealthy status has made him content that they have a good life. Nonetheless, going back to visit his parents' home has been an important duty in Tom's life. He believes that having talks with parents and taking walks with them are also important responsibilities and are a way of taking eldercare responsibilities.

Tom: My parents do not need economic supports; they both have income … They have everything, including pensions and accommodations. They also do not need me to provide special care. Sometimes on Saturdays and Sundays I go to have a visit to my parents' place, talk with them, have some talks, and take walks with them.

The second point in this section refers to the other intensive focus of older Chinese academics/carers on FCR: childcare responsibilities for their middle or high school children. As mentioned in literature review, Chinese parents consistently put a strong focus on their child's education, especially in the high school period, which is understood to be a crucial trajectory to success in a student's studies. In Henry's words, *'The child is absolutely the central focus of life of Chinese people; it may influence or change you.'* Similar to the field of empty nest in the literature, little research has been done around family carers who have middle or high school-aged students in the West. Eldercare responsibilities for rural or distant empty-nested senior parents and childcare responsibilities during middle or high school

education could represent distinctive Chinese life course factors to contemporary older workers.

A few participants, especially the females, mentioned that the busiest trajectory or the trajectory that is most difficult to organise happened during the time their children were striving for *gaokao*. The achievement of *gaokao*, as Henry said, is culturally valued as the success of the whole family. Females like Kate especially would devote their full attention and sacrifice anything for the childcare, even at the expense of her career.

Kate: Who doesn't have pressure for gaokao*? Which university the kid will enter is the focus of the whole family around those years. There was very big pressure, that shouldn't be problem of pressure; at the end it became anxiety.*

Kate's life was greatly impacted by stress while her daughter was in high school. She indicated that she not only felt *'problem of pressure'*, but even anxiety, since she was too worried about whether her child could a get good result on her *gaokao* and enter an expected university. She revealed that at the end that the pressure on parents could become anxiety. Members of the entire family were worried about whether her daughter could enter a university as expected since Chinese parents assume that studying in a university is essential for success of employment and life. Most importantly, the success of the child's life is what the whole family wanted.

The last year of high school can be the most intensive period for childcare and the most worrisome time for Chinese parents. Helen said it was an extreme mental pressure for both parents and child. The stresses of that year are also more likely to generate conflicts between generations. Helen discussed the significant WLB pressure in that year.

Helen: By the child's last year of high school, there was extremely big mental pressure. Sometimes she was not as we expected as parents; there appeared some conflicts. There were things to do at work; simultaneously I had to take care of the child's feelings.

Furthermore, participants also admitted to difficulties in dealing with characters of adolescents during middle and high school. Edward described the past three years of life, while his daughter was in middle school, as *'miserable'*. Edward's time was almost entirely occupied with taking care of his daughter and her studies. Kelly and Ellie discussed the challenge of guiding adolescents at this time, which influenced their WLB. According to Kelly: *'The child was a bit rebellious during middle school. In those time I was badly frazzled. After she went to high school it got much better.'* Ellie also added: *'During adolescence, you may have to use strength to give guidance.'* Edward said he *'really hopes that the child finishes* gaokao *as soon as possible'*.

This section presented the findings of this research in terms of the major influences of FCR towards the life course of older Chinese academics/carers. The researcher has pointed out important factors of FCR in the Chinese context referring to long-distance eldercare responsibilities, especially for those from rural areas. Also discussed were the middle age of dual caring responsibilities, especially for those with both eldercare responsibilities and childcare responsibilities for middle or high school students.

5.3.3 Generation gap. Beyond the two trajectories of intensive FCR regarding eldercare for distant senior parents and childcare during middle and high school education, another linked-life factor identified in this research is that of generation gaps.

Michael described himself as *'kept in the middle'*, his generation experiencing a significant challenge to adapt both to the older and younger generations. As Michael mentions in the quote below, they see the next generation as single children growing up in

modern society with a fast speed of development. Characteristics, conceptions and behaviour of the only-child generation could be remarkably different from those who had a few siblings. As discussed in the literature review, changes in contemporary society may have exacerbated generational variances in China. Therefore, adapting both generations seem to have become major challenge in the family trajectory of older Chinese academics/carers.

As Michael said, it is challenging to adapt both to his senior parents and to his child. He explained that his parents tended to follow the old traditions from the countryside culture. Conversely, as he has lived in the city for many years, he has adapted to urban cultural life, resulting in a worldview vastly different from that of his parents. However, he still has to adapt to his parents. In the traditional culture of filial piety, it is important to be obedient to one's parents. On the other hand, since the next generation has grown up in a completely different national, social and economic background, with the input of Western conceptions driven by globalisation, adapting to the next generation then also becomes a challenging job. Since he has been '*kept in the middle*', he has had to adapt culturally while fulfilling the responsibilities of both eldercare and childcare.

Michael: Our senior parents follow old traditions, such as the old traditions from countryside cultures. To us, [we have to] *adapt to old traditions and take care of older people, adapt to them. We also have to adapt to contemporary society. On the other hand, for our children, our next generation, we also have to adapt to them … This makes us feel big pressure, to adapt to both sides; we are kept in the middle.*

Mike mentioned that the three generations (his parents, himself, and his child) have all grown up in front of significantly different backgrounds. Thus, there have been enormous gaps between each generation.

Mike: The time our parents grew up and the time we grew up, plus the time our children grow up, the gaps are incredibly big. Societal terms are different; economic conditions, societal trends, and even international trends are all different. Hence, changes of thinking must be different.

The generation of the participants' parents, including Charles's parents, were living in poverty throughout their whole lives until growing old. The generation of the research participants had been experiencing major economic and social changes throughout most of their career pathways. The generation of only children has been growing up around social and economic advancement. Major social change has made people's life trajectories from different generations significantly different. Charles gave the example of his child and his students of being too attached to cell phones, which has also bothered him greatly.

Charles: The upper generation of senior parents used to be very hard because they lived through poverty. There is a big gap between them and us, from poverty to the transformation of a whole social economy ... Since digitalisation, the whole lives of my child as well as my students are suddenly taken up by holding cell phones all the time. This makes me really unhappy.

A few participants have talked about generational conflicts between them and the upper generation. As Tom pointed out, '*senior parents are more conservative; their thoughts have stayed in 50s and 60s of the last century. They prefer stability on everything.*' Tom has switched jobs several times: from academia to different industrial organisations, and then back to academia. This seems to be unusual given their social background, as will be

discussed later, in terms of relative standardisation of life course among older Chinese academics/carers in contemporary China. His work experience may have led to him feel quite different from his parents, whom he described as more '*conservative*' and who '*prefer stability in everything*'. Given the age, time and social background of his parents, it seems unlikely for them to change.

A few participants have stated that in Chinese culture, parents interfere to a greater extent in children's life decisions. Alice and her husband live with her husband's parents; she imagined that their completely different outlooks contributed greatly to the generational conflicts that took place. They seem to have significantly different ways of thinking and considerations in life, and her husband's parents usually attempt to make decisions for Alice and her husband instead of respecting their decisions. This has made adjustment living in the same flat quite difficult. Rose and her husband also live with her husband's parents, but they have experienced extremely severe generational conflicts. Rose identified the generational conflicts as stemming from cultural differences: she is originally from southern China, living in the north with her husband's northern family. As mentioned in the literature review, there are vast cultural differences between the southern and northern parts of China.

Alice: They will interfere in your life. I think this really, makes you very uncomfortable. They will impose their aspirations onto your life. I always think about this question: I don't know whether my family is an exception or if this is a normal phenomenon within families with three generations living together.

Rose: I think there are some barriers for communication, unlike with my own parents ... I didn't eat with them at the same table until now, in case they nitpick me ... I think, I – this

may be the character of southern people – I think I am more open-minded than those

northern people. They, are, I think, too conservative, too traditional. It is just this feeling.

Juliet got married after she reached 40, and she used to experience generational conflicts with her parents, who believed that she got married too late and disagreed with her decision of getting married after 40. She sometimes decided to walk away when communication did not work.

Juliet: How did they agree? Every family must not say they agree with their children's [decision] *to get married that late. They were also worried, very worried ... I talked with them. If talk didn't work, I walked away. I went out to not make the older people unhappy.*

In Ann's opinion, carrying out filial piety by remaining obedient to one's parents has become increasingly difficult. As discussed earlier, the research participants believed their parents' worldviews to be considerably restricted by their past life experience, when China was appreciably less advanced.

Ann: Parents hope you show filial piety. You have to obey, but as parents grow older, to obey is more and more difficult. Their ways of identifying and thinking are very restricted by their time, their knowledge, and their capability. So to obey them is very difficult.

Some of the participants also spoke about their experiences adapting to the generation gap with their children. Significant economic development and social change, not to mention the OCP, have made their children significantly different from them. Yuri mentioned consequences to Chinese families stemming from the OCP. In her opinion, the new

generation of only children has grown up being spoiled by six carers between parents and grandparents. Because they are the only children of the family, they have monopolised the family's attention, especially grandparents. This may have triggered another challenge of contemporary older Chinese academics/carers with regard to child education.

Yuri: Now, diverse negative outcomes have come up from the OCP. There is only one child from each family; they are all spoiled ... There are six adults taking care of one child.

Jennie described the general character of the young generation of only children as *'less sensitive in considering others' feelings.'* The era in which the generation of only children grew up had already seen significant economic development in China, so there were sufficient economic support and resources for their early life experiences. The only child, as Yuri depicted, became the centre of the family, while the rest of the family members concentrated on taking care of them and tried their best to meet their needs, and they did not have the experience of sharing possessions with siblings. This may have led to what Jennie attributed to the generation of the only child: *'They may have higher requirements for satisfaction.'* By contrast, the generation of the older Chinese academics/carers had grown up with family poverty and scarcity of resources on a national level. At the same time, they often had a few siblings, while their parents were busy earning the income needed to afford a big family, and thus the parents' focus on each child would be limited. Therefore, it is not difficult to perceive major differences between generations in contemporary China, and why Jennie would think of the next generation as more 'self-centred'.

Furthermore, there are also generational differences on conceptions around education. James mentioned the differences between his and his parents' viewpoints on his son's education. He observed that it merits thinking about the ways a child could be educated,

especially when living with senior parents. In his words, his senior parents used to restrict him a lot, but today, education of children should be more democratic. Charles indicated that his way of enforcing restrictions on his son seemed not to work. He said, '*I haven't been good at restricting him.*'

James: When staying with senior parents, to what extent should the child be restricted? The children nowadays should not be overly restricted. Maybe senior parents used to be the way they were; they thought taking care of children must be done through restrictions. Maybe there still exist differences in conceptions of childcare methods.

By contrast, Lily seems to be different from the above participants' experiences with intergenerational child education. She felt that she had lots of freedom from her parents with her own studies, but she has been very strict with her own daughter's studies. This could be explained by the changing family structure, in that there is much more attention paid by parents towards an only child's studies and performance, especially given high level of importance of a child's *gaokao,* considered the responsibility of the whole family in contemporary China. Ellie's perspective is similar to that of Lily in that that she relied more on '*self-control*' with her studies. By contrast, she paid a lot of attention to restricting her son and supervising his studies.

Lily: Because we are comparatively very strict with the education of our child. In the past, our parents gave us total freedom, almost not restricting us at all.

Ellie: Very big difference. We didn't go to out-of-school classes; my parents didn't guide me too much; I was using self-control while I was growing up … In the old times there were a lot of children [in a family]. *Now there is only one child, and all focus is put on him.*

Participants have also talked about how they adapted to different generations and dealt with generational differences. Among older Chinese academics/carers, including Michael, a prevalent way to deal with the generation gap was to be more malleable to the younger generation while being more obedient to the older generation. As Michael mentioned, in contrast to the autocratic relationship with his senior parents, it seemed more effective to be open-minded and accept the views of their child. This is understandable since it is already extremely difficult for the generation of the oldest old to change. Complying with them and continuing the autocratic structure of FCR, trying one's best to think of their feelings as they have become more fragile with age, was suggested as the most effective way to deal with the generation gaps with senior parents since it is already too difficult for senior parents to change. As modern society changes, ways of managing FCR could also be changing; autocracy keeps decreasing and more democracy takes its place in the relationship between parents and children in only-child families.

Michael: At that time, older people used to be autocratic in families, which I don't agree with now. In contemporary society, people cooperate to solve problems … Families and their children are like brothers and friends in communications. It is very normal.

Participants usually chose to devote more patience and obedience towards their senior parents as according to filial piety, obedience towards parents is very important, and this is also expectation of senior parents. The older Chinese academics/carers did not want to make

217

their senior parents unhappy, even if they did not agree with them sometimes. As Derek manifested, it is too difficult to change senior parents. It should be done slowly, and the senior parents require their patience.

Derek: Our parents are old, and their friend circle is just that house [home]. *There are lots of things he has never seen and never heard of. After all, older people have their own values in the world; their world values have already been formed, and they think what they think is right. It is very hard to change them; you have to keep doing it slowly.*

Hilary assumed that not living in the same house with senior parents could effectively prevent generational conflicts, so that the two generations could both follow their own lifestyles. As many participants have revealed, senior parents have been restricted by their own social background and are very difficult to change. While working in modern society, it seems unrealistic and ineffective for the Chinese academics/carers to synchronise with their senior parents in the environment of contemporary China. Quite a few participants chose to synchronise with their child instead in order to have better communications within the family and improve the child's education.

Hilary: But as I said, we don't live together, so the difference [between us] *has not affected us … Now I am almost synchronised with my child. I can accept his way of life now.*

As discussed previously, parents in the past, who had been following the old tradition of Chinese culture, seemed to be strict with the filial piety of their children. Their children had to do what they were told by their parents and could not disagree with them. As Frank said, '*from our generation, no matter whether our parents were right, we had to accept it …*

It seemed like disobeying parents was a significant crime. The children nowadays are not like this.' He described disagreeing with parents as being like a *'crime'*. In the following quote from Frank, it can be seen that he has made noticeable changes in child education from his own, with his parents, to his daughter. He described his parents' communication style with him as more like *'giving orders'*. By contrast, he preferred to favour talking to his daughter first, in order to make his way of getting along with his daughter more friend-like.

Frank: The next generation is different. You have to think a lot before talking to her, instead of directly talking as you think; this is the difference. Our parents used to talk to us more straightforwardly, in a way like giving orders, and you had to obey them.

Tom seems to agree with Frank. He opined that respecting the opinions of children is very important in modern child education rather than issuing autocratic orders as was done in the old tradition. Alice believed that her job working in a university has helped her synchronise with the younger generation and accept changing conceptions.

Tom: The generation of children, the conceptions they have accepted are in fact different from ours ... They have their own thoughts; we have to respect the opinions of the child.

Alice: It may be because I work in university, staying with students, so I can gain some information. I can still gather what they like, what the fashion is. This makes the gap smaller, not as big as expected.

Henry seems to be an exception from the research participants, holding a different opinion from the majority of the participants. He stated that he has mainly synchronised with

his parents on conceptions and values. In his words, *'our ways of thinking, ways of behaviour, have in fact already basically synchronised with our parents'*. However, while talking about adapting to the next generation, he seemed to be more permissive. He seemed uneasy accepting his child's differences. The strategy he took was to ensure the main basic principles, then try to keep his distance from the minutiae in order to maintain harmony in his relationship with his child.

Henry: We basically take our own responsibilities respectively, including family responsibilities. Take control of important principles, then totally be free from other stuff. At least in our time, it is too hard to make too many agreements with our children.

This research has found older Chinese academics/carers significantly caught in major generation gaps due to the significant difference in social and economic background and level of advancement between the three generations in China. Their general strategy to deal with generation gaps was to comply with the autocratic tradition of their senior parents while adopting more democratic communications with their single child.

5.4 Summary

This research has found significant macro context factors of former command economy policy, economic transition, technology development, and increasing social need of more independent ageing that have influenced the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers. This research has found that under the former command economy system, older Chinese academics/carers have accepted the state arranged full life employment since graduation from university and have pursued their whole career trajectories under the lead of government and organisation. Economic development has significantly improved income and life quality of older Chinese academics/carers while resulting in increasing competition along with bigger mental pressure to older Chinese academics/carers.

Surprisingly, this research has found that the open-up economy has not had a big impact on encouraging career transitions or changes in older Chinese academics/carers. This may be due to the privilege position of older Chinese academics/carers who possess better social capital to safeguard family needs. Extensive benefits of 'iron rice bowl' provided by command economy system has enhanced the decision of older Chinese academics/carers to stay in the state arranged employment. Furthermore, this research has found an increasingly significant challenge among older Chinese academics in adapting to the new technologies or high-tech facilities that are applied in teaching. Moreover, this study has indicated an increasing need for independence among older Chinese people in the future.

This research also analysed the major linked life factors of *guanxi, importance of FCR, and* generational differences significantly influencing older Chinese academics/carers' WLB and life courses. A profound influence of *guanxi* was found on the WLB of older Chinese academics/carers. The most common strategies that older Chinese academics/carers used to deal with *guanxi* were compromising and complying with superiors and putting forth effort towards building good *guanxi* with colleagues. The research findings are consistent with the literature in that the *guanxi* system can be detrimental to those employees with less political capability. Finally, nearly all participants thought that they had received sufficient support when they experienced urgent FCR situations because of *guanxi*.

This research has identified gendered life courses associated with FCR. Relative destandardisation of female academics/carers' life trajectories is visible in the data along with a greater influence of FCR on WLB among female older Chinese academics/carers.

This research has discussed the significant concern of older Chinese academics/carers towards their senior parents living in distant rural areas with insufficient pension and eldercare resources. Another major concern of older Chinese academics/carers in dealing with FCR lies in the trajectory with childcare responsibilities of middle/high school education.

These are the most concerning circumstances with FCR throughout the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers, which have caused significant disruptions on WLB.

Moreover, the study found that older Chinese academics/carers developed a strategy to deal with the generation gap by accepting and adapting to the autocratic communication style of their senior parents, while making more democratic adjustments towards their children.

This chapter has discussed the above macro context and linked life factors with displaying evidence from data in extensive details which has answered the first question of what factors have influenced older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories.

Chapter 6: Major Transitions and Trajectories

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, this researcher will illustrate five major turning points ([1] Enter higher education and start first job; [2] change job or start second career; [3] start marriage and have first childbirth; [4] middle age; [5] Children move away) and two trajectories ([1] Childcare responsibilities with middle and high school education; [2] midlife responsibilities) associated with the most intensive FCR. These factors have been the most influential in the life trajectories of older Chinese academics/carers according to the research data. This chapter also addresses what the important issues are to which older Chinese academics/carers pay the most attention. This chapter provides a basis to the analysis on next two chapters which will explore the interplays between older Chinese academics/carers and contextual factors in China.

6.2 Enter Higher Education and Start First Job

Judging by the previous discussion on political force from the command economy, it is not difficult to discover that entering higher education and gaining one's first job opportunity has become a major turning point for older Chinese academics/carers. This major turning point will be discussed in this section. This research combines entering higher education and one's gaining first job into one major turning point. As discussed previously, entering higher education and receiving assigned employment after graduation was a packaged procedure arranged by the Chinese government under the central planning economy. This has determined the working place and the whole career trajectories of older Chinese academics/carers at the most influential turning point in their young age. When asked what turning point has had the biggest impact on her whole life trajectory, Ann answered: *'getting the first job after graduation from undergraduate study'*. Older Chinese

academics/carers took the strategy of getting into university with promised full-life employment to change their 'fate' in order to migrate to the city and get rid of poverty.

Participants expressed their deep appreciation towards the renewal of *gaokao* and the opportunity it conveyed to study in university. *gaokao* was renewed in 1977 after the Cultural Revolution (Fang, 2018). For instance, Michael attributed studying in university and gaining knowledge to completely changing his life trajectories. He mentioned that staying in rural areas offered *'no opportunity for development'*. By contrast, the turning point of going to university and being assigned his first job changed not only his own life trajectory and quality but also that of his whole family. This may also be what he meant when he said '*knowledge is everything'*. He has been content with his life, describing his current, moderate condition in terms of *'despite not* [having] *too much'.* He has realised his general life goals and has become capable of supporting his whole family, and thus *'it's enough'.*

Michael: Basically, knowledge is everything. Since I went to university and started working, I got out of the countryside … By having the knowledge I possess today, I have a job, and I can take care of my parents. At least I can support the monthly expenditures of my parents. Despite not having too much, it's enough.

This major turning point has impacted the research participants to the extent that they could not imagine what their life trajectory would have been had it not happened, what they would have now and how different it would be. Jack expressed great appreciation to Deng Xiaoping, the president of the country who revived *gaokao* after he came to power: *'I took part in* gaokao *in 1981; it had just been just recovered in 1977. After Deng Xiaoping came to power, he implemented the policy that has changed all people's fate.'* Especially for people

who were born in rural areas, and for whom career opportunities were rather limited, the reinstitution of *gaokao* was a policy that potentially could 'have saved their lives'.

As Zach said, his childhood trajectory in the countryside was *'too tough'*, such that he would not want to keep it after having grown up. Participating in *gaokao* and entering university was the only way he could take to change his 'fate' or life trajectory. Therefore, working hard and getting the opportunity to go to university was inevitably a turning point to him, and he said *'this turning point was the only way'*.

Zach: Childhood experience was just too tough; life was very hard. Hence you needed to work hard. Your only way at that time was to take part in gaokao.

To Bruce, no longer living in village was the primary aim that he was determined to achieve: *'Because I was a child from the countryside, my dream was to at least live in town.'* Ann also believes that *gaokao*, higher education, and her assigned job were a crucial turning point in her life trajectory, mentioning that *'this basically determined my life trajectory'*. According to her, this turning point has decided all aspects of her life trajectories regarding her place of residence, her life quality, her income and social environment, etc. Without this turning point, she could not have *'gained the life'* she has had.

Ann: Since I received the education, I was assigned to this organisation after graduation. Thus, I gained the life I have ... This has decided my life, the location I have been living in, the quality of my life, income, and also the people around me. This basically determined my life trajectory.

However, there are other participants who discussed this turning point from another perspective. When asked about the turning point of entering higher education and starting their first job, they said they did not feel a major change. This researcher allows that this may be because the first major turning point discussed in this section possesses the likelihood of affecting people's life trajectories gradually rather than instantly. In Ellie's experience, the first time she started working, salaries and incomes were still very low, rendering her unable to make major life changes. After about ten years, with the national economic level improving, she felt greater changes as a result of this later turning point. Kelly had similar experiences to Ellie, but her condition was a bit different. Her original family possessed better economic conditions, and thus she did not experience poverty as a majority of the participants had. Therefore, she also felt little change at the turning point of entering higher education and starting her first job.

Ellie: Not so many changes. We were all very poor at that time. When we first started working, our wealth and salaries were all very low. The general level of the society was also not high.

Kelly: There wasn't too much change because my parents were also teachers before. So, there was just a little bit more income compared with before, but it was just fine, there was not a very big change.

Nonetheless, this research has identified entering higher education and gaining one's first job as a significant influential turning point in life courses of older Chinese academics/carers. As it completely changed their 'fate' and social identity away from

remaining farmers in rural areas, their whole work and life trajectories also changed along with radical improvements in economic and social level.

6.3 Change Job or Start Second Career

The second turning defined in this section on the life course of older Chinese academics/carers is that of job changes or starting one's second career. This research associates this turning point with major changes in career trajectory. In the era around the 1970s and 1980s in China, political transformation and the characteristics of the government could significantly change people's life trajectories. For example, Deng Xiaoping implemented the open-up economy when he came into power (Chang, 2018). Michael said during the interview, *'if Deng Xiaoping didn't come to power, we would have remained in the village.'*

Two major typical strategies that research participants took to deal with the major turning point associated with economic transition are that of beginning a second career, changing from working in academia to industry, or changing jobs while remaining in the employment of academia. These two strategies could be represented by Michael and Victoria. Crucially, the turning point in this case was mainly driven by China's political change and the opening up of the economy.

Firstly, this section will discuss the turning points of career changes from academia to industry. As discussed in literature review, the opening up of the economy significantly influenced the life trajectories of Chinese people. It has caused the establishment of large numbers of enterprises, and organisations (including state-owned universities), facilitated by marketisation and globalisation, strategised to join the expanding market.

For instance, Michael's university established university-based enterprise under the driving force of the open-up economy. Therefore, Michael was assigned to work in the enterprise rather than in the university. As will be discussed in more detail later, with the relative standardisation of life course common to the command economy, people were also

likely to comply with the state's arrangements throughout their career trajectories. Michael accepted the job transfer, though not without hesitation: he felt unsatisfied because working in the university-based enterprise would interrupt his career progress in academia. As he noted, however, he was used to working in academia, and, after working for 14 years in the university-based enterprise, he requested a transfer back to academia.

Michael: The university aimed at initiating university-based entrepreneurship. At that time, it was under the open-up economy … I didn't want to go at first … and then I was transferred to the [name of the factory]*, and worked there for 14 years … My colleagues who started work at the same time as me had all been granted a deputy director level or a professorship. I have been unsatisfied about this.*

However, Vick also had a career trajectory including a job transfer from academia to industry and then back to academia after working for the industrial organisations for years. He returned to academia in large part to stop living apart from his wife: '*How does one solve the problem of living in distant places? This is one point.*' Another reason was again due to the support that he could continually receive since he would still be eligible for the command economy's iron rice bowl.

Vick: Actually, there was another reason why I transferred from industry. The pressure was too much … The civil servants, organisations in the public sector in our country, which belong to what we called the 'iron rice bowl', promised lots of guarantees [to employees] *… As I became older and older, I also tended to consider that element.*

The difference between Vick and Michael was that Vick was not transferred by the university to an industrial organisation. He decided to change careers by himself. Crucially, since Vick did not change jobs because of an assigned transfer from the command economy system, and he was not working in state-owned enterprise like Michael, Vick did not receive any iron rice bowl benefits during the years he was not in academia.

After working in the industrial organisation for years, Vick assumed that he was more suited to academia as he became older. He believed that there less work pressure in academia. In the meantime, working in industry required more physical strength, Vick having been in the domain of engineering, and there was a higher probability of risk and fewer guaranteed benefits. Simultaneously, as was mentioned in literature review, the command economy offered life-long employment, so employees who became employed under the command economy system before it vanished in the early 90s could all enjoy whole-career trajectories. Therefore, Vick was able to go back and work in his former, original university.

Secondly, apart from alternating between academia and working in industry, some other participants experienced starting a second career. Victoria was one of those who started a second career, seizing opportunities allowed by the open-up economy and globalisation. Victoria started her part time job as director of two private enterprises after her first childbirth. As she disclosed, she had genuine passion for her career and her subject, which was why she was so interested in managing companies specialising in project design.

Victoria: The most important reason was, I just really like this subject and wanted to improve myself through blending theories into practical activities ... Secondly, the most important thing was I had a kid, and the income from university was too low.

The birth of her child and the subsequent demand to increase her income was Victoria's biggest incentive to start the part-time jobs. For older Chinese academics/carers like Victoria who started a second career, making this decision was primarily driven by the increasing demand on family income. As she mentioned, she had to *'earn more money'* to provide better resources for her child, and *'it was inevitable this reason'*. Edward stated, *'nowadays the cost of raising a child in China is too high. People place significant value on raising a child.'*

However, most participants have stayed in academia, maintaining the job they initially received from the command economy arrangement and never changing jobs or starting a second career. Mike talked about different experiences that some of his university colleagues had. Those students were assigned to work in their rural hometowns after graduation. Then they gave up their assigned jobs and went to southern China to start entrepreneurship when the open-up economy was implemented and the Shenzhen special economic zone was established. According to Mike, it could be interpreted that because those students could not work in the city under state arrangements, they were willing to reject the assigned job and attempted entrepreneurship instead.

Mike: Some students who came from very remote and poor areas were sent back [to their hometowns] *to work ... they quit their jobs and went to southern China, starting a business or selecting another job. It was the time of the start of Shenzhen, when Shenzhen special economic zone was founded.*

The turning point of job transition or starting a second career is not as conspicuous as other turning points identified in this chapter since merely several of the participants have experienced this turning point. As a macro-level change in the national economy transition, it

could potentially have significant impact on people's life courses and career trajectories by increasing career options. However, this researcher considers that the lack of prevalence of this factor among participants of this research may be they are from privileged groups who were receiving a respectable iron rice bowl benefits package, and they were satisfied with their living conditions. Thus, there could be little incentive for them to drop the iron rice bowl and change jobs. Regardless, some of the participants such as Victoria expressed that the strong incentive of meeting higher demands on family income after childbirth encouraged them to manage a second career simultaneously outside of academia.

6.4 Start Marriage & First Childbirth
The third turning point is that of starting marriage and one's first childbirth. This research defines the start of marriage along with the first childbirth as a major turning point. As will be discussed later, there tended to be short intervals between first marriage and first childbirth among the research participants.

The turning point of being newly married and having one's first childbirth seemed to be a monumental transition in FCR, after which research participants experienced enormous work-life conflicts. When asked the biggest turning point was in terms of FCR, nearly all of the participants isolated the life transition of being newly married and having their first childbirth. Some participants were even likely to group being newly married and having their first childbirth together. Other participants emphasised that it the first childbirth that made them feel a significant turning point in FCR since having a child was the most conspicuous source of work-life conflicts. Likewise, Hilary commented: *'FCR started since I had child, rather than getting married.'*

The most impressive difficulty to Chrystal was what she described as *'a lot of first-time things'* when raising a baby. She was also affected in her mood at work. Frank also

described this as a *'substantial turning point'*. He had to spend the majority of time at home, which he could was not accustomed to doing at the beginning.

Chrystal: There was great increase in tasks from the family. Some were the things you had never done before, a lot of first-time things … At that time I felt I may have been in a period with worse moods.

Frank: A substantial turning point was having a child … A large amount of time was spent at home since then. I wasn't used to it at the beginning.

Similarly to Chrystal and Frank, many participants had their WLB interrupted. For example, Helen said that her focus changed from work to family during the period after her first childbirth. After her child went to school, she felt she *'came back to normal life'*. To Helen, the transition seemed longer, lasting until her child grew up and went to school.

Helen: There must be some change on focus of work. Since the child needed people to take care of it, there were a lot of things to do. When the child was on his track and went to school, then I came back to normal life.

Henry speculated that this transition and turning point could be the most difficult time of conspicuous work-life conflict for people working in academia. As discussed previously, working in academia can provide a certain flexibility, which may be helpful for managing FCR and WLB. However, participants still think this turning point in terms of noticeable work-life conflicts.

Henry: *The period of having a child was comparatively difficult. There could be some conflicts between family life and work sometimes … After this period, there should be* [no difficulties] *working in the field of education.*

When asked about how they dealt with this turning point, most of participants mentioned that they did not consciously make major adjustments. As Michael said, *'there were no adjustments; it was just letting nature takes its course.'* There were natural changes in his self-concept in terms of becoming a father, though he accepted a different life without thinking too much about it. Alice seemed to have a similar opinion: everything was going naturally, and he did not develop special strategies to deal with the turning point. Frank similarly suggested that no special adjustments were needed: *'It is a conceptual family value in Chinese culture that makes people change'.* Beyond simply *'letting nature takes its course'*, Frank's opinion indicates that traditional Confucian filial piety may also have led the older Chinese academics/carers to adjust for their families or prioritise family above individuality. This research has identified being newly married and having one's first childbirth as a major turning point in older Chinese academics/carers' life courses that has given them significant work-life conflicts.

6.5 Middle Age

The fourth turning point is that of middle age, carrying with it dual caring responsibilities. For clarity, this research defines the major turning point of middle age as specifically ranging between 40 – 45 years of age. Middle age was mentioned frequently by the research participants as a huge turning point wherein their lives experienced immense changes, mainly due to sudden new eldercare responsibilities when their senior parents felt a rapid decline in their health conditions. Those who also had childcare responsibilities for high school-aged children and their education, as discussed in previous chapter, felt this impact especially strongly. However, it is difficult to define a specific number of years to denote a

mid-life turning point. The 35 participants mentioned this turning point taking place either at a specific age year between 40 and 45, or they referred directly to the age range of 40 – 45. For example:

Kate: *I think I was in the neighbourhood of 45 years old. At that time I truly felt having elders above and my child below. Older people on the top need to be taken care of; children at the bottom need to participate in* gaokao.

Alice: *When we reach the current age, it is found to be different, like me at the age of 45 or 46. Then, older people from the family all become so old, my mum was suffering from myocardial infarction.*

Ellie: *40 years old, because I think at this age there are lots of things to bear in mind … For example, there are older people, children, and many projects assigned at work. It is not like at a young age, when you didn't have such big responsibilities.*

Most of the research participants revealed a major midlife turning point around the age of 45. As Kate expressed in the interview, this is the time when they entered a stage of having both eldercare and childcare responsibilities. Thus, there was instantly increased pressure on the older Chinese academics/carers in terms of FCR. Kate mentioned that it was difficult when she needed to take care of her senior parents, who had started to contract severe or multiple health issues. Simultaneously, she also had to pay attention to her child's studying for *gaokao*.

Chrystal felt that through her whole life trajectory, she had not experienced major difficulties except during the current stage of FCR towards senior parents. Alice was in the

same circumstance of taking care of senior parents. She highlighted the age of around 45 or 46 representing major increased FCR for senior parents. She depicted her experience being the only child from her family available to take care of her mother, who was severely sick, and being busy with work at the same time.

Chrystal: There have never been any difficulties from family life that have influenced me. I think I was always fine. But in later years it really is, when older people have already become dependent on you too much. Then you feel the pressure is bigger and bigger.

Alice: My older brother was in Dalian; I am the only one in Shenyang, so I was almost the only one who took care of [my mother]*, while I was very busy* [at work] *after the operation.*

Most participants expressed mental pressure around work-family conflicts during this turning point. Likewise, Edward said, *'I think this is less of an economic pressure but a kind of mental pressure that keeps you worrying, because she is old.'* Ellie considered age 40 to be a major turning point. She depicted her current life as having '*a lot of things to worry about'* and that she *'often forget*[s] *about things',* being saturated by dual FCR and work responsibilities: *'Actually, it is because there are too many things to think of at this age.'*

More importantly, this research has found that the factor interrupting the participants the most was concern for the health conditions of senior parents. Most participants said that the thing they worried the most, or the only thing that concerned them at their current stage, was their senior parents' health. It could be observed from the data that FCR plays a big role in older Chinese academics/carers' life trajectories.

Derek: We mainly care about their physical and mental health and problems. We wish them good health and a happy mood … If there arrives a time our senior parents cannot not live by themselves, this will become a very tough thing.

This research has identified middle age as a major turning point, along with being newly married and having one's first childbirth, that has imposed significant work-life conflicts on older Chinese academics/carers' life courses.

6.6 Children Moving Away

The last turning point was when the study participants' children began their studies at university and moved to other cities. This research has defined this as a major turning point because participants conspicuously revealed a corresponding significant change of life. In Kate's experience, for example, life has suddenly become relaxed. She said, 'the *major responsibilities for my kid and that anxiety were gone.'* As discussed in the literature review, the child's education has long been a central element within families in traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, a child finishing *gaokao* could also be viewed as the completion of an important family task.

Kate expressed a strong feeling of relaxation since this turning point, enjoying a life of more leisure, spending time with and paying attention to her senior parents, and moving her attention back to her career.

Kate: Suddenly the major responsibilities for my kid and that anxiety were gone. So leisure time has been increased, which I can manage all by myself, to pursuit personal hobbies and enjoy time on my own, for this part … Now (we) spend more time on parents and less on kids. In the past, it was more for kids and less for parents.

The conspicuous change and feeling of sudden relaxation may be due to Chinese parents' tendency to pay significant attention to their children when they are nearby. For example, Frank's quote below demonstrates the enormous attention he paid towards his child:

Frank: Chinese people comparatively emphasise their children very much, caring about her studies, her thoughts, her eating habits, and we work for her the whole day.

Many participants spoke about a sudden feeling of relaxation after their children went to university. Following that trend, Frank's life turned from *'so many things to do'* to *'*[having] *to look for things to do'*. Compared to the earlier experience of having a child working towards *gaokao*, which had caused significant work life conflicts, participants' lives have changed and have better WLB since the children have been gone. This trend can be observed from the three quotes below.

Frank: Now, after she went to university, there comes massive free time … I am comparatively more contented, more contented because I have my own time.

Lisa: Before, I took my child to out-of-school classes, worked for her gaokao, *and so forth. Now that the child is not near me, I feel very relaxed … I also miss her, but what can I do? I am the kind of person who looks at the bright side.*

Helen: Nowadays, the child is not with us. During the weekend, we take time to visit a park, have a walk and take a view. Life conditions have improved.

It is clear from the above quotes that the older Chinese academics/carers tended to focus on their children and their studies, and they worked on all tasks needed to assist their children's lives and studies. Therefore, life before *gaokao* and life after their children went to other cities to study could be completely different. Many research participants viewed this as a conspicuous turning point in that their lives suddenly become relaxed with instantly-reduced caring responsibilities. This also further supports the argument that the education of middle and high school students is a significant linked-life factor impacting older Chinese academics/carers' life courses and WLB.

6.7 Childcare Responsibilities for Middle and High School Education

Aside from the five major turning points, the research identifies two major life trajectories that stand out in the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers. The first trajectory happens in the years when the child studied in middle and high school. As discussed previously, the importance of a child's education and the aspiration for success in *gaokao* have significantly influenced the WLB of older Chinese academics/carers. Middle school and high school are culturally assumed to be most crucial stage of child education in China.

Edward is one of the parents whose child is currently studying in high school. When talking about this period, he displayed intense anxiety around his daughter's studies. As he described it, *'your time is all hers'*. He spends nearly all of his time outside of work on his daughter in order to assure the success of her *gaokao*. He has also been significantly influenced in his own mental state. Kate has been through the same stage, during which, as she revealed, she even *'passed* [her] *anxiety towards* [her] *child'*.

Quite a few participants mentioned taking their children to out-of-school classes, which occupied a large amount of their time during this trajectory and was a major cause of work-life conflicts. Charles discussed making not-insubstantial payments to his child's out-of-school classes, for each subject. Both Charles and Helen were taking their child *'here and*

there' for out-of-school classes. Evidently, this could take up a lot of time and was a factor influencing WLB.

Charles: When the child went to out-of-school classes, we had to take him out and back and spend money as much as possible … So if you want to take out-of-school classes on each subject, that could be a comparatively big amount of expenses.

Helen: Before, the weekend was spent on the child. We accompanied her here and there for out-of-school classes, and then we kept busy until we went to work on Monday. This kind of life.

Amy's son was in his first year of middle school. According to her, for the next few years she will spend most of her time on her son and his studies. She was worried that by doing this, she may have to make sacrifices in her career. Still, as discussed above, a child's middle and high school education is a crucial period for a family that cannot be neglected. Females especially would unquestionably prioritise efforts made to their children's studies during this trajectory.

Amy: For my life in the next few years, I may put emphasis on our son Because he is now in first year of middle school, the next few years are really important to him … I am worried for the next few years. If I spend too much time and strength on family life, will I work less well than before? I don't know in this case whether I can get my superiors' approval of my value [to the organisation].

Edward described his schedule during his current stage with his daughter studying in high school. He mentioned that he spent nearly all of his leisure time on his daughter and greatly looked forward to being *'totally free'* after her daughter goes to university. Most participants identified this trajectory as one of their busiest times with FCR. This busy condition may not be due to the significance of the individual tasks to be done; instead, it seems mainly to come from the immense anxiety caused by the steep expectations on their children's studies and *gaokao*. As Lily described it, *'since* [the child's] *middle school, who's not like this? Every day is busy, and until he goes to university, you have to be busy.'*

Edward: When she goes to university, we can be totally free ... We have to get up 5 AM and cook breakfast ... You have to constantly accompany her; this keeps using your strength. Whether she's doing well with her studies, this interferes with your heart ... Your time is all spent on her ... She goes to bed 11:30 PM; thus, we go to bed at 12 AM.

This research has identified that one trajectory with most intensive FCR is that of the education of middle and high school students. This was isolated by participants as a trajectory with significantly worse work-life conflicts.

6.8 Middle Age Responsibilities

The second trajectory is that of entering one's midlife period. Becoming middle aged is often a crucial time for FCR due to senior parents starting to have worsening health conditions. A worsening situation could be when senior parents become badly sick, requiring enormous caring responsibilities; keeping WLB in this situation becomes a major challenge.

Some older academics/carers, like Yuri, may possess eldercare responsibilities at this stage while their children are still studying in high school, which further increases the challenge to keep WLB. Most female participants chose to reduce their time and effort in their careers, or even sacrifice their career, in sake of taking on FCR. By contrast, all the male

participants confided that FCR have seldomly influenced their careers or admitted that their spouses seem to have contributed more to FCR.

Lucy discussed her experience last year before the interview when her father came down with severe health problems. She believed that this was the first turning point at which she felt significant FCR.

Lucy: I think the first time that comes to my mind when I felt like I was starting to have FCR was last year. This has such a big effect on my heart. Because my dad got a very severe cerebral haemorrhage … I think I may be different from others; others may feel the first time they had FCR was when they got married. But I have since this incident last year.

Participants emphasised the responsibilities of their current condition, with the most accumulated FCR from both eldercare and childcare responsibilities and simultaneous demands on working hours and workload. For instance, Ellie discussed having insufficient time, struggling in balancing work and life while taking care of senior parents, with their weak health conditions, and her child as well. Ellie compared her current life stage with her past life stages. While she was younger, she may not have felt the weight of FCR since her parents were not old and were completely independent. However, nowadays FCR play a major role in her WLB, which was like *'having to do ten tasks at the same time'*.

Ellie: When we were young, our parents were also young, or we still had no kid, so you could focus on completing one task. But now it feels like you have to do ten tasks at the same time.

The stage of entering their 40s or mid-40s is also the time the participants' senior parents entered the oldest old stage, which comes with a significant decrease in health and

emergence of diseases. Sometimes caring for senior parents may consume large quantities of time senior parentsif the parents are partially disabled in their ability to live at home or are in hospital. More importantly for the middle-aged person, the biggest influence of the mid-40s trajectory is the pressure and the mental concern towards his or her senior parents' health, which is markedly deteriorating older Chinese academics/carers' quality of life and concentration at work.

Not all of the participants have indicated dual FCR at a single point in time. Nonetheless, this research still illustrated that the mid-40s is an important area for researching FCR in China as it relates to dual caring responsibilities. The importance of traditional filial piety still dominates Chinese culture, strongly impacting older workers' lives through emotional bonds and shared values as shown in the data above.

This research has identified the most intensive FCR trajectory as that of middle age with dual caring responsibilities. As comparatively bigger flexibility is granted by higher education, older Chinese academics/carers have not experienced serious work life conflicts throughout their life trajectories, with the exception of those special turning points and trajectories: being newly married and having one's first childbirth; education of a middle or high school-aged student; and middle age with dual caring responsibilities. Life course research on older Chinese workers/carers may shed further light on these three special transitions and trajectories for further investigations.

6.9 Summary
This research has found five major life transitions (1.enter higher education and start first job; 2. change job or start second career; 3. starting marriage and first childbirth; 4. middle age; 5. children moving away) and two trajectories with most intensive FCR (1. childcare responsibilities for middle and high school education; 2. middle age responsibilities) of older Chinese academics/carers. The first two turning points are found within career trajectories, while the last three belong to family trajectories. This chapter provides a basis on

which to answer the second and third research question and investigate the interplay between

older Chinese academics/carers and the Chinese environment.

Chapter 7: Structural Influences on the Life Courses of Older Chinese Academics/Carers

7.1 Introduction

Chapters 7 and 8 discuss the interplay between structural influences from the Chinese context and the agency of older Chinese academics/carers. Chapter 7 illustrates an important finding of this research in terms of the relative standardisation of older Chinese academics/carers' life courses: the extent of the influences of political force, of the former command economy system, and of the traditional collectivist Confucian cultural values. Additionally, the researcher discusses gendered life course in this chapter; as discussed in literature review, life course between genders could be different, corresponding to structural influences.

More importantly, the main objective of this chapter is to answer the second question of how do older Chinese academics/carers navigate major turning points in their life courses, and also answer the third question of how are the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers linked to the Chinese broader political and socio-economic, organizational, and linked life contexts, as well as human agency.

However, this research focuses only on participants from one particular generation, under a specific historical background and from the same region of China. The participants' social and historical background and life trajectories have been thoroughly explored throughout the previous two chapters. The findings of this research, therefore, may only suit

this particular group of people. In addition, the next two chapters develop further analysis that goes deeper, based on the data discussed in the previous chapters.

7.2 Relative Standardisation of Career Trajectory

This research indicates that the relative standardisation of older academics/carers' life courses in contemporary China could derive from the control of the command economy and from the cultural collectivism influencing people's values. According to Ross (1998), China has, for a long time, applied a procedure of standard settings in order to manage the social welfare system and scientific, technological and business development across the country. This researcher hypothesises that central planning policies possessed noteworthy power to influence and unify older Chinese academics/carers' life courses, especially for the birth cohort of the research participants, whose major life courses have been under the influence of the command economy system.

The first major turning point that was identified and discussed in the previous chapter could be affected by a relative standardisation of people's life courses. The extent of the influence of political control in a macro-level structural context over people's life trajectories was also discussed in the first analysis chapter. Under the command economy system, people overwhelmingly chose to receive their assigned jobs at the turning point of starting their career pathways.

The command economy's policies had a significant influence on working adults entering the labour market in the era. The birth cohort from the 1960s to 1970s was very likely to take the job opportunity arranged by the state within the public sector. They assumed it to be the more conservative and safer way, compared to job seeking for themselves, which connoted uncertainties and instabilities. People saw state employment as an 'iron rice bowl', which could guarantee an entire life's employment with a certain income that was sufficient for the family to live on.

The researcher has also detected a significant urge to migrate among older Chinese academics/carers to live in urban areas for better living conditions and career opportunities. However, the labour surplus in the agricultural sector could also have been a significant factor triggering migration. Since people had got family members taking care of the farm work in the villages, they feel enabled to leave their hometown to seek jobs in the city to produce more income. Simultaneously, the command economy and its iron rice bowl removed many of the barriers to living in urban areas, further encouraging rural workers to migrate.

More significantly, rejecting the state employment arrangement meant losing all the benefits of the iron rice bowl, after which one had to seek employment with absolutely no guarantee and a high degree of uncertainty. By weighing the advantages of the iron rice bowl, most people decided to accept job arrangement by the state and also to follow that employment throughout their career trajectories. Despite the minor exceptions of participants who had switched jobs between industry and academia (e.g., Tom and Lisa), most participants decided to keep their employment, which had been arranged since graduation, until retirement. There are also participants who were simultaneously running a second career as a part-time job. Nonetheless, they still retained their employment in academia. This further strengthens the argument put forth in this research regarding the crucial power of state policy over people's life courses, particularly in Chinese culture. This researcher has found a generally relative standardisation of career trajectory among Chinese academics/carers, under the control of command economy system, across whole career trajectories.

Most of the research participants discussed integrated life course, particularly in career pathways under the control of state policy throughout their working lives. Rather than applying for job promotions or asking for changes to their work location or sector, a few participants preferred simply to undergo collective job changes by complying with the

organisation's official arrangement. In George's words, every step he took throughout in his career progress, since the job was first arranged for him, was based on the management or distribution of the organisation. George mentioned a few times during the interview that, rather than actively striving for career promotions, he consistently followed the orders of the university on the operation of his career. In other words, which job to do or which position to take was totally dependent upon the needs of the organisation.

George: My job and my whole career pathway have been completely arranged by the organisation. Every step I take, basically, from entering university to getting my first job to following arrangements is basically done by complying with the organisational arrangement.

George has been working for a single organisation his whole life, and this is very common among his peers. There are also people like Michael, who had been passively transferred to other state- or university-owned enterprises. In order to keep their iron rice bowl, most people choose to follow the organisation's decisions. For instance, Michael had the experience of switching in and out of academia, not on his own decision, but to comply with organisational arrangement. Again, rejecting the organisation's arrangement midway through one's career trajectory may also have led to loss of employment and, subsequently, of the guarantees and benefits offered by the command economy system. This all led to relative standardisation of career trajectory among the older Chinese academics/carers, who followed the organisational operation on their career progress.

Above all, it has been mentioned that the iron rice bowl started to be eliminated, with diminishing relevant profits, by the end of the command economy in the mid- and late 1990s. There may have also been changes to people's life course or career pathways that came along with the marketisation of the economy; however, this is not revealed from the data of this

research. Most participants remained working in academia since graduation, with only a few exceptions having experiences working in industry or having a second career. Again, this may be due to the participants of this research generally coming from privileged positions and lacking incentive to change careers.

Lastly, older Chinese academics/carers' retirement age also seems to be relatively standardised by state policies. According to the participants' responses, retirement decisions seem mainly dependent on national policy. When asked about whether he wanted to extend his working life, Jack answered, *'it is not that you want to extend; it is the national policy, so you must extend',* meaning retirement age is wholly dependent on the age required by national policy.

Jack: According to the national policy, I should still have 6 and a half years' working time. If it's an especially extended work life, then I may extend it by another one and a half years of working life.

There is another crucial reason that older Chinese academics/carers intend to follow national retirement policy on extending their working lives. Older Chinese academics do not want their future pensions affected. Thus, they respond positively to an extended working life scheme. This can be seen in the quote from Kate below.

Kate: If I don't extend my working life in line with the new policy, there will be a big loss to my pension. So as long as my health condition is ok, I must comply with the extending working life scheme and retire at the designated age.

In this research, participants did not actually possess much anxiety around retirement. They seemed eager, looking forward to retirement and the more leisurely life trajectory it promises. Kate assumed that retiring at 55 was not *'enabled'*. She may mean that if her pension were to remain unaffected, she would choose to retire at 55: *'It is mainly because of policy. Actually, I prefer to retire at 55, but isn't it not enabled? Because if I retire at 55, there will be a big influence to my pension.'* Similarly to Kate, nearly all participants indicated that they will doubtless extend their working lives corresponding to the policy, even though they may want to retire at an earlier time. Therefore, this research supports the idea that retirement timing also tends towards relative standardisation in older Chinese academics/carers' life courses.

Crucially, this research considers that schemes of EWL (extending working lives) could be undoubtedly successful in contemporary China since older people tend to comply fully with the policy. By contrast, due to globalisation, economic reform, improving economic conditions, booming access to information and changes on concepts and worldviews, younger cohorts' retirement decisions may change. Further life course studies of older workers/carers in China from the perspective of generational differences or changes are needed.

This section has presented a picture of relatively standardised career trajectories among older Chinese academics/carers: Their general career trajectories including career changes or progression generally followed the state's arrangement or the need of the organisation rather than personal pursuits or interest. However, this research has limitations. It focuses on older workers/carers from the world of academia. Since people working in different types of industry, in the public or private sectors, in self-employment, or those from different social classes or living areas may generate different results, the study it may not be representative of the country at large. Working in academia in China may more easily lead to

relatively standardised career and retirement trajectories since most academics are confident with their income and pensions, unaffected by concerns about supporting their families' lives. By contrast, people from lower social classes or those from rural areas, who are not covered by pension schemes, may intend to retire later.

7.3 Relative Standardisation of Family Life Trajectory.

As the above section demonstrated relative standardisation of career trajectories, this section presents evidence of family trajectory relative standardisation among older Chinese academics/carers. This research has shown a generally relatively standardised early marriage timing with a short interval to the first childbirth. Like Kelly, most participants held the attitude of following the mainstream choices from people in their society, and the previously-mentioned Confucian collectivist values, when approaching the major turning point of marriage. Respondents tended to believe that there are specific life objectives or responsibilities to complete during each life stage, as illustrated by Kelly: *'We did as we should',* he said, and he added, *'we just had the child once we had him.'* More explicitly, soon after graduation from university and starting work, the next big life objective is getting married, which should be completed as soon as possible.

Kelly: It was within our expectation. Because in our age we did as we should: Get married and then have child afterwards.

Among the younger generation in contemporary China, there may tend to be diverse, relatively destandardised opinions, attitudes and plans towards their career and marriage trajectories. As a result, their life decisions and life plans could also be more destandardised compared to older Chinese academics/carers. As discussed in previous chapters, there have been widening generational gaps; in the past, people tended to value collectivism, believing that following the majority was the most appropriate or safest life choice.

In contrast to Kelly, Edward viewed himself as having a late marriage at 30 years old: *'I got married comparatively late. I got married at 30.'* Bruce got married at 28, which he also assumed was a late marriage; it was, at least, later than his peers. The reason he got married at a 'late' age was poverty during early life experiences. Bruce indicated that due to his family's deep poverty, the weak health conditions of his senior parents, and years of efforts in paying back debts, he had to get married at a later age. *'Nothing. I had nothing,'* he said, indicating the significant resource scarcity in the past. He also pointed out acquiring *'triangle debt'* (multiple reciprocal debts among three entities) from his parents, which had worsened his disadvantaged condition and the possibility of marriage. As mentioned in the literature review, males in China have been culturally assigned the important role of providing financial support and ensuring accommodation for the family. Therefore, it is not difficult to see that Bruce, with his difficulty securing accommodation in his early years, had to delay his marriage until after the debt was paid and sufficient money for a family was accumulated.

Bruce: It was because I came from the countryside … Nothing, I had nothing, my family did not have anything, really poor, and we had 'triangle debt', and I was in debt. So I didn't dare to have a girlfriend. I wasn't able to. I didn't even think of having a relationship, or in other words, no one dared to introduce a girl to me.

The researcher has found a relatively standardised life course of early marriage with a short interval to the first childbirth. According to Jin et al. (2005), the average age of Chinese females' first marriage was around 23 in 1992. With one exception, all the research participants were married before the age of 30. Juliet, however, used to be a dancer before she became an academic; she needed to attend performances nationally, and her work

trajectory was visibly different from the other participants. She was much more mobile, and as she herself said, she was *'always on the stage'*.

Juliet: I got married when I was already 43 ... I was always on the stage when I was young, and had no time to think about having a relationship.

There was also an exception in the data in terms of childbirth age. All participants had a child except for Juliet; the others, who had children, had given birth to them before the age of 30 except for Yuri, who had hers at over 35 years of age. Yuri strongly emphasised that she was the exception among her peer cohort by having a child *'around ten years later than the others'*.

LLY: The children of my university colleagues are already senior university students, but mine is still a third grader at primary school ... I conceived my child when I was 35, and gave birth to her at 36.

In the quotes above, both Juliet and Yuri identified themselves as exceptions among their peer groups. It is not difficult, then, to infer the relatively standardised decisions and common values among older Chinese academics/carers in contemporary China with regards to early marriage with a short interval to one's first childbirth.

In addition to the generally relatively standardised timing of early marriage with a short interval to one's first childbirth, relatively standardised family life trajectories could also be observed from other perspectives. For example, the OCP determined that the majority of older Chinese academics/carers' family structure would have single child, except for Henry (who had two children) and Juliet (who had no child). Moreover, the previous chapters

identified two specific trajectories with the most intensive FCR: child education in middle and high school, and middle age, associated with dual FCR, and especially eldercare responsibilities. Since most of participants went through earlier marriages with a short interval to their first childbirths, it is reasonable to conclude that older Chinese academic/carers experienced the most intensive FCR trajectories around the same time.

More significantly, this research predicts a collective social need in future trajectories for independence among older Chinese academics/carers due to the relatively standardised family structure resulting from the OCP. This research also has found that older Chinese academics/carers tend to possess a relatively standardised early experience of poverty and rural–urban migration facilitated by the renewed *gaokao* and the command economy system. Another collective factor found in this research, which most concerns the research participants in terms of FCR, is that of having senior parents living far away from them and especially in rural areas.

Therefore, it can be seen from the above discussion that older Chinese academics/carers are likely to have been through relatively standardised family life courses, due in part to the political control over people's life courses and the sociocultural background of the command economy era. The researcher proposes that future ageing and retirement policies in China could be based on classified age groups. This solution ensures representation for people at similar age stages, who are associated with particular characteristics, past experiences and life trajectories, and who have similar needs and concerns for their employment and retirement plans. The contemporary generation of older Chinese academics/carers, with their relatively standardised life courses from the state-enterprise sector, would especially benefit from such a system. In other words, this researcher suggests that viewing people's life courses as relatively standardised may be a more convenient and effective way to manage the country.

7.4 Gender Life-Course Associated with FCR

This research has shown distinctive gendered life-courses and different conditions of WLB (work life balance) between genders among older Chinese academics/carers. As discussed in the literature review, Confucian societies, including China, have still retained the cultural norms around female carers and male breadwinners within families. However, there have also been changing norms and conceptions of gender. Participants of this research mostly deny the traditional forms of FCR, agreeing more on an increase in cooperation between genders in taking FCR; however, females seem receive more pressure from FCR (family caring responsibilities).

This section includes some characteristic quotes from female participants discussing relatively destandardised FCR distributions and the life trajectories that result. Some female participants made life decisions or experienced major turning points of life trajectory development in a large part as a result of their spouses' life trajectories. Alice stated that most of her life decisions, including turning points in her career pathways and resolution to pursue further studies, were all made expressly to assist her husband's career management or to prioritise her husband's decisions rather than her own interests. For instance, Alice moved to another city and pursue a further degree in order to live with her husband.

Alice: I went to do the degree with him. Because he wanted to leave, to go back to university to do the degree. I said ok, then I will go back with you.

Amy shares a similar experience to Alice, going as far as emigrating to a different country for the convenience of providing FCR and supporting her partner's study and career. Despite having certain ambitions for her own career, and after much consideration, Amy decided to temporarily prioritise the needs of her family at the expense of her career.

Amy: I went in 2003. The first year and a half was spent accompanying him while he was studying. During the first year, I had a baby ... When our son reached one year and four months old, I also did a PhD ... I didn't think too much when I left, including whether my current job would be still kept for me after I came back. I also didn't consider at all; I immediately sorted out my passport and visa and left.

Kohli (2007) stated that there is constant inequality in the linked lives between genders. This leads to females making adjustments towards male partners' life decisions, assuming their most important role to be FCR. However, this inequality has long been criticised among Western cultures and questioned within the literature. In this study, a few female participants, most notably those who had altered their own life transitions and trajectories, complained about their sacrifices of career for family needs. Kelly and Yuri reflected on making too great a sacrifice for FCR. Kelly believed herself to less competitive and less determined or persisting in her career: *'I seem to have put most of my energy into my family and my child ... However, it is laziness ... My own requirements for my academic career are relatively low.'*

Furthermore, some female participants, like Ellie and LLY, expressed significant dissatisfaction towards their life and career trajectories. Ellie criticised the traditional distribution of FCR between genders. In contemporary societies, she said, life courses of female workers are genuinely challenging and include doubled responsibilities since they have to compete in the labour market at an equal standard of requirements to their male counterparts, while still being seen as the main contingent of family carers. This has also been one of the reasons that female participants have given up aspects of their careers or development opportunities to meet the needs of the families.

Ellie: I think females take heavier FCR. As working female, I am held to the same standard as males in the workplace. It will not be lessened because you are a female. In the family, you also have to undertake more caring for the child, housework, and cooking. So, I think females undertake more responsibilities.

During the interview, Yuri listed five major sacrifices she had made for her family pertaining to decisions around major turning points in her life course (coming to live in her partner's city, giving up her career opportunities, giving up studying overseas, taking on eldercare responsibilities for her partner's senior parents while living together with them and having a child). She made all of these decisions unwillingly in order to meet the expectations of her family members. Yuri saw herself as having a life course significantly influenced by FCR, leading to dissatisfaction.

Yuri: I unquestionably reckon that I devoted more. When I started looking for a job, I originally could have chosen to work and live in Beijing. But in order to stay with him, I chose to stay in Shenyang … The second sacrifice, to be closer to him, I transferred here from my original organisation … Change, I just feel more and more like I don't have personal space, I have less and less time, and less and less life for myself, right?

According to Yuri's responses throughout the interview, her concern and the pressure experienced from FCR mainly stemmed from the demand of her family members, especially her husband and mother-in-law, that she serve FCR over the development of her career. Nearly all of female participants expressed having to give up parts of their work time or career development opportunities provide family care. On the other hand, most of them also had indicated their willingness to prioritise FCR over career, since they had eventually

concluded that family was the most important thing in life. By contrast, male participants tended to put more focus on their career pathways than on taking FCR.

Moreover, responses from the male participants seem to support the females' opinions in this research. For instance, Charles, Henry and Michael indicated that females seemed to take on more FCR. Among the voices of male participants, it seemed common not to spend too much time on family. For instance, Charles said, *'exactly, I always feel I spend little time for family.'* There were also male participants who expressed genuine appreciation for the work their spouses have done for FCR. For example, Michael said, *'now I even don't know how to withdraw money from the cash machine. I don't mind about it; my wife is in charge of everything in our family.'* Male participants also expressed their view that males should perform proper FCR by earning money as a breadwinner. Henry assumes that this is the reason males *'haven't done a lot'* in FCR.

Henry: Males really haven't done a lot, but I have this idea I have tried my best, but just what I have done is not that much. Because sometimes, we men … I think of as the breadwinner for the family.

More significantly, quite a few male participants possessed different viewpoints towards the above discussion, observing that lately there actually tends to be more gender equality in FCR. Frank suggested that in contemporary society, there has been not any conspicuous distribution of who should be the breadwinners and who should take more responsibility as caregivers. He also pointed out a social change in his conception of taking FCR. He mentioned that in the social environment of his childhood, FCR was mostly distributed in the traditional ways. This researcher submits that this may be due to the dramatic increase in economic activity, which puts large demands on human labour

participation and has encouraged booming labour participations among females. Therefore, there has been an increased need for males to assist the careers of females.

Frank: There is no longer a clear distribution between females and males, but when we were young it was clearly distributed. It could be assumed as an extremely specific distribution.

Vick's quote seems to support the coordination between genders for FCR and enhances the argument of reformed FCR distributions within families in contemporary China when compared to the older traditions.

Vick: My wife is really good. My wife herself is a little workaholic, really, she is more like … compared with me … Her quality of proactivity in her work is better.

Victoria seems to be an exception in this study, as a female participant with completely different conditions and perceptions of her life course. In her interview, she disclosed that along with completing extensive tasks and assignments at work, she also occupies the main role in the family for caring responsibilities. However, she had experienced family conflicts with senior parentsin-laws'; they disagreed with her ambition and the time spent for her career, especially with her decisions to pursue a master's and PhD and to work as a manager for two companies. As she mentioned, '*The major conflict before was my husband's parents' belief that you should take care of the child at home, or else.* [Now] *they changed.'*. She maintained in the interview that perseverance was the only strategy for her to take when capably managing diverse responsibilities.

Victoria: In those times, I think, my parents were supportive of me, but my husband's parents were not. They thought a woman with a bachelor's degree is enough, sufficient for life … I feel one thing is that I persisted, constantly persisted; they then also believed that [I] *really am able to achieve it.*

Nonetheless, even if compared to other participants, she possesses much greater responsibilities, Victoria seems to feel greater satisfaction in her FCR. She did not reveal any concern or unhappiness during the interview towards her WLB associated with FCR. It should be evident that possessing double careers in academia and company management while taking FCR is not easy.

To summarise, this research has displayed relatively destandardised FCR, in contrast to the traditional family pattern of male breadwinners and female carers. Coordination between spouses in distribution of FCR is prevalent, and the female research participants were highly involved with economic and labour participation. Nonetheless, this research has also shown that females are still more likely to sacrifice career to take FCR compared with males. The existence of a social and cultural norm of male breadwinners and female carers is revealed by the research participants, especially among the female participants.

However, gender discrimination is not evident in the research data. Participants have not labelled themselves as having experienced gender discrimination. They simply take the potential for gender discrimination or inequality as given and adapt to those conditions by voluntarily devoting themselves to FCR and making career compromises. This is rather similar to what will be discussed in the next chapter in terms of older Chinese academics/carers' attitudes and reactions towards ageing, age discrimination, and EWL.

7.5 Summary

In this chapter, this researcher has answered the second question of how older Chinese academics/carers navigate major turning points in their life trajectories, and has answered the third question of how are the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers linked to the Chinese broader political and socio-economic, organizational, and linked life contexts, as well as human agency.

Accordingly, This chapter has found relatively standardised life courses of older Chinese academics/carers, with certain differences between genders. More explicitly, this research has found general relatively standardised life trajectories with similar timing of major turning points and similar life decisions made during those turning points, along with similar pattern of career pathways among older Chinese academics/carers. This is significantly due to strong political force of former command economy that has kept older Chinese academics/carers more likely to stay in the state arranged employment throughout career trajectories. Simultaneously, the social influence of traditional Confucian and collectivism culture has also augmented the relatively standardised life course of older Chinese academics/carers. Since older Chinese academics/carers tend to make decisions that follow the majority of their peers to prevent uncertainties and risks.

Chapter 8: Agentic Orientation of Older Chinese Academics/Carers

8.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses how older Chinese academics/carers react to the Chinese environment. Therefore, this chapter presents the findings to answer the second question of how older Chinese academics/carers navigate major turning points in their life courses, and also answer the third question of how are the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers linked to the Chinese broader political and socio-economic, organizational, and linked life contexts, as well as human agency. Section 8.2 discusses the WLB of older Chinese academics/carers. Section 8.3 illustrates the current condition of older Chinese academics/carers with regard to ageing. Section 8.4 discusses the lay voices of older Chinese academics/carers towards ageing, EWL and age discrimination. This research presupposes that studying older workers' own attitudes and perceptions towards ageing-related topics is important to the development of a social ageing concept.

However, as this research is a qualitative study, which was conducted with biographical interviews, this research could merely information only from the participants' own perceptions. Therefore, some results may be subjective, analysing mainly how participants observe their life courses and how satisfied they felt about their own WLB.

8.2 WLB of Older Chinese Academics/Carers

The findings of this research regarding WLB seem polarised. Some participants assume working in academia has given them the opportunity to pursue better WLB, while many others revealed significant concerns and pressure on WLB, especially during the previously-identified trajectories involving highly-intensive FCR. A common reason for the

pressure is that of the intensive workload required to win academic titles or career promotions, which conflict with taking FCR.

For example, some participants, like Bruce, expressed significant pressure and dissatisfaction in balancing work with FCR. From his viewpoint, he has devoted almost his full attention to his career and work, which has squeezed away his time to take FCR, spend time with family or socialise. He expressed feeling significant pressure from work and difficulties dealing with the pressure. This study has analysed Bruce's life course previously and has learned that Bruce experienced extreme poverty and debts in his early experience. He also ladled himself as an *'outsider'* who did not possess the access to resource and social opportunities that would come from family or former career trajectories, which are important fundamentals to building up *guanxi*. These may be the factors that have deteriorated his WLB and monopolised his time from taking FCR.

Bruce: Honestly speaking, it is really a shame. I cannot balance work and life well. ... Thus, I ignore lots of family life, including taking my child out. I also do not have time to socialise; I feel really un-balanced, feel very pressured, very tired.

This research has found that older Chinese academics/carers who also got administrative positions and had fixed working hours in the universities would like to separate work from family life, while those academics/carers who merely worked in teaching or academic research usually brought work home. Some of the participants, like Lisa, preferred to separate work from family life fully: *'I think my work and my life shouldn't bother each other. And I try my best not to do any work after I go home, and focus on my work during work time.'* Lisa seemed to be satisfied with her WLB; she put her focus on FCR and did not do work outside of work time. However, Lisa had administrative responsibilities

and had to work fixed hours on weekdays. Others, like Ellie, possessed a completely different point of view: '*Working in this field seems to have no conspicuous dividing line.*'

Ellie: We don't have a fixed working time. We can work at home; we can also work from school.

Chrystal referred to work pressures impeding communication with family members: '*When you are not mentally relaxed and bring your pressure home, you may lose patience when you talk to family members.*' Another participant, Yuri, has also been significantly affected by work pressure that influence WLB. As a female participant, Yuri seems to confront more major difficulties in adjusting to the work pressure. She mentioned that, due to pressure from work, her life was affected, leading to drastically worse quality of sleep. She divulged feeling significant pressure in meeting the rapidly-increasing work performance requirements. However, as discussed previously, Yuri mentioned during the interview that she has been suffering from the enormous FCR that occupies large parts of her life.

Yuri: Nowadays, requirements are more and more demanding. The speed of my progress cannot always reach the speed of increasing demand. Before, I usually woke up every midnight, sitting and sweating from anxiety.

In Charles's experience, too, keeping WLB has been a significant challenge, since too much freedom may have made self-discipline more difficult. In his quote below, he says that keeping WLB while being efficient at work without a certain level of supervision necessitates a certain perseverance. Meeting deadlines may become more challenging without the organisation imposing the restriction of fixed working hours.

Charles: There is certain level of difficulty in my own time management … Every day, you are in an environment of freedom, but you still have to complete [tasks or work assignments]. *This truly requires certain ability of perseverance.*

As mentioned previously, findings in this research regarding the WLB of older Chinese academics/carers seem to be polarised. Many research participants have indicated that working from academia has provided them a certain flexibility in their working hours and locations, which they greatly enjoy while managing WLB and taking FCR. Vick said that there was no conflict between his work and his FCR. In his opinion, this was mainly because of his belief that both work and FCR deserve the effort of being conducted well and that it is unnecessary to frustrate one's family life because of work.

Vick: Work and family are not contradictory. Both have to be well conducted and better connected … Since there is no need to make an unhealthy family life because of work.

Frank appreciated much about working in academia, especially the sufficient flexibility and freedom it conveys in managing WLB. He responded that '*the most comfortable point that this job has offered me is referring to* [the] *comparatively high level of freedom.*' He took full advantage of the substantial flexibility and time that he could use after teaching and completing academic work responsibilities, investing that time in FCR. Amy had a similar reason to Frank for appreciating a career in academia: '*The job I have … I think as far as time management, I am relatively happy. Because university teachers can work half days.*'

Frank: Teachers in higher education don't have fixed working times. So, there is sufficient time. Sufficient time refers to, after I finish my normal tasks of teaching and research, I have a lot of personal time to manage freely.

Henry expressed that working in academia had led to a well-ordered life, which helped him to improve WLB. As mentioned previously, he had been working as both an academic and university administrator and thus had a fixed eight-hour work day on weekdays, unlike those academics who did not work in administration and thus possessed a large amount of flexible working time. Henry's life, he assumed, had become more organised and regular. According to Henry, in his university, he did not have to work extra hours; thus, going to and from work regularly every day seemed to contribute to a conspicuous division between work and home life, leading to good WLB with FCR. Henry himself is an administrator who has fixed working hours, but, like most Chinese academics, he calls himself a teacher. As Henry mentioned, he had unintentionally settled down into the life rhythm determined by his university's work schedule.

Henry: Teachers themselves live with regular schedules, so it also leads to other parts of my life being very regular, planned … Now, it is not a question of easy or not easy; it is being very used to it, just already being used to this kind of rule of life, life rhythm.

Furthermore, as Shaffer et al. (2011) indicated, to people from collectivist cultures, the most important incentive to work is to support the family, while to those from Western cultures with more individualism, the most important incentive to work is to complete one's individual career goals. This study supports Shaffer et al. in that that most of participants stated that their major life decisions, or the changes they made at their major turning points,

were made with the aim of creating better living quality for their families or brighter futures for their children.

Most of the female participants indicated concerns and pressure around keeping WLB and taking FCR, especially for childcare, while most male participants expressed having good WLB associated with minor difficulty in taking FCR. For example, quite a few participants instantly gave a short answer when asked how they saw their WLB, like Mike: *'I am happy with both my work and life. There are also no conflicts between the two.'*

This research generally revealed higher levels of work-life tensions among the female participants. The extent to which participants experienced work-life conflicts varied. Kate indicated that she experienced significant work-life conflicts since she maintains high expectations on her career and work.

Kate: I think there are conflicts. Because to do a better job, maybe there has to be a big sacrifice from private time, and from time of taking care of a child ... Now it is fine, because since the child has grown up, there has been a good balance, but work still takes up 80 – 90% of the time in my life.

Kate mentioned that her current life trajectory seemed to be more balanced since her daughter had just finished *gaokao* and gone to university. As mentioned in a previous section, there was intensive FCR while her child studied in middle and high school, contrasting noticeably with her more relaxed life after her child went to university. She recognised spending around 80 to 90 percent of her time on work; overall, Kate seemed to be a significantly career-oriented female, stating *'good WLB to me means that I can spend more time on my work.'*

Ann described work-life conflicts as depending on *'sufficiency of resource'*. She elaborated that both time and money spent on her family, including eldercare and childcare, were limited. She implied that since she always wanted to give more, she is always unsatisfied with her WLB performance. Rather than making efforts to balance work and family, Ann simply described herself as being used to an 'unbalanced' life: *'There is not a kind of good balance. We are just accepting it. We don't have space to balance.'*

Ann: It is mainly a matter of sufficiency of resource: for example, time. In the coordination between work and things from family, there is a conflict of time … The money you have earned is limited and has to be distributed. You always hope to give more … There are always many conflicts.

Moreover, this research has not shown the propensity for turnover as Ang et al. (2018) did. Similar to some other findings from the literature review, this study overwhelmingly indicated a high level of commitment from the older Chinese academics/carers towards their universities. It is common that once the older Chinese academics/carers had received their assigned job, they would keep this job until retirement, with minor occasions of career transitions and a significantly low instance of career withdrawal.

It was discussed in the literature review that working extra hours has been embedded in Chinese organisational culture, though it is more prevalent in industrial organisations. In this research, only one of the research participants, Lucy, talked about her WLB being significantly influenced by having to work extra hours. This has been a major detriment to her time to take FCR and manage WLB.

Lucy: Maybe some people would mistakenly think that allocating leisure time to work is a way of making a contribution. But maybe it is not necessarily true … Sometimes, we are given tasks by the school on Friday which have to be submitted on Monday. Then you have to work on weekends; otherwise, you cannot submit it.

Above all, some participants revealed how they deal with WLB while taking FCR. In Chrystal's experience, during the time after work, she used to give first priority to FCR. Simultaneously, she often used her spare time after completing her FCR to work.

Chrystal: If [time is] *available — for example, if there is nothing to do after returning home from work — you can do some work at home. If there are things to do, then this has to compromise.*

Victoria was a participant who showed strong confidence in her career management and WLB. Victoria did not have administrative responsibilities, but she did have part time jobs as manager of two companies. Simultaneously, Victoria said that she was fully saturated in FCR. In Victoria's opinion, her key to maintaining a good balance between work and life was perseverance: *'It's not easy. The only thing I can do is keep strong perseverance. This is the only thing I can do.'*

Victoria: These [multiple roles] *all need you to take care of them, which made me feel extreme difficulty … You just, you have adjust yourself well. You know they all need you; you have to be stronger than all of them, so you have to persist.*

Lucy mentioned her character and habitual preference to make plans, and Lisa also indicated good management between work and life. Ellie agreed that keeping WLB was not easy, but added that it mainly depends on self-control and being strict with herself in completing tasks.

Lucy: I am the kind of person who likes to make plans ... So, when I go home, I basically do things for the family. So, it is relatively good. I don't feel there has been too big a conflict.

Ellie: It just depends on self-control. Additionally, there has to be an objective. You are strict with yourself on achieving objectives, however; you have to make sure to complete them on time.

This section presented data on older Chinese academics/carers' perceptions towards their WLB, which tended to be significantly polarised. Quite a few participants appreciated that work in academia has provided certain flexibilities and has helped them with WLB and FCR, while others did not. However, this research has found that participants with both teaching and administrative positions were better at WLB since fixed working hours have helped them keep regular lives. Participants largely agreed that self-control is the most important quality to keep a balance between work and life.

8.3 Lay Voices Towards EWL

This researcher considers, based on the literature review, that due to different living or income conditions, different needs and desires for life, career goals and plans, or varying family needs, people are very likely to possess different attitudes towards retirement. This may result in a diversification of retirement trajectories, as most Western countries have abolished mandatory retirement. By contrast, this study's data shows the opposite attitude. Participants tended to agree with and hold affirmative attitudes towards complying with the

mandatory retirement scheme. This leads to a high likelihood of relative standardisation of retirement trajectories in China.

Research participants roundly revealed their eagerness to retire. In other words, without mandatory retirement, they would still want to retire as early as possible. Lisa preferred earlier retirement and said that she has tended to be less ambitious than before towards her career. She indicated this may be due to her advancing age. She wanted to do well on the *'final tasks at the final position'* to give a good end to her career. However, retired life clearly seemed attractive to her.

Lisa: For my job, honestly, I am now a bit not diligent enough; maybe it is because of age. I just want to finish my final tasks at my final position, retire earlier and go back home to enjoy my time with my husband.

Kate said, '*I just want to work until 60, and no longer'* (mandatory retirement age for female academics in contemporary China is 60). Most research participants instantly answered that they would not work longer than the mandatory retirement age. In the two quotes below, interestingly, Kate and Chrystal gave almost identical responses on their opinions towards the contemporary EWL scheme in China. They both indicated increasing competition in academia, which has been rather challenging for older workers. The severe competition and pressure to follow the mainstream development have driven them towards an expectation to retire earlier. In keeping with the previous discussion on ageing, participants had concerns and limited capability to adapt to rapid change and the development of new knowledge and technology. They feared being eliminated.

Kate: Don't have enough energy, and anyway, now the pressure is bigger and bigger. Nowadays, competition in academia is actually very big, including for young teachers. Aged teachers sometimes are challenged to follow the mainstream, the speed of development; it also leads to elimination. So, when getting too old, if you don't want to fall behind, you have to supplement it with greater capability, so this has a negative effect on your health.

Chrystal: I do not have sufficient strength, and there is more and more pressure. Nowadays, pressure in higher education is actually very big. Younger teachers have big pressure; older teachers sometimes cannot follow mainstream staff and the speed of development. There is also a tendency toward dismissal [of older academics]. *So, when growing old, one must spend a lot of strength in order not to be left out, hence this is detrimental to your health.*

Simultaneously, a significant factor that concerned the research participants the most is worrying about their health conditions. Concern of rising health problems and expectations to maintain their health was one of the major issues to which research participants returned for consideration. Retirement age had already been delayed once in China, and it is currently negotiating postponing the national retirement age again. All participants expressed their concern over whether their extended work would affect their own health conditions in the future. Further, participants seemed to have a negative opinion towards potentially extending their working life scheme. Amy said, *'I do not hope to delay my retirement time … I think the retirement age now is already very late. It is already delayed…'*

Kate stated that she would definitely be willing to extend her working life, provided her *'health condition allows'*. From the quote below, it could observed that Kate attached significant value to her work. She assumed that not having work may be *'intolerable'*. She was also quite interested in EWL; however, she emphasised that EWL should be

implemented only where the physical capability of older workers would not affect their work, and likewise, the continued work would not affect the older workers' health.

Kate: [working lives could be extended] *if health conditions allow, and your ability is also* [sufficient] *… If suddenly, one day, you are told you no longer have a job, and you don't have any work to do after so many years' hard work, this is intolerable to a person. So, no matter how old, people should have jobs, but the amount of work should be gradually decreased, otherwise* [we] *cannot stand it.*

Bruce also raised the concern that when an older worker approaches retirement age, his or her health condition may decrease. Then, if the older worker continues to work in a state of faltering physical health, it may endanger his or her life quality. In addition, Bruce postulated that older workers also have a responsibility to take care of themselves so as to reduce potential pressure on the state and family members to provide eldercare in the future. Many participants are like Bruce and possess the opinion that retired life could potentially be beneficial for older workers' health and later lives: *'If I don't work, I may be better and more relaxed.'*

Bruce: If your physical capability is not fine, and you are pushed to work until 65, this will exhaust you. You may gain some health problems that you didn't have before. So, which is more important? Making money or health? Your children need to take care of you; society also needs to take care of you. Therefore, you become a burden to them instead.

Chrystal also held an oppositional stance towards EWL. She seemed to look forward to retired life, and making retirement decisions was a way for her to seek freedom: *'From the*

perspective of making a selection, it is a question of being free or not.' Chrystal believed that retired life is an expected benefit of older people: *'Isn't it a benefit, receiving pension and not working while being retired?'* This research has determined that the participants generally looked forward to retirement and do not want to extend their working lives. Much like Lily, participants readily revealed their eagerness and expectations for retired life, when they will not have work pressure and will enjoy a more relaxed, pleasurable later life. As discussed previously, the participants are generally from a more privileged group who would have fewer concerns around pensions and life after retirement. As such, their attitude towards retirement seems to be a positive one, and they had few expectations of extending their working life.

Lily: I don't have any big plans for the future. I just want to retire early and have the life I want, a life without pressure. This is my plan.

There were participants like Lucy, who expected to retire earlier in order to keep a more balanced life and dedicate more to FCR compared to their current stage of work-life conflicts: *'You will have plenty more time to take your duties and responsibilities after retirement; it will be not like it is now.'* Other participants, like Tom, also asserted that they had devoted most of their time in life to work and FCR. Therefore, the older Chinese academics/carers hope to take a life trajectory 'for their own'.

Tom: I really don't plan to work. Because I have been working my whole life, I should have more enjoyment. One sentence: I should have some of my own time ... Because I think after working until 60, I think two thirds of people's whole lives have passed.

William talked about another perspective: EWL may be detrimental to younger workers in that it eliminates career promotion opportunities for younger workers. Quite a few participants said that they believed organisations should give more encouragement to younger workers, especially in today's intense labour market competition.

William: There are some older workers who want to extend their working lives, but then younger workers could not get promotions. There should be more opportunities created for young people. Nowadays, obtaining employment is so difficult. So, I think extending working life is not very reasonable.

This researcher suggests that it is an urgent but difficult question for China to balance career trajectories between older and younger workers. There should be good management of extending working life schemes, with provision of certain flexibilities to consider older workers' physical and mental conditions and their needs. On the other hand, oversight in providing additional career opportunities while there remains a shortage of younger labour and an intensely competitive contemporary environment is also important. At the same time, if the country implements extended work life schemes to supplement the labour market shortage, there should also be trainings tailored to each age group addressing their specific needs.

Victoria was an exception in this research, possessing a strong determination to extend her working life. However, she did not intend to be reemployed or extend her working life at her current workplace. Instead, she sought career opportunities in southern China. This is partly due to her enthusiasm towards her subject and partly due to her plan to enhance her designing capability by working in another area of China after retirement: '*I must keep*

working, keep doing designing, which I like, so I may go to another city to actually experience the influence of culture on design.'

Another reason Victoria wanted to extend her working life, as seen in the quote below, was her view that her entire work and life trajectories in the past were made to advance her career in education and to pay for FCR. She initially began her second career (managing two design companies) to earn money to support the growth and education of her child. This put some restrictions on her: a large time commitment and a lack of mobility. It was surprising, then, when during the interview she shared her plans to devote more passion and strength to further developing her career after retirement. This researcher has gathered that, in the politics of national retirement and pension schemes, and especially when extending working life schemes, it is essential to consider different the interests of older workers and the needs they have for their retirement plans.

Victoria: However, to speak from my perspective, I really feel that the years I have been working were mainly for education first and raising my child second. This has restricted me a lot. Now, I still enthusiastically hope that I can still have my own job after 60.

Rose is another exception among the research participants. She had a part-time job in a non-profit organisation that has been advocating active and healthy ageing in the local area. She also has great passion for this part-time job, and she told the researcher that she wanted keep working for this organisation indefinitely after retirement from the university. Despite being a rare occurrence, it may be worth considering providing various part-time jobs for older people in order to extend the working life schemes in China. This is also a good approach to keeping the valuable resource of older people. Simultaneously, due to older

workers' concerns towards their physical capability, flexibility among the part-time jobs may be needed.

Rose: Now, the document requires retirement at 60. My workload now is also not big. So, it is still ok for me to have this part-time job … If the university could allow me to retire or anything, I will completely retire, and I will dedicate myself fully to the career of ageing.

Participants' ideas towards EWL varied. Most of the participants seemed to possess negative opinions towards extending their working lives, with the few exceptions who maintained strong beliefs in working longer. However, there were also participants who were not sure about their plans for EWL. Ellie said that her decision around EWL depended on her health condition in the future: *'There are still many years. I don't know what my health condition will be in that time. If I am fine, I may want to.'* This is also consistent with the findings discussed above that health condition seems to be a major factor in affecting older Chinese academics/carers' decisions around retirement trajectories. Additionally, participants who revealed uncertainty in their plans for EWL are mostly the younger ones: those between 45 and 50. In Alice's opinion, whether to retire earlier or extend her working life will depend on her achievements in the future. If she can reach her career goals as expected, she may be more confident with EWL.

Alice: If I still have no achievements, I shall not stay here, and I will wish to retire earlier. If I could still make a few achievements in academia, that could support me to stay here.

Charles mentioned that his retirement decision and plan to extend his working life may depend on FCR. If his family needs to take more time for FCR, for example, taking care

276

of his grandchild, he will not extend his working life. Many participants have mentioned that if they have a grandchild who needs care, they will definitely retire. As discussed previously, childcare responsibilities have been an important factor for older Chinese academics/carers and their families, who know that the next generation of only children may need them to help with FCR. Therefore, the politics of extending working life should inevitably consider older workers' opinions and FCR situations.

Charles: I don't know what situation will be around that time. If my family needs me to retire, I will retire.

This research has found generally negative perceptions from older Chinese academics/carers towards EWL. They hope for retirement; however they have decided to follow the state EWL (extending working lives) scheme policy so that their pension is not affected. As the research participants are from privileged positions, they may not be as concerned about financial support for retirement. It should be noted that people from other industries may have a greater need to extend their working lives.

8.4 Current Condition of General Inactivity

This study has found a trend of inactivity among older Chinese academics/carers. Most of the participants disclosed decreasing proactivity, work motivation and ambition towards their careers in recent years corresponding with their advancing ages. Many of the participants also valued stability over change in their future work trajectories.

Michael mentioned several times during the interview that he believed people his age should relax their frame of mind around pursuing career progress and instead make do with maintaining stability so that they do not challenge their physical capability and affect their health condition. He identified a line between two different stages and the corresponding

change of mentality. After 50, he said, he has tended toward decreasing proactivity, ambition, and zeal at work.

Michael: When over 50, people's mentality changes: the ambition and zeal have gone. Basically, they just hope to stay stable until retirement. Proactivity, ambition, this kind of mentality has gradually vanished with the increase of age.

Tom possesses a similar opinion: *'When above 50, there is basically just an expectation of stability.'* Some participants indicated 40 instead as the turning point to distinguish the start of ageing and a decrease in work ambition and proactivity. For example, Henry said, *'yes, 40 years old is a very important turning point. Just when people reach 40, their mentality is not like before, or there is no longer an ambition to win.'* As discussed previously, one of the major turning points identified in this research pertains to middle age since ages 40 – 45 are associated with dual caring responsibilities.

Research participants have disclosed a significant decrease in self-expectation for progress. Rose depicted this as *'slowing down rhythm'* and self-described as less hard working than younger people. Mike also mentioned less *'desire to advance'*.

Rose: Just, no matter what I am doing, there is a slowing down in mentality. The rhythm has slowed down. I must not be as hard working as younger people.

Mike: People above 50 are in a state of hoping for stability. Their desire to advance and their pioneering spirit will be relatively decreased.

Many participants said that change is the thing they genuinely do not want in future work and life trajectories. Emily said, *'I just hope everything could be stable',* and Frank pointed out that he expected stability on his work in the future. This stability may involve keeping work effectiveness of standard quality as required by the job position rather than a decrease in output. However, he indicated that this may still become challenging to him. Many participants, including Frank, identified themselves as in the stage approaching retirement, wherein they automatically slow down their working pace: *'Sometimes I unintentionally relax myself a bit.'*

Frank: Don't expect any changes. The reason I intend to keep stable is because I'm afraid I cannot maintain it. Because when people are approaching retirement, they usually have some laziness; it means that it could be ok as long as the work is done. Because I will retire soon, there is no need to be particularly diligent to every task.

Stability, as understood by Edward, is *'no expectation of big rises and falls'*. Additionally, Edward seemed to be genuinely satisfied at having reached a basic economic ability to afford daily life and family, and to cover potential issues such as diseases of family members. Thus, there seemed to be less incentive and motivation for work progress or further career development.

Edward: Yes, I think it will be fine with no expectations of big rises or falls. Because I am basically at the stage of around 50 now ... To me, economically, only enough money to spend will be fine, only being able to deal with big issues in life will be fine.

Participants' observations from an organisational perspective indicated fewer career advancement expectations on older workers as well. Vick described it, *'firstly, I think in the stage of above 50, you just have to do your job well. There are basically no new opportunities.'* Participants like Bruce also seemed not to possess significant interest in work progress and development: *'If I can stably do my job well before retirement, I'd feel very good.'* Shirley added, *'there are no big pursuits in work. Just hope there problems don't appear. Just normally complete the work that should be done.'* Crucially, many participants, including Lisa, described the goal of maintaining good work on the last duty, or the last trajectory, of their careers.

Lisa: Now I am somewhat not proactive enough. This may be because of age. I just want to do well in the last duty, and then retire earlier.

Bruce elaborated that organisations may have fewer expectations surrounding older workers' productivity during the last years before retirement.

Bruce: The time before retirement is fine; the organisation won't give you too much pressure. There just won't be too much control over you. You just have to do teaching ... There won't be a big component of academic research because you are going to retire soon.

Therefore, this researcher considers that in the government's endeavour to implement and advocate active ageing, merely establishing policies is not enough. It is important to transform the concepts older people's independence on a societal and cultural basis.

Additionally, most of the participants have tended toward decreasing health, which has been the biggest reason of their 'inactivity'. Chrystal talked about her current experience

teaching, compared with that of a younger age: *'When you become older, you may feel the job could be a — how to say — in the past it was an easy thing; now I just feel very tired.'* Chrystal also indicated significant differences in terms of physical exhaustion from completing work tasks and revealed that the job has become a *'pressure'* on her.

Chrystal: I feel I am almost collapsed after giving two lectures. Actually, when I was young, I would have been fine after giving six lectures a day. Now, this job has actually already become a pressure on me.

Furthermore, research participants have indicated physical decline as a crucial incentive making them desire more stability. Michael gave the example of a sudden change in eyesight, which significantly affected his work motivation and proactivity: *'When I was 48, suddenly my eyes couldn't see very obvious words. Then* [my] *mental state was instantly different.'* Lisa mentioned change of physical condition in terms of climacteric, raising another important issue around population ageing, specifically among older female workers, that deserves investigation. This is another contributing factor in which the WLB (work life balance) of older female academics/carers seems to be more affected than that of older male academics/carers in relation to FCR (family caring responsibilities).

Lisa: In the last two years, maybe it is the commonly-known girls' climacteric, it feels that my strength in all aspects is worse than in previous years. It has been very obvious in the last two years.

Moreover, participants have identified decreasing learning capabilities compared with previous age stages. Like Lisa, Victoria also noticed a general decrease of capability: *'It feels*

like, it could be said that, in everything [I am] *less capable than before.'* Participants have also noted challenges, difficulties and a decreasing capability of applying new technologies. Below, Victoria discusses the pressure on her to learning and adapt to new technologies, and she observes significant differences compared to her younger colleagues:

Victoria: New young teachers, they have owned many new technological methods ... Now we are already comparatively slower than they are to accept [new technology]. *I genuinely feel a kind of pressure.*

When asked how they might deal with the major turning point of middle age and their current decreasing work capability and health conditions, some participants, like Kate below, offered a welcoming strategy in exercising more and increasing their attention toward keeping a healthy lifestyle.

Kate: Physical ageing is a kind of normal condition. If I am to give some ideas, then they are to keep fit, to exercise more, or change lifestyles.

However, most participants felt that it seemed more realistic for them to accept the fact of being old and make adjustments. In Michael's words, *'people should do what they should do during middle age; this is quite normal.'* The change in mindset and work motivation among older Chinese academics/carers is understandable in light of their increased focus on their health, not to mention their present trajectory of intense FCR. What Michael means by *'should do what they should do'* could be calmly accepting the fact of being old and adapting to this biological change, lest overworking endanger their health condition and generate difficulties for family members.

More significantly, as discussed previously, participants generally looked forward to retired life rather than EWL. Lisa worries about the work pressure in the prospective trajectory of the last ten years of work: '*If I retire at 60, then in the last ten years, I may have significant pressure. Whether I can take it — this is what I am mostly worried about.*'

However, there are exceptions, like Bruce below, among the participants, some of whom said they never felt a reduced passion for work, though they have all admitted to decreasing capability, proactivity and ambition. It is important for policy makers and managers to investigate the concerns and needs of older Chinese academics/carers in order to provide them assistance in achieving their passion in spite of decreasing physical conditions and work and learning capabilities.

Bruce: No, I think my enthusiasm is still very big. Frankly speaking, I am still enthusiastic for my students.

Jack talked about his significant remaining enthusiasm for his academic career and his urge for development. He also disclosed his plan to start a business as a second career. Instead of hoping for stability and earlier retirement, he has indicated a strong desire for progress. His reasons also include improving his income to help with his relatives who are still poor.

Jack: I hope I can still improve, including in academic research … Before retirement, I'm planning to do it within the year, I am planning to run a business and contribute to society … If my income improves, I can help my family.

Victoria, again, could be seen as an outlier among the research participants in activeness of ageing and positive perceptions towards EWL. She indicated never feeling reduced work motivation with her increase in age and also plans to extend her working life until 70. As she mentioned, she plans to move to southern China after retiring from the university to improve her own understanding and capability in the subject of design.

Victoria: So, what supports me every day now is that there is basically no rest every day, working even on Saturdays and Sundays. It is your interest in your subject that supports you. It should be said that your interest in the subject makes you happy and makes you forget about tiredness.

This research shows a general inactivity in older Chinese academics/carers in their current stage. Older Chinese academics/carers generally expect stability in their career trajectories and have seen weakening motivation, ambition, and proactivity for career progress. This coincides with decreasing physical capabilities and health conditions, and less ability to adapt to technological developments. However, the researcher sees evidence indicating that the previously-mentioned intensive FCR they have, especially since they entered midlife, could also be a major factor triggering the decreased ambition and proactivity among older Chinese academics/carers.

8.5 Lay Voices Towards Age Discrimination

This study found that older Chinese academics/carers seem to be attempting to persuade themselves that they have become old, and therefore they should not be doing as much work as they once did; they are inclined to calmly accept the fact of their decreasing work capability and make adjustments to their current condition of ageing. As can be seen from Helen's quote below, she is satisfied with attempting to adapt by decreasing her own expectations towards her work outcome.

Helen: Mental and physical strength are not as strong as before. So, to act according to my capability, I make a plan, and then I do as planned; then it will be fine.

The research shows another reason that discourages older Chinese academics/carers from EWL: fears of being viewed as superfluous by others. Zach seems to fear working at a later age, a factor that has dissuaded him from EWL. Zach is much like the other participants who said they would only extend their working lives if required by state policy: *'If I extend my working life, that would be because of state policy. I would not actively extend my working life. I don't like to do that.'* Zach said that he would be willing to quit his job to provide opportunities for younger workers. Zach's quote could be interpreted to mean that he views older workers in their prospective later years, including himself, as having less value than younger workers. He went on to express further concern that older people may at that time be perceived by others as superfluous; thus, voluntarily withdrawing from their work positions could be an effective strategy to protect their dignity.

Zach: Because when I reach that age (65), I think my value will not be too great, I'd better go home. I think this is also being responsible in my job, and it is also a good way to keep my dignity. I don't like to let others look down on me, seeing me as surplus but still sitting there. This is what I don't like.

This research has found that older Chinese academics/carers view themselves as being old and unsuitable for certain tasks or positions. Participants tended to compare themselves with younger workers, as can be observed in the quote below.

Vick: Sometimes, there is a hint from bottom of my heart that always feels that I have become old. This is an everlasting hint, subconsciously: 'Oh, I am old. I seem kind of unable to do as well as I wished at anything,' I tell myself in advance.

Michael indicated the perception of outdated conceptions and an outdated social network comparing to younger workers: *'Your worldview is not suitable for the development of contemporary society. Additionally, your social network is outdated.'* The very concept of being old could be a subconscious suggestion potentially impeding work motivation and proactivity, reflected in Helen's quote below. She used the words *'abandoning myself'* to describe being less diligent than in her previous age stages.

Helen: I also think that since I reached the current stage of life, I think I don't want to devote too much hard work [to my career]. *However, I feel I am somewhat abandoning myself* [from work].

Lisa and Mike held the same idea. Mike believed that career development and progress require certain physical capabilities that older workers lack but are more suitable to younger workers, hence younger people should be given more opportunities: *'Those who need career development need to devote more physical capability and spirit. That should give people in their 40s, or 35 – 45 years old, more opportunities.'* Lisa worries that her value at work would be far outweighed by younger workers in the workforce, and states that it would be beneficial for the effectiveness of the organisation for older workers to withdraw, leaving more space for younger people. Despite the country implementing EWL, Lisa assumes that retiring earlier is beneficial to both herself and organisational effectiveness.

Lisa: For my own sake — when reaching older age, it can really influence work efficiency — so, selfishly speaking, I want to relax and retire earlier. For the sake of the organisation, and enabling young people to do more things, I think it could be better.

William also talked about the competitive environment of the labour market in China. He assumed that EWL is not helpful in alleviating young people's pressure to find jobs: *'[We] should create more opportunities for young people. Now finding a job is so difficult, I don't think EWL is reasonable.'*

More importantly, many participants mentioned that they have not experienced age discrimination in their workplaces. '*Age discrimination, this question is not referred to in our place',* said Kelly. As discussed in the literature review, people's attitude and outlook towards ageing may not only be due to their inner perception of age-related changes but also to societal or cultural influences. However, in this research, older Chinese academics/carers generally revealed that no age discrimination existed in the workforce. Frank stated that there was *'almost no age discrimination',* adding that *'the older people are, the more work responsibilities they are assigned.'* Simultaneously, there are more organisational support, resources, and assistance for older academics compared with those of younger ages. Bruce pointed out that in his workforce, older people tended to gain more respect, and age discrimination is rarely found.

Frank: In the public sector, there is almost no age discrimination … Despite many older workers like us not having big authority, these teachers, the treatments they receive, compared to people of a similar level [of organisational hierarchy] *… Older people could still receive more officially-provided resources than younger people.*

Bruce: As for age discrimination, I haven't felt it at all. Because for universities, for age, it seems like the older one is the more respect is gotten. In our university, there is no big feeling of being discriminated, I think this is not obvious.

As seen in the quotes below, a few participants mentioned that the phenomenon of age discrimination may be more unusual in academia compared to industrial organisations in China. Otherwise, it is clear that research participants like Edward did not pay much attention to or think a lot about age discrimination.

Emily: Nowadays, instead older people more easily get promotions; they get promoted very easily … So far, at least from our university, it doesn't exist. Maybe it exists in some industrial organisations, some organisations that need younger people.

Edward: Age discrimination must exist, right? It must exist. But I didn't think too much about it … Age discrimination, maybe we haven't experienced what is like in industrial organisations.

The research data includes a seemingly contradictory result in that participants mostly revealed a significant decrease of physical conditions, learning and adaptation capability, and a lack of confidence in their work abilities; at the same time, many participants also claimed that older age is actually an advantageous factor in academic career trajectories. In the quote below, Emily states that knowledge accumulation and work experience are crucial parts of building up an academic's abilities and the respect and recognition of others, and these things could only be gained through increase of age.

Emily: Since the university is a place of knowledge accumulation, what do you count on to win others' respects? It depends on your experiences and qualities, your abundant experiences. Where do you gain them? Age is a very important part.

Older workers are undeniably valuable in the workforce. Lucy manifested that older workers at middle age are the main source of work power in academia. On the one hand, they take on enormous tasks to complete every day. On the other hand, with more experience, skills, and accumulation of knowledge, middle-aged workers possess significant capacity to contribute to academia. Lucy is quite accurate in stating that older workers are undeniably important sources of work and help for younger workers.

Lucy: We should be the main working power … Even though we don't have fixed working times, we have to use leisure time for academic research and also supervising students' essays. And other [responsibilities] *like preparations for classes and so forth.*

Mike thinks very positively towards older academics over 50, who possess more thoroughly diverse and proficient skills for work and communications. Simultaneously, their FCR could be much smaller since their children have already gone to university. Lily also argues that the lack of age discrimination in academia could be a beneficial factor to work outcome, while industrial organisations may be comparatively more likely to foster age discrimination associated with more need for younger workers.

Mike: I think it could be ok for people aged 50. If a person has certain abilities, it could still be easy to gain a new position. Because this group of people possesses abundant life

experiences and work experiences, they also know how to deal with different kinds of issues

from society. Simultaneously, their FCR is smaller.

Lily: Not at all, this doesn't exist in our place. It is unlike in industrial organisations, where

there may be some [discrimination] *towards older people. It doesn't exist at all here.*

Nonetheless, some participants have indicated some age discrimination. Michael believed that it is recognisable that the country, society and organisations disqualify older people from further career opportunities. Michael also indicated diminishing opportunities for career development among older academics: *'Managers at different levels of the university are all young people; we basically have arrived that age, the stage for retirement.'*

Michael: Even if you have the ability, society and the organisation don't allow you to [work].

Vick reports the existence of age discrimination towards older people from younger people. Simultaneously, there can also be age discrimination from older workers toward younger workers around their professional level.

Vick: [Younger people] think you are old and your thoughts are outdated … But older people like us may also have some discrimination towards them in terms of insufficient quality [of work] and experience.

It should be noted that people from different cultural backgrounds may understand ageing and age discrimination differently. For instance, this researcher has found that older

Chinese academics/carers generally do not consider age discrimination to exist in the workforce, or they do not interpret certain age-related issues as age discrimination.

This study has found that older Chinese academics/carers do tend to believe in the stagnation of their career, but they attribute it mostly to decreasing capabilities. Older Chinese academics/carers tend not to blame age discrimination; instead, they are more likely to accept that it is normal, since they have grown old, for them to be eliminated. The rest of this section thoroughly demonstrates how participants understand and interpret 'age discrimination'.

Older Chinese academics/carers seem to understand the term 'age discrimination' as a process of natural organisational metabolism. They are not found to argue for more rights and profits for older workers. Vick spoke of age discrimination as *'just normal'* since younger workers may have a competitive edge that older workers cannot surpass.

Vick: I never say 'discrimination'; I think this is just normal. Because younger people have their own characteristics, and younger people have their own advantages. Older people cannot surpass them, right?

Some participants acknowledge the existence of age discrimination but view it as 'not obvious' or 'not important' to older workers or organisations. William holds the opinion that age discrimination likely exists in the Chinese academic working environment, but it could not be *'obvious'*, and it is merely an *'unconscious influence'* that one may be able to ignore.

William: Age discrimination, how to say? There must be some. But it is also something of an unconscious influence from the environment. However, there could not be obvious discrimination.

As mentioned above, older Chinese academics/carers tend to perceive the phenomenon of age discrimination as a natural process of organisational metabolism. According to Lukes, he tends to understand the organisational structure as operating different job positions suitable to the capabilities of people of different ages. Therefore, the 'retreat' of older workers from their job positions, or the expectation for them to retire, can be seen as a result of no longer being suited to the job.

Lukes: This truly exists, this objectively exists, and this is also a very natural phenomenon. For some positions, young age is not suitable. For some positions, older age is not suitable. This is an outcome of objective needs and also a very normal phenomenon.

Lukes further explained his viewpoint. As discussed previously, the rapidly-changing environment has widened generational gaps among the different age groups. More importantly, as Lukes argued, it could be a significant challenge for older Chinese academics/carers to adapt to the changes in contemporary China. Hence, a better choice for them is to withdraw from their work responsibilities as early as possible.

Lukes: However, I think when one is older and working in a group, there can be disagreements between younger people and older people. There are big gaps in viewpoints and conceptions. Because contemporary society develops very fast, there are many things that older people cannot adapt to, have no way to adapt to.

Zach is likely not to identify seemingly-imbalanced management or opportunities for different age groups as 'discrimination'. He gave the example of comparing age

discrimination with gender discrimination. He is more inclined to understand that specific jobs particularly suit younger workers or older workers, or female workers or male workers, which is important for organisations to take into consideration.

Zach: Age discrimination is actually very normal because some work is just not suitable for older people to do. Including gender discrimination, it is similar, I think it is very common.

Derek interpreted age discrimination from another perspective. He understands it as the organisations making considerations to take care of older workers. As mentioned previously, there will be reduced work tasks and responsibilities for older workers during their last years before retirement. In Derek's words, both the older Chinese academics/carers and the organisation itself may hold decreasing expectations towards older workers regarding workload. Gradually stepping away from their work and retiring at a 'proper' age (not too late) is a necessary step in older workers' late career trajectories. He also assumes this to be a genuine consideration and a protection that organisations take to ensure the safety of older workers.

Derek: I think age discrimination is just about considerations by the organisations for the aspect of your safety … Organisations' concern, employers' concern about whether your physical health is ok.

It can be ascertained from the above participants' responses that older Chinese academics/carers tend to accept the existence of age discrimination as a normal process of organisational metabolism. Older Chinese academics/carers tend to accept the 'fact' of older worker' decreasing capabilities, and they assume that leaving more opportunities for younger

workers is also a responsibility of older workers. This is in contrast to the Western concept of active ageing, which encourages independence and proactivity in older workers. The concept of active ageing has likely not taken root in Chinese social and cultural norms and frame of reference of older workers in China. The reform of active ageing in China should not merely focus on the implementation of retirement policies but also on social reforms that could radically change the outlook of older workers.

8.6 Summary

This chapter has presented research findings regarding agentic responses and agentic orientations of older Chinese academics/carers towards the Chinese context. Thus, this Chapter has answered the second question of how older Chinese academics/carers navigate the major turning points in their life courses. This chapter has also answered the third question of how are the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers linked to the Chinese broader political and socio-economic, organizational, and linked life contexts, as well as human agency.

.Accordingly, this research has found the two trajectories with most intensive FCR (childcare responsibilities of middle and high school education; and middle age responsbilities) were the trajectories with worst WLB in the life courses of older Chinese academics. During these two trajectories, older Chinese academics/carers experience significant difficulties, challenges and concerns associated with WLB.

More significantly, this research has found older Chinese academics/carers adopt the strategy of prioritising family needs in dealing with WLB issues. More explicitly, when their senior parents are heavily sick, they immediately ask for leave and devote as much of their time as possible to taking care of senior parents. During the trajectory with childcare responsibilities of middle/high school education, older Chinese academics/carers are

determined to sacrifice their work in order to ensure the success of their children's *Gaokao*. Additionally, female older Chinese academics/carers tend to make more sacrifices and experience more WLB pressure than their male counterparts.

Moreover, this research has found generally inactiveness of older Chinese academics/carers with decreasing proactivity, motivation, and ambition for progress but expect more stability in future career trajectory and hope for earlier retirement. This is due to decreasing physical capability and worsened health condition of older Chinese academics/carers. This research has also found older Chinese academics/carers tend not to agree with the existence of age discrimination. By contrast, older Chinese academics/carers tend to admit decreasing capability of older workers, and older Chinese academics/carers tend to assume it is the organisational need to leave more opportunities to younger workers.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion

9.1 Overview of the Research

This research has investigated three questions: 1. What factors have influenced older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories? 2. How do older Chinese academics/carers navigate major turning points in their life courses? 3. How are the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers linked to the Chinese broader political and socio-economic, organizational, and linked life contexts, as well as human agency?

By answering the questions, this research has found key macro context factors that influence older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories: former command economy system, economic transition, technological development, and social need of more independent ageing. Simultaneously, this research has also discussed important linked life factors that influence older Chinese academics/carers' life and career trajectories: Guanxi, family caring responsibilities, generation gaps. Furthermore, this research has identified 5 important turning points (1.enter higher education and start first job; 2. change job or start second career; 3. starting marriage and first childbirth; 4. middle age; 5. children moving away) and two trajectories associated with intensive FCR (childcare responsibilities of middle and high school education; and middle age responsibilities).

This research has found, in dealing with major turning points in their life courses, older Chinese academics/carers usually choose to follow the majority of their peers and attempt to avoid risks and uncertainties. Therefore, older Chinese academics/carers generally tend to complete specific turning points (e.g. marriage, having child) at specific life stages, and follow the traditional pathway of career growth under the lead of government and state arranged organisations. More significantly, this research has found relatively standardised life course of older academics/carers under the significant influence of former command economy system. This research has found marketisation and economic transition has not

increased career transitions among older Chinese academics/carers as it has been enormously evidenced from the literature. Maintaining the privileged position and social capital from state arranged universities with receiving extensive benefits of 'iron rice bowl' seems to be a stronger factor to keep older Chinese academics/carers stay in the state arranged employment.

Additionally, this research has found older Chinese academics tend to agree with the importance of *Guanxi*, and adopt the strategy of keeping good *Guanxi* both with their superiors and colleagues. This research has found older Chinese academics/carers adopt the strategy of being more obedient towards senior parents' autocratic style of communications, while adapting to more democratic style of education with their children when dealing with generational differences. This research has also found older Chinese academics/carers adopt the strategy of prioritising family needs when dealing with situation of WLB difficulties. These situations mainly include when their senior parents are in severe health situations, or when their children are in middle/high school. Female older Chinese academics/carers tend to make more sacrifices and experience more WLB pressures than male older Chinese academics/carers.

Moreover, this research has also found generally inactiveness of ageing with decreasing work motivation, and generally pessimistic perceptions towards age discrimination and extending working lives among older Chinese academics/carers. In the next section, this research will discuss how these findings relate to existing literature and apply to the contributions of this research, and their implications for social policy and practice in China .

9.2 Contributions and Discussions
9.2.1 Historical and Sociocultural Context

'The main focus of the life course paradigm is on linking specific context- and time-dependent events in earlier life to responses in later life' (Moschis, 2019, p. 41). Baltes and Smith (2004) claimed that since the tradition of life course studies has mainly focused on early impacts from before 20 years of age, investigation is needed on logics embedded contextual structural characteristics and influences on adult workers and the ageing population. The main focus of life course studies is to shed light on how specific events in early life experience impact on later life trajectories. By contrast, the innovation of this research helps develop a more thorough look into life course, is based on people's whole life trajectories, and analyse the contextual environment linked to entire trajectories rather than a singular early life event.

Dingemans and Mohring (2019) stated that the existing literature on life course has concentrated on 'socio-demographic characteristics such as gender and educational background and on factors that were proximal to the retirement transition, such as health, partner status, wealth, and income at the time of the retirement transition' (p. 23). Unlike those studies which focused on specific demographic characteristics or situational factors, this research investigated the outcome of life course based on context, combined with multi-level forces of macro socioeconomic and political power, family influences and individual choices. Crucially, there lacks research in investigating the link between the former command economy system and the life courses of older workers in China. Therefore, this research addresses this gap of developing a more context based research, investigating contemporary older Chinese academics/carers and the sophisticated contextual environment specific to them.

This research contributes to the use of LCT by fitting it into the effects of major social and political changes in China. Therefore, this research addresses the above gaps by suggesting the effect of relative life course standardisation. This research has found relatively

standardised career trajectories of older Chinese academics/carers directly resulting from the control of former command economy policies. Their general career trajectories from entering to exiting the labour market, including career changes or progressions, generally followed state arrangement or the organisation's need rather than personal pursuit or interest. This researcher has also found relative standardisation of family trajectories among older Chinese academics/carers' life courses in early marriage with a short interval to the first childbirth. relative standardisation of older Chinese academics/carers' life courses could also be seen from other perspectives, such as a relatively standardised family structure driven by the OCP, the collective experience of early-life poverty, rural–urban migration and similar timing of important trajectories associated with the most demanding FCR (childcare during middle and high school education and midlife dual caring responsibilities).

Therefore, this research has uncovered similar issues and problems along with the similar timing of trajectories over the life course of older Chinese academics/carers. For example, the generation of older Chinese academics/carers has collectively experienced the social problem of providing eldercare to senior parents living in the distance. They also experienced significant FCR with the education of their middle and high school-aged children at a similar age stage. This can be seen as an advantage to the Chinese government in managing an ageing population and addressing the associated FCR as relatively standardised as well. However, there may also be potential concern for the country's management of the ageing society. As discussed previously, there are significant generational gaps in contemporary China. The relative standardisation of life course among the generation of contemporary older workers in China seems is easily seen; conversely, however, the life courses of following generations may tend toward relatively more destandardisation. Hence, how to deal with ageing groups possessing significantly different characters and life

trajectories, and thus potentially different concerns and needs, deserves investigation. The country's management of social policies also is in urgent need of development.

The findings of this research are in stark contrast to the more destandardised life course from the Western context. Destandardisation of life course has been considerably discussed and evidenced in Western studies due to socioeconomic changes, increasing life opportunities and diverse life options. Western studies evidencing that destandardisation of life course include Bruckner and Mayer (2004), who studied destandardisation of individual lives in West Germany, McMunn et al. (2015), who found diverse work- and family-life patterns in Britain, and Dingemans and Mohring (2019), who indicated diversified retirement trajectories in Europe.

Komp-Leukkunen (2019) and Widmer and Ritchard (2009) discovered a diversification of female life course due to increased education and career opportunities, while males comparatively maintained the traditional life course pattern. The findings of this research are consistent with the literature regarding more diversification of female participants' life courses compared to males. This may be due to the female research participants being highly-educated female academics possessing more social capital and career opportunities, and thus having stronger agentic power over their career choices.

This research contributes to LCT by fitting Asian cultures with the effects of macroeconomic structure. However, the research findings differ from the literature review, with some studies such as Zhang and Pan (2012) and Li and Zhao (2011) pointing out destandardisation of life course and a greater likelihood of career transitions resulting from the opened economy and marketisation. By contrast, this study's participants seem to adhere closely to a relatively standardised life course. This may be due to research participants generally coming from a privileged group receiving the benefits of exceptional job security and subsidies granted by the public sector under the command economy system. This could

be a strong factor discouraging them from career transitions; selecting other job options could completely lose them the security and benefits of the iron rice bowl.

There were participants who revealed their ongoing experience managing second careers, such as the part-time manager of two small firms outside academia. There were also participants who revealed their intentions and plans to start entrepreneurship in the future. However, unlike in the findings of Quach and Anderson (2008), limited-wage job opportunities are not a factor in these participants' decisions. The majority of participants are satisfied with their job in academia and claimed sufficient pay to support their families. Instead, the most important incentive to start a second career was to increase income to provide a better quality of life for the family. Additionally, participants seemed proactive and eager to starting self-employment or a part-time job as a second career rather than as an involuntary choice.

Furthermore, this research has addressed another macro structural effect on older workers' life courses in technological development. Participants indicated significant need of training on technology skills and a significant shortage of training opportunities from the universities in which they worked. Similarly, a study from Germany and UK found that older people received scarce training opportunities and that a large percentage of companies did not offer employment to people aged above 50 (Malul, 2009).

Brooke's (2009) findings showed common expectations of an early exit from Australian IT industries due to age segmentation corresponding to advancing socio-technological changes and stereotypes of older workers' declining capacities. Brooke called for more trainings for older workers from IT industries to help them connect with technological change and prevent early exits. Taking place in a significantly different institution to the IT industry, technology development was not revealed in this research as a factor influencing retirement decisions or career exits. Though participants revealed strong

intentions to exit labour market earlier due to decreasing confidence in pursuing active ageing and a desire for relaxation, technology development was not a major impact.

More significantly, 'most studies on population ageing in China have been dedicated solely to empirical, demographic and epidemiological data and economic aspects, with few addressing normative dimensions inherent to the subject' (Nie, 2016, p.351). This research addresses this gap and unfolds the contemporary social environment for older Chinese academics/carers and manifests what the Chinese social cultural background means to older Chinese academics/carers. This research targets participants at a largely similar life stage (older workers/carers above 40), who collectively experienced the same social changes and social background in their life trajectories. This research has thoroughly analysed various mechanisms of the macro socioeconomic effects on the life course of older Chinese academics/carers.

Therefore, as a result of the changing socioeconomic environment, the researcher highlights the important social ramifications of the potential increasing need for independence among older Chinese academics/carers. This research has found current older Chinese academics/carers sharing eldercare responsibilities with their children, with bigger caring responsibilities put on them due to greater longevity and the limited capability of only children. Older Chinese academics/carers possess crucial obligations of FCR. However, in the future, they may become the first generation in China to adjust to major decreasing filial piety and eldercare with less available family support than previous generations. Accordingly, it could be observed that a potential dilemma for older Chinese academics/carers is maintaining FCR while attaining the social demand of independence.

Research is lacking in the opinions of older people themselves towards independence (Hillcoat-Nallétamby, 2014). There is also a shortage of research in lay voices towards active ageing or independence among older people in China (Bowling, 2008; Schmidt & Yang,

2019; Chen et al., 2019). This study addresses this gap by analysing lay voices towards more independent later lives and active ageing in China. What has surprised this researcher and differed somewhat from Tang et al.'s (2009) finding is that older Chinese academics/carers seem to have more open, positive and prepared attitudes towards the prospect of independence in the future. It seems that they have sensed the importance for them to be more independent in the future, diverging from the traditional filial piety. Many of the participants have thought about plans for their own eldercare in later lives. The researcher observes that it is worth investigating the social ageing environment and independence of older workers in China.

To summarise, this research fills the gap of macro structural effects from life course study in the Chinese context. Accordingly, this research has found a relative standardisation of older Chinese academics/carers' life courses. This research has also found that macro-economic restructuring has not increased the likelihood of career transitions over the life course of older Chinese academics/carers. Simultaneously, this research has found similar challenges among older Chinese academics/carers in adapting to technological development as were found in Western studies. Above all, this research contributes to sociological ageing studies in China by explaining mechanisms leading to the independence of contemporary older Chinese workers.

Findings from this research indicates significant collectivism character of the social group of older workers in China. Older Chinese academics/carers tend to make life decisions according to what majority of their peers do, in order to avoid risks and uncertainties. This seems have led to older Chinese academics/carers adhere closely to a relative standardised life course. Therefore, it is important that policy makers and practitioners on pension, retirement, eldercare and welfare in China shed light on lay voices of the population of older people. Perceptions of older people in China may be immensely impacted by social voices,

groups and communities in proximity to them. This research calls for more studies on lay voices towards active ageing and extending working lives in China, which is significantly underdeveloped field but crucial to the developments of ageing and eldercare policies in China.

Furthermore, this research recommends establishments of active ageing paradigm and programs in China. Active ageing has not been a constructed social concept and still new to older people in China. This research considers that establishing active ageing programs and policies may help to meet the significant social need of more independent ageing and ameliorate problems from population ageing in Chinese societies in the future. Moreover, the findings from this research indicate a significant need of training opportunities and employee development on Chinese older workers in adapting and reaching the speed of technological advancement. Older Chinese academics/carers are in genuine concern of adapting to the increasing need of teaching and work with new technologies and high-tech skills.

9.2.2 Linked life

Comparing to existing life course studies based on Western cultures, this research has found distinctive micro-level factors that significantly influence Chinese life course, including *guanxi*, generation gaps, having senior parents in empty nests, and having children at the middle and high school levels.

Mayer (2009) contributed significant development to LCT by elaborating micro-level causational logics. Despite major developments of micro-level mechanisms being found in the literature, there are large portions of cultural studies on life course that are based in Western contexts. This research addresses the gap by providing indepth analysis on important cultural factors at the micro level on life course in China as follows.

The findings of this study seemed not to reveal a strong influence of *guanxi* on employee commitment as some of the literature did. Keeping the iron rice bowl may be the biggest factor keeping employee commitment among older Chinese academics/carers. The

causational mechanism between *guanxi* and older Chinese academics/carers found in this research provided contradictory reflections. Older Chinese academics in this research conspicuously assumed that keeping good *guanxi* at work is a significant and important issue that constitutes part of workers' responsibilities during work. However, they also revealed significant dissatisfaction, especially around *guanxi*'s negative effects on psychological health at work. This result is consistent with Wei et al. (2010, 2012) in that that *guanxi* is detrimental to employees with weaker political capabilities. It is worthy of future study to investigate lay voices of Chinese employees on *guanxi* and the mechanism between *guanxi* and employee well-being, especially on older workers, who adhere more to traditional culture and are more deeply involved in the social connections of *guanxi*.

This research analysed generation gaps as a linked-life factor influencing older Chinese academics/carers' life trajectories. This is relevant because of what Binstock and George (2011) termed the problem of 'life-course fallacy' in the current literature, which ignores variations between cohorts and between generations. This research has addressed this issue by discussing generational gaps in the Chinese context and suggesting that generational gaps impact the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers.

According to Yi et al. (2015), there have been a number of studies on generational differences in the workplace from the Western context, especially in the US, while lacking relevant research from other cultures. However, scant research has been done in investigating older Chinese workers/carers' perceptions and experiences towards generational gaps. This researcher considers that it is important to study ageing in China and to learn about and understand older Chinese workers/carers' well-being. Cheng et al. (2018) pointed out that there is a shortage of research into how eldercare in China could be influenced by the contemporary major socioeconomic reforms, fast urbanisation and ageing environment, in

305

contrast to more established economies, which have a longer history of experience with ageing populations.

This research fills the above gap by adding explanation of generational differences in the contemporary Chinese context, and manifesting strategies that older Chinese academics/carers take to deal with the linked life issue of generational gaps. This research has found older Chinese academics/carers to be caught in the middle, with significant gaps between both their senior parents and their children, as China has experienced dramatic political economic and sociocultural changes in the past 40 years. This research has found older Chinese academics/carers dealing with the generation gap by taking the strategy of complying with their senior parents' autocratic approach while allowing for more democratic communications with their only child.

Moreover, this research contributes to the micro-level mechanism of life course factors in Chinese culture by pointing out two important factors pertaining to FCR: senior parents living in the distance (especially those staying in rural areas) and the busiest life trajectory involving childcare responsibilities associated with the education of middle and high school students. These two factors form the distinctive cultural mechanism of Chinese FCR. Participants of this research have identified these two items as the most vital sources of FCR that have created not only significant challenges to their WLB but concerns over their psychological health. Future life course studies or studies on older workers with WLB or FCR in China may consider the four factors discussed above (*guanxi*, generational gaps, senior parents in empty nests, and having children of at the middle and high school levels) to investigate links between social influences and older Chinese people's life course.

This research contributes to knowledge on eldercare in China, with an explanation of the life course of older workers with FCR. Evandrow et al. (2002) noted that the majority of work done in the area of sandwiched individuals (couples with dual caring responsibilities for

both their senior parents and their children) has been on individuals from North America. Hämäläinen and Tanskanen (2019) also argued that existing research on such sandwich families enormously focus on Anglo-Saxon areas. Falkingham et al. (2019) suggests that there may be similar limitations placed on sandwiched adults in China, but most research has been done on advanced cultures. This research addresses this gap by explaining the WLB of older Chinese academics/carers' associated with FCR.

Gravador and Teng-Calleja (2018) pointed out that existing literature (mainly based on western cultures) has mainly focused on organisational policies and difficulties in attaining WLB, while there lacks studies to explore individual experiences of achieving WLB as well as employee well-beings. The concept of WLB is "somewhat foreign" to Chinese peope (Cieri and Bardoel, 2009: p. 183), and there has been significant shortage of studies on WLB based on eastern countries including China (Cieri and Bardoel, 2009; Chandra, 2012; Xiao and Cooke, 2012; Lewis and Beauregard, 2018; Ratnesh et al., 2019).

This research addresses the above gaps by narrowly focusing on a select number of Chinese older academics from sandwiched families. Therefore, this research has identified two key factors associated with FCR that has significantly influenced life courses and WLB of older Chinese academics/carers. The first one refers to the concern of older Chinese academics/carers towards their senior parents living in distant empty nests with insufficient support of eldercare from rural areas. The second one regards childcare responsibilities when their children are in middle/high school which are crucial duration for winning *Gaokao*. Older Chinese academics/carers possess most unbalanced work and life during these circumstances.

More significantly, this research has found that in dealing with WLB issues, older Chinese academics/carers adopt the strategy of prioritising family needs. More explicitly, when their senior parents are in severe health situations which requires significant eldercare,

or when their children are in middle/high school that requires parents' enormous supervision, older Chinese academics/carers are determined to sacrifice their work. Female older Chinese academics/carers tend to make more sacrifices and experience more WLB pressures than male older Chinese academics/carers.

The research data matches the existing literature on FCR, which indicates accrual of mental stress and anxiety among caregivers. For instance, Marks' (1998) quantitative research, which estimated the impact on caregivers of employment during midlife while providing eldercare to disabled or frail older family members, evidenced a worsening mental condition in terms of both work and family lives.

Moreover, this research has analysed gendered life course associated with FCR. Findings corroborate Kohli (2007) and Widmer and Ritchard (2009), revealing more diverse female life courses. Therefore, relative destandardisation of female academics/carers' life trajectories associated with FCR is more conspicuous compared to relative standardisation of older Chinese academics/carers' life courses in a broader perspective. One point that contrasts Widmer and Ritchard's findings that the female participants in this research have been much more involved in the economy, possibly owing in part to the greater career opportunities and social capital they can access as highly-educated workers.

Findings from this research differ from the results of Evandrou et al. (2001) and Dentigner and Clarkberg (2002), who both indicated minor FCR among both male and female workers. This research's participants are highly involved with multiple roles of employment and caregiving during midlife. In addition, in this research, females are comparatively more involved with care work, and thus engage to a higher level than males in multiple worker/carer roles in midlife.

In the literature review, the researcher discussed gender discrimination as a factor making female workers devote more effort to FCR, in turn affecting their life courses and

WLB. Interestingly, unlike in the literature, both male and female participants research participants indicated no experience of gender discrimination in the work environment, despite female participants expressing more difficulties and struggles in WLB and FCR. Crucially, research findings show female participants having doubled responsibilities, experiencing workforce competition with their male counterparts, while being held to the same standards, and simultaneously bearing the bulk of providing care for their families. By contrast, male participants of this research indicated a central focus on work and less focus on FCR. Findings of this research are similar to those of Frone's (2000) research in the US, which indicated that females possessed a higher probability of mental disruptions than males in association with work-life conflicts.

More importantly, this research also confirms Toffoletti and Starr's (2016) finding that females tend to ignore the negative effects of gender bias derived from sociocultural structures around their career pathways, understanding it rather as a personal choice of having children and compromising in their career progressions. Female participants of this research admitted that their careers and their WLB have been hampered to a great extent by FCR. However, they mostly assume that these are their major duties in life and a contribution they are willing to make for their families and children. By contrast, male participants assume that earning money from a career is their foremost responsibility towards their families.

Wolf et al.'s findings (1997) reported very few respondents receiving care from sons-in-law or daughters-in-law. To some extent, this contradicts the findings of this research. Most research participants indicated some form of cooperation between the couple in providing eldercare to parents on both sides, including financial support, daily care, medical care, etc. This may also be due to cultural differences: Marriage in China is collectively understood as a merger of two big families. Providing care to senior parents from both sides is culturally and socially deemed a duty of working couples in China.

Zhang and Pan (2012) stated that the impact of marketisation on China's economy would cause only a small increase to the probability of married females to enter self-employment. This is also indicated by the findings of this research; several female participants revealed their intentions for self-employment or career transitions, but only Victoria took action. A few more male participants had indicated the experience or intention of self-employment or part-time work as second career. The findings of this research are somewhat consistent with Zhang and Pan's result, which used data from the 1996 'Life Histories and Social Change in Contemporary China' survey, that marriage immensely increased people's probability of starting self-employment. As demonstrated previously, Victoria expressed that her unique driving force and initial incentive to start a second career was the increasing demand on her income due to the birth of her daughter.

Yi et al.'s (2015) comparative study revealed larger generation gaps and less gender role distinctiveness in an organisational context in the US than in China. Their research also found that changes in gender role norms are bigger in China than in the US and that traditional views on gender roles are diminishing; this indicates that the major social and economic changes have changed females' self-conceptions significantly in China. However, this research may not be representative in this domain. Since the female participants are from the small percentage of older women in contemporary China who have received higher education, it seems reasonable that the female participants of this research are more independent or have more social capital, and thus they may display bigger divergence from traditional gender norms.

To summarise, this research contributes to LCT among Asian cultures by addressing the micro-level mechanism of effects on life course in the Chinese context. Subsequently, this research has found the importance of *guanxi* on older Chinese academics/carers' life courses: Building up and maintaining *guanxi* at work still plays an important role in career progress,

while at the same time the *guanxi* system can be detrimental to employees with less political capability skills. This research has found that older Chinese academics/carers adapt to the vast generational gaps by attempting obedience towards the autocratic tradition of their senior parents and democratic communication with their single child. This research has revealed a significant importance of FCR on older Chinese academics/carers' life courses, with a greater influence on the WLB of females. Middle age, which is associated with dual caring responsibilities (when senior parents may live in distant empty nests), and the trajectory of having children in middle and high school are two distinctive factors on life course from the Chinese cultural background.

This research recommends that government, social and organisational policy makers and practitioners in China should pay more attention on employment policies assisting FCR and flexible working. Research on FCR in Chinese context, and social policies and practices in China should pay major attention to older workers during the two trajectories with most intensive FCR (childcare responsibilities of middle/high school education, mid aged dual caring responsibilities) or in the situation of having senior parents living as empty nesters from distant rural areas identified in this research. During theses circumstances, older workers in China are in significant need of supports to WLB from organisations and policies. It also deserves more investigation on testing generational differences for life course research in the Chinese context in the future.

9.2.3 Transitions/Trajectories

This research contributes to the investigation of life transitions and turning points within LCT. Life course studies associated with turning points mainly focus on unique major social events. The most frequently-investigated major social events were the Great Depression (Elder, 1998) in the Western context and the Cultural Revolution (Zhou & Hou, 1999) from the Chinese context. Researchers have predominantly investigated how the Great Depression and the Cultural Revolution have impacted later life outcomes. Based on a review

311

of life course research throughout the development of LCT, there have been a number of studies focusing on specific individual life turning points such as transition into adulthood (Schwartz & Petrova, 2019), military service (Gade, 1991; Sampson & Laub, 1996), transition into motherhood (Prabhakar et al., 2019), residential change (Kirk, 2012) etc. Studies have typically focused on those special turning points or social identities corresponding to unique timing of structural influence. By contrast, this research sheds light on sequential turning points of individual life course in relation to the macro socioeconomic environment in China. This research classifies the major turning points and major FCR trajectories that are mostly important in the life courses of older workers in China.

Giele and Elder (1998) have pointed out a significant challenge of LCT in unifying a holistic line of structure and change accessibilities while also accommodating social structure at various levels and divergent changes. However, this research has not attempted to clarify all structural changes to older Chinese academics/carers with specificity. Nonetheless, this researcher has attempted to unify a holistic line of important turning points over the life course of older Chinese academics/carers as a reflection of macro and micro structural changes, identifying the most crucial transitions and trajectories.

Therefore, this research has found five major turning points of older Chinese academics/carers' life course: (1) Enter higher education and start first job; (2) Change job or start second career; (3) Start marriage & have first childbirth; (4) middle age; (5) Children move away. Further, the research identified the two most outstanding life trajectories that immensely influence FCR in older Chinese academics/carers' life trajectories: (1) the trajectory of having a child at the middle and high school levels; (2) Middle age, starting between 40 – 45 years old, with dual FCR.

During the two trajectories with most intensive FCR identified in this research, the older Chinese academics/carers were having worst WLB and experiencing significant

interruptions and difficulties to focus on work. Apart from these two trajectories, employment from academia has provided older Chinese academics/carers significant help and flexibility in pursuing WLB. However, organisational and social practice and policies should pay major attention to the two trajectories that this research has identified in dealing with WLB policies and FCR issues. There is a significant need of support, assistance and flexibility provided to older workers within these two trajectories.

Consequently, this research contributes to life course studies and explaining turning points in China in two ways: First, by attempting to holistically display crucial transitions and trajectories over the general life course of older Chinese academics/carers, corresponding with multi-level contextual forces in China, the study provides important information for the enrichment of life course studies in China. Second, this study also provides a starting point for further study of life stages, highlighted by FCR, in the life course of older Chinese workers. Future research on FCR in China may consider the important life turning points and trajectories identified in this research.

9.2.4 Agency

This research contributes to the study of older Chinese academics/carers based on concept of active ageing. For example, it fills the shortage of lay voices from older Chinese academics/carers. There has been limited information on lay voices towards active ageing (Bowling, 2008; Schmidt & Yang, 2019; Chen et al., 2019). Chen et al. (2019) identified a shortage of literature on the social needs of older people from a cultural perspective. This research fills the gap of active ageing literature by explaining the sociocultural environment and the needs of older people in contemporary China. This researcher considers that research on lay voices is a crucial part of active ageing studies since it grasps the core of active ageing: seeking ways to encourage changes in older people to increase their independence. It is also a direct way to understand the cultural effects on older people.

More importantly, this research contributes to active ageing literature based in the Chinese context. Chong et al. (2006) revealed a shortfall of research on ageing positively in the Chinese context. Chen et al. (2019:) identified that the research methods and theoretical frameworks pertaining to the topic of 'ageing well' (p. 65) are mostly based on Western cultures. Chen et al. call for the need to research on the context of eastern Asia that contains publicly-used terms in the society's daily life . This research fills the gap of active ageing in China with in-depth investigations on the perceptions and attitudes of older Chinese academics/carers towards ageing, age discrimination and EWL.

Subsequently, this research addresses the lay voices of ageing populations in China and has found a general inactivity of older Chinese academics/carers. Decreasing physical and health conditions, along with intensive FCR in middle age especially, age could be major obstacles triggering a decrease of ambition and proactivity at work. The researcher found that older Chinese academics/carers have a negative perception towards ageing and do not want to extend their working lives. Simultaneously, they do not agree that age discrimination has a negative effect, rather understanding it as natural organisational metabolism.

Hsu (2007) argued that little research had been done on how older people define successful ageing or on cultural differences towards the question. This research fills this gap as well by addressing older Chinese academics/carers' understanding towards ageing, which may also be different from that of Western cultures. This research has found older Chinese academics/carers expect stability in their future career trajectories. Older Chinese academics/carers also expect an early exit from the labour market despite expressing resigned intentions to comply with state EWL policy so as to prevent loss of pensions. In the findings of Bowling (2008) on older people 65 years old and over in Britain, 33% reported themselves as ageing 'very actively', 47% 'fairly actively', 8% 'in the middle', and merely 12% reported ageing 'inactively' (p. 296). This is significantly different to the findings of this research,

314

where most of participants identified themselves as inactive and tended to accept the inactivity inherent to ageing.

Research findings are similar to the literature review in that older Eastern and Western European workers chose to retire at the legally-designated time out of unwillingness to receive decreased pension benefits (Velladics et al., 2006). Actually, the general consensus among the research participants in terms of attitudes towards retirement somehow fit the result of Lim's (2003) study. His empirical analysis, based on a survey of 204 people above 40 in Singapore, indicated that older workers tended to possess positive attitudes towards retirement. Research findings indicate a difference between Chinese and Western older people: the desire for retirement seems stronger among older Chinese workers. Instead of anxiety around retirement, they seem to worry more about their health condition.

Despite EWL likely being successful, as older workers are willing to follow the policy, the researcher considers it more important to help older workers rebuild their confidence and proactivity at work in order to more thoroughly construct an active ageing culture in China. Especially in a culture like China, which is intimately connected to traditional Confucian values and collectivism, changing the views and attitudes of older people towards active ageing is a significant challenge.

Further, this research contributes to the study on age discrimination in China. According to Spedale (2019), there has been a dominating focus on responses from employers or managers in the domain of age stereotype in the literature. This research contributes responses from the side of older workers, with the older Chinese academics/carers expressing their opinions and understanding of age discrimination. Subsequently, this research discovered a distinct social ideology on ageing compared to Western societies.

This research addresses the lay voices of ageing societies in China and has found the ways that older Chinese academics/carers understand age discrimination are different from

Western societies. In other words, this researcher argues that instead of perceiving certain phenomena as age discrimination as Western cultures do, older Chinese academics/carers tend to believe they are the effects of the decreasing capabilities of older workers and that they have the duty to create more opportunities for younger workers. According to Chiu et al. (2001), age discrimination has been widely and consistently recognised in the UK by both public and private institutions. European countries are leading implementers of active ageing policies, and political movements to transition from a passive to an increasingly active approach have been mirrored in both national and local politics (Walker, 2008). By contrast, this researcher considers that active ageing has not drawn similar attention or sufficient focus from Chinese society.

Simultaneously, this study found that the strategy older Chinese academics/carers took to adapt to ageing was to comply and compromise with forces that may hinder older workers from career progression. They merely consider this a normal, natural process that people have to adapt to and accept. In other words, the concept of active ageing is still 'new' to the social construct of ageing in China. The reform of active ageing in China should not merely focus on the implementation of retirement policies. By contrast, social reforms around active ageing and the education of older workers towards the concepts of independence and active ageing are crucial to constructing a healthy ageing society. In Peng and Fei's (2013, p. 9) words, 'active ageing is important because it changes the concept of ageing from "needs-based" to "rights-based".' This research shows that older Chinese workers need conceptual reform that encourages them to take initiative to seek their rights and avoid being passive recipients.

Crucially, it is an interesting finding from this research that older Chinese academics/carers have made compromises throughout their life courses. They used to compromise to the command economy and to state arrangements on their career trajectories;

they would compromise to organisational *guanxi*; they compromised with both their senior parents and their only children to deal with generational gaps, and they now compromise to organisational and social age discrimination while confronting the ageing process.

Above all, the findings of this research are consistent with the trend identified in the literature of working couples retiring together in both Western and Eastern countries. Johnson and Favreault's findings (2001) in the West showed that people tend to retire at the same time as their spouses so as to enjoy their leisure lives together, even if one of the couple experiences worsening health conditions.

This research contributes to ageing studies and active ageing in China by investigating lay voices of the ageing population. This research has found a general inactivity among older Chinese academics/carers and a negative attitude towards ageing and extending working lives. However, this research has found older Chinese academics/carers tend to extend their working lives mainly for the purpose of not retaining their pension. At the same time, however, most of them look forward to retirement. Unlike in Western cultures, older Chinese academics/carers tend to ignore issues of age discrimination, understanding it differently as a natural metabolism that older people should not fiercely resist.

Findings of this research indicates generally inactiveness of older workers in China. Therefore, this research contemplates that a comprehensive system cooperated by societies, organisations, and policy makers aimed to improve independence and wellbeings of older workers is significantly in need of development. This research recommends more policy and practice interventions on eliminating age discrimination in China, and active ageing should be a helpful concept to be established and disseminated across Chinese organisations and societies. It deserves attention and investigation for research and policy makers to collect lay voices and increase older workers' understandings on age discrimination and active ageing in China.

9.3 Limitations and Future Study

There may be a limitation in applying LCT to investigate the relationship between structure and agency since changes over time may also quickly render LCT studies out of date. For instance, social and cultural factors (e.g. customs, religion, language, class) may change over time; thus, the implementation of the Life-course model in a specific time background may no longer be valuable when applied to the next generation or era.

This research has certain limitations in terms of limited scale and geographical diversity. Due to the limited time and resources of a PhD study, the researcher could not conduct a longitudinal study to further improve findings around older Chinese academics/carers' life course. Longitudinal studies in the future could help to test the effectiveness of LCT in the broader life span. In addition, this research merely focuses on academia; future studies may adapt it to different fields such as industrial organisations or governments.

The literature reviewed included investigations of entire populations, regardless of regions, social groups, work industries, organisational positions, income level, etc. Nonetheless, this research's data collection merely targeted a specific group of people with particular sample criteria in order to ensure the validity and pertinency of this research. Hence, the findings and data analysis could not be representative of the whole country; instead, it possesses the advantage of providing a sufficiently in-depth analysis of the life courses of older Chinese academics/carers.

The social group on which this research is based is generally a privileged one. Investigations of different social groups may generate different results. The older Chinese academics/carers in this research were in general less likely to be interrupted by FCR on WLB, though they possessed two special trajectories with intensive FCR. Future studies on FCR may investigate people from lower income levels or with less-flexible work; these

hypothetical studies could be interesting if they find contrasting results to existing life course studies.

Furthermore, future studies could adopt a comparative approach to explore differences between regions or cultures. Future studies could also compare life courses between generations. Moreover, studies at a larger scale that include large numbers of participants could help test, build and shape the development of LCT. Future studies may also focus on gender differences in order to investigate more explicitly gender-focused life course.

There lacks research based on different cultures that have tested the effects of economy regimes, or the differences between command and marketised economies, on standardisation or individualisation of people's life trajectories. However, a number of studies in the literature have noted a diversified trend of people's life courses in Western countries. Little research has investigated standardisation or individualisation in Asian cultures. Future research may look at LCT and compare relative standardised life courses in Asian cultures to the propensity for individualisation among Western cultures. Future life course studies on China may also look at the marketised economy.

This study adopts LCT in extensively unpacking and exploring the contextual environment, and uses LCT as a lens to investigate the general life course of older Chinese academics/carers. Like Elder's research on the Cultural Revolution, future life course studies may focus primarily on a specific turning point or major social event, conducting analysis of the contextual environment in relation to that particular turning point or event specifically in order to conduct a more in-depth analysis.

Appendix A: "A three-level health-care protection system was developed. The first level is public medicine. This is a state-owned, state-provided, and state-financed medical and health protection programme initiated in 1951. It aims at providing free medical and health-care services for the serving as well as retired state officials, civil servants and workers in public agencies and universities, handicapped military officers above a certain rank and university students. Health services are mainly provided by public hospitals. Financial budgets are planned in the central government level and allocated to provincial and local governments according to state-planned indicators. Deficits, once unfortunately prevalent, would be underwritten by the finance bureau of different levels of government.

The second level of the system is called collective medicine targeted primarily to employees and retirees of state and collective enterprises. Medical and health services are still largely state-provided, but are financed, wholly or partially, by the enterprises by drawing a designated portion of "welfare funds" set up by them. In case of deficits, the enterprises may draw a greater portion of "welfare funds" beyond the portion originally designated for medical and health services. A major difference between public and collective medicine was that a nominal fee had to be charged in the latter since 1966, but the fee was symbolic and minimal.

The third level of the protection system is called co-operative medicine. In the Maoist era, co-operative medicine schemes collected funds from individual peasant households, brigade (village) and commune (county) welfare funds and a small subsidy from various levels of government. In return, patients were entitled to free or subsidized medical and health services provided by brigade health stations, commune health centres or county hospitals which together formed a three-tier rural health network. Being the lowest rural health unit, the brigade health stations staffed by barefoot doctors – who had received three or more months of training in health care, and allocated some of their farming or production time to health activities – took charge of most of the preventive health services undertaken at brigade or village level and of the treatment of nearly 60-70 per cent of the county's out-patients[6]. The co-operative medicine system also relied on political mobilization and health campaigns in support of the public health approach. By the mid-1970s, more than 90 per cent of rural brigades had a co-operative medicine scheme. The establishment of cooperative medicine was a very important development in China which guaranteed the majority of rural population access to essential health care on the one hand, and on the other consolidated the three-tier rural health network in which disease prevention and health promotion were afforded a high priority" (Wong and Chiu, 1997: pp.77-78).

Apendix B: "The system included a social security programme, various allowances, and personal and collective welfare services. Social security included benefits for sickness, maternity, work injury, invalidity and death, and old age (pensions). Not only comprehensive in coverage, the benefit rates offered were considered rather generous (Chow, 1988). Allowances included subsidies on rent, food, transportation, bathing and haircuts, fuel, single child benefits, sanitation and visits to family members living in other parts of the country, etc. Collective welfare services included nurseries, kindergartens, staff quarters, primary and secondary schools, clinics, hospitals, recreational club houses, libraries, cinemas, canteens, etc. Personal welfare services included mediating in family disputes, promoting family planning, counselling delinquents and assisting poverty-stricken house- holds" (Leung, 1994: p. 342).

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

(To follow life grid chronology – current situation, past experience, future plans – throughout the whole interview)

Please tell your story about your satisfied or unsatisfied experiences? Take note

Current situation:	Why you choose this job? Who/what influenced the choice? How did you acquire the skills for the job? Have you had/been offered any training/support here? Do you need any? Do you think you could get it? Thinking back over your life, what has been the most helpful means of acquiring the skills you need for your job? What is important to you about work? (colleagues, money, job satisfaction, being local, fitting with kids, colleagues) Has this changed over your working life? How does your work fit in with the rest of your life and your other responsibilities? Is that easy to manage? Tell me more about your current job: What do you enjoy about your job/ working? What do you dislike about your job/ working? What would you change about your job/working if you could? How do you get on with those you work with –colleagues/ management? Do you think your work/you are valued by your employer? How far do you think your skills and knowledge are being used/passed on? Are you OK with that? Do you think about your age colours in your workforce? How you are seen/treated at work as an older worker? What do you think your chances are for promotion or job change? How easy do you think it is to get a new job now for the over 50s? What kind of caring responsibilities you have for your family? In what ways do you and other of your family members share the family caring responsibilities? How other members in your families view the caring responsibilities you have? The first time you took family caring responsibilities, how much did you think your life was changed? How did you adapt to that change? Is it easy to manage the family caring responsibilities? What difficulties do you have? What are the aspects that you are satisfied with your family caring responsibility? How do you think it is managed in your family? Are you and your family members happy with it? If so, why? If not, what are your concerns and expectations for it? Do you think you are influenced by family caring responsibilities? If not, why? If so, in what ways family caring responsibilities have been influencing your life? How big is the influence? Do you think your family life and career are well balanced? Why? How much support do you get from your manager and colleagues when there is an emergency? Is there any one at home that can help you manage family caring responsibilities? Do you think the education you received has influenced your current life? Why and how? Tell me more about your current situation of your family and your life: What do you enjoy about your life? What do you dislike about your life? What would you change about your life if you could? How do you think your life is changed comparing with the past? How do you think are the differences on the condition of your family caring responsibilities comparing with the past? Do you think your family caring responsibility is managed better than past experiences? Why and how? How happy are your family members towards the family caring responsibilities comparing with the past? In what ways? Why?

	Do you think you are now balancing your career and life better than past experiences? Why and how?
Childhood experience:	Was there any experience happened in your childhood that has influenced your current decisions on your career? What was it? How did it shape your perceptions about your life and career decisions? Was there any experience happened in your childhood that has influenced your views on your marriage and family caring responsibilities? What was it? How did your family conduct family caring responsibilities when you were in your Childhood? How you and your grandparents were taken care of? Did your parents shape your views and decision-makings on your marriage and family caring responsibilities? How did they influence you on your current marriage condition? Which member in your original family has influenced you the most on your marriage and family caring responsibilities? How has he/she influenced you?
School leaving:	When did you leave formal education? Why then? What qualifications did you have? Do you think the education you had influenced you at that time? What influence? What did you do next? Why did you make that decision?
First job:	What was your position in that job? Why did you choose that job? Who/what influenced the choice? How did you acquire the skills for the job – training/apprenticeship/ on the job? What did you gain from that job? What influence did pass on you or how much do you think you are changed during this job? Did your education benefit you for that job? What are the effects? What are the influences of your first job on your life? Did it influence caring responsibilities in your family? What were the effects? How well was your balance between your job and your family caring responsibilities at that time? Were your family members happy with it? How and why?
Next job: (& so on)	What prompted the change? Was family caring responsibility a reason that prompted the change? What was your position in that job? Why that job? Who/what influenced the choice? How did you acquire the skills for the job – training/on the job? What did you gain from that job? What influence did it pass on you or how much do you think you are changed during this job? What are the influences of this job on your life? Did it influence caring responsibilities in your family? What were the effects? How well was your balance between your job and your family caring responsibilities at that time? Were your family members happy with it? How and why? How do you think your life was changed comparing with having previous job? How do you think are the differences on the condition of your family caring responsibilities comparing with the time you were having your previous job? Were your family members happy with the caring responsibilities managed in your family? Why? How happy they were comparing with the time you were having your previous job?

Future plans:	What are your plans for the future? Do you know when you'd like to retire? Are these connected to your partner/spouse/other family members? Would you like to carry on working in the same way you are now up to retirement or would you like to make any changes? How do you think your employer would respond to a request for change? When you reach the point when you'd like to retire, how would that work with your

	employer? Do you think family caring responsibility will be a reason to influence you on your retirement decision? Why? Do you have any worries or concerns about your future work life? Once you've retired, how do you think you'd spend your time? Would you consider part-time work? What type of work do you think that would be? Generally, how do you think older workers are seen by other/younger people? At a broader level, what types of things do you think would make work better for older workers with family caring responsibilities? How do you expect the caring responsibilities in your family will change over time? How will you respond to those changes? Do you think retirement could help you on managing family caring responsibilities? In what ways? Or do you think staying at work help you more with family caring responsibilities? Will you expect yourself to extend your working life or return to work after retirement? Why? If not, will it be because of the family caring responsibilities you have? Or, do you think extending working life could help you with family caring responsibilities?
Final Question	Do you think any of the above turning points have influenced you generally in your life? If so, what are the influences? How big do you think are the influences? What is the turning point that has influenced you the most? Is there any big social events happened in your past life experience that has influenced you and your decision makings? What are the effects? Are there any other major points that happened in your past life trajectory which has given you big influence but not mentioned above? What was it? How did it influence you? If you had no restrictions, nothing to stop you – money/people/employer – what do you think you would do? Would you like to carry on the same way of how your family caring responsibilities are manged? Or what changes would you like to make?

Appendix D: Information leaflet

This project attempts to investigate how older Chinese professors/carers balance their career and family caring responsibilities, based on theoretical framework of Life-Course model and conception of structure and agency. China has raised its attention on its population ageing and approaches to improve potential and existing social problems derived from ageing. However, relevant profits for older Chinese people in terms of retirement pension is significantly limited. Additionally, traditional way of supporting eldercare based on families has been weakened comparing with the past. Family is still the main union for supporting lives of older people in China, while older people has been collectively assumed as good resource for childcare in the families. Nonetheless, due to smaller family structure with fewer working adults, impacts of One-Child policy on Chinese families have been making it great challenge for families to provide eldercare support. It is also a challenge for older Chinese people on independence for eldercare.

This project will explore what are the factors that influence older Chinese professors/carers' careers and lives and how they manage them. 32 biographical interviews will be conducted in this project. Participants are encouraged to talk out their experiences, difficulties and challenges, needs and concerns, and expectations towards the future. The findings will detail factors embedded in the Chinese context which affect older Chinese professors/carers' life trajectories. These findings will help local authorities to understand the lives of older Chinese people with family caring responsibilities, and inform development of social security and pension systems and future interventions targeting this group of people.

This research will seek for at least 32 participants of older Chinese professors who have family caring responsibilities to conduct biographical interviews. Each interview will contain one participant for purpose of understanding their lives, needs, concerns and expectations for future. The following is the grid containing information and characters of respondents required for this research. Participants' personal information will be kept confidential perpetually. Participants' names won't be revealed. Instead each participant will be given unique identifier to be used in note-taking, transcriptions and in the final PhD thesis submitted. The researcher would also be happy to send a copy of summary of findings to each participant.

Age:	50+ years old, including those beyond retirement age who return to work.
Gender:	16 males and 16 females
Academic position:	Academic staff from different levels (teaching staff, professors, academic staff without teaching responsibilities, director, dean)
Family caring responsibilities:	Either have eldercare responsibilities, or childcare responsibilities, or have both
Family status:	Either in marriage or divorced

This research do not require participants with fitting all the five criteria. Anyone who has an interest in participation or is interested in this project is welcomed to contact the researcher. The researcher is very happy to talk about this project and answer any questions. The researcher will then give a phone call back, explain more about the project and answer any questions, and discuss whether to recruit the participant and arrange date and time for interview. If anyone feels interested in this project, please feel free to contact. Your interest and participation will be of great help to this PhD project.

Researcher: Xueying Wang,

PhD student at Newcastle University, United Kingdom

x.wang40@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix E: Demographic form

First name: …………..……..….. Surname: ……………….…………..

Birth year: ………..….. Gender: …….…….. Occupation: ……….……..…..

Highest education obtained: ………..……..…..

How many years have you been in marriage?

……………..………...……………………………...

Who are you living with? Spouse? Adult child/children? Grandchild/grandchildren?

 …….………..………...……………………………...

Do you have family caring responsibility for

eldercare? …….………..………...……………………………...

Do you have family caring responsibility for

childcare? …….………..……..……………………………...

Appendix F: Demographic Information of Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Position	Length of service in current position	Highest education	Caring Responsibillities
Frank	Male	50	Teaching, researcher , assistant professor	25 years	Master	Childcare (first year university student)
Michael	Male	55	Teaching	7 years	Bachelor	Eldercare and Childcare (university graduate).
Jack	Male	54	Teaching	33 years	Master	Eldercare and Childcare (20s at work)
Lukes	Male	49	Teaching, researcher, professor	Less than 30 years	PhD	Eldercare and Childcare (university student)
Jennie	Female	51	Library staff	More than 10 years	Polytechnic degree	Eldercare and Childcare (22 years' old university student)
Derek	Male	55	Teaching	31 years	Bachelor	Eldercare
Zach	Male	49	Teaching, researcher, and vice president of school	Since graduation	Bachelor	Eldercare and Childcare （Master's student）
Hilary	Female	52	Teaching	11 years	Bachelor	Eldercare （80s）
Vick	Male	51	Teaching	7 years	Bachelor	Eldercare and Childcare （22 years ' old university student）
Emily	Female	54	Teaching, professor, president of school	10 years and 6 months	Bachelor	Eldercare and Childcare （27 years' old entrepreneur）
Henry	Male	49	Teaching, assistant professor, deputy director	26 years	Bachelor	Eldercare and Childcare (first child of university student and second child in Kindergarten）
Victoria	Female	45	Teaching, researcher, professor, manager of two companies	14 years	PhD	Eldercare （80s） and Childcare （18 years ' old university student）
Chrystal	Female	47	Teaching, professor, researcher	24 years	Master	Eldercare (80s) and Childcare (university student)
Kate	Female	48	Teaching, researcher, head of department	25-26 years	Master	Eldercare （80s and 90s） and Childcare (university student)
Rose	Female	56	Teaching	35 years	Bachelor	Eldercare （85 years' old） ）
Alice	Female	45	Teaching, researcher, vice president of school	14 years	PhD	Eldercare and Childcare (university student)
Mike	Male	50	Head of department	Nearly 30 years	Bachelor	Eldercare and Childcare （university student）
Juliet	Female	48	Teaching, researcher	9 years	Polytechnic degree	Eldercare (70 years' old)
Edward	Male	50	Teaching	24 years	Bachelor	Eldercare （70s and 90s）

						Childcare (first year high school student)
Bruce	Male	50	Teaching, researcher, assistant professor	13 years	PhD	Childcare (before university)
Kelly	Female	46	Teaching	16 years	Master	Childcare （university student）
Ann	Female	47	Teaching, president of school	25 years	Master	Eldercare and Childcare (first year high school student)
James	Male	47	Teaching, researcher	23 years	Master	Eldercare and childcare
Charles	Male	45	Teaching, researcher	9 years	PhD	Eldercare and childcare (high school student)
Tom	Male	52	Teaching, researcher, vice president of school	Less than 19 years	PhD	Eldercare (80s) and childcare (university student)
Amy	Female	45	Teaching, researcher, assistant professor	9 years	PhD	Eldercare and childcare (first year middle school student)
Helen	Female	55	Teaching	34 years	Master	Eldercare (70s, 80s) and childcare (university student)
William	Male	53	Teaching, professor, researcher	29 years	PhD	Eldercare and childcare (university student)
Lily	Female	49	Teaching	About 27 years	Master	Eldercare (70s, 80s) and childcare (high school student)
Lucy	Female	46	Teaching, researcher, assistant professor	More than 20 years	PhD	Eldercare and childcare (six grade primary school student)
Lisa	Female	50	Teaching, researcher, assistant professor, vice director of school	13 years	Master	Eldercare and childcare
Yuri	Female	45	Teaching, researcher, assistant professor	Unknown	Master	Eldercare (75 years' old) and Childcare (primary school student)
Shirley	Female	47	Teaching	Unknown	Master	Eldercare and childcare (master's student)
George	Male	57	Teaching, administrative	14 years	Master	Eldercare and childcare (university student)
Ellie	Female	45	Teaching, researcher, assistant professor	More than 20 years	PhD	Eldercare and childcare (middle school student)

Appendix G: Analytical Framework by Nvivo

Appendix H: Consent Form

Thank you so much for taking time to join this interview. This is the consent form for you to sign in light of outlining protection of your rights and confidentiality in participating in this project.

This is a PhD project which attempts to investigate how older Chinese professors/carers balance their career and family caring responsibilities. This project will explore what are the factors that influence older Chinese professors/carers' careers and lives, and how they deal with major turning points in their life trajectories. Participants are encouraged to talk about their experiences, difficulties and challenges, needs, concerns, and expectations towards the future. The findings of this research will help to understand the lives of older Chinese people, and development of social security and pension systems and future interventions targeting this group of people.

All personal information gathered from participants will be kept confidential perpetually. Each participant will be given a unique identifier rather than real name to be used in interview notes, transcript, translated transcript, and the final PhD thesis submitted. Hard copies of interviews notes will be stored in lockable filing cabinets in a safe place. Typed documents will also be password protected and stored on university servers, or researcher's personal laptop. All these hard copies or typed documents will only be accessed by the researcher and her PhD supervisors. The personal information of each participant will only be accessible to the researcher.

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet dated _____.	☐

2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	☐
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	☐
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	☐
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymization of data, etc.) to me.	☐
6.	If applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, audio, video or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.	☐
7.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	☐
8.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	☐
9.	Select only **one** of the following: • I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. • I do not want my name used in this project.	☐ ☐
10.	I, have the right to stop, withdraw, skip any questions during the interview.	☐
11.	I, have the right to respond and comment on but not to add or change any contents on the outcome of this project	☐
12.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	☐

Participant:

_____   _____
       _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Researcher:

_____   _____
    _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

Appendix I: Debrief Letter

Thank you so much for your participation in the interviews. Your help and talks are great help to the contribution of this project.

This is a PhD project which attempts to investigate how older Chinese professors/carers balance their career and family caring responsibilities. This project explores what are the factors that influence older Chinese professors/carers' careers and lives and how they manage them.
The aims of this research project are therefore to understand more about how older Chinese professors/carers balance their career and family caring responsibilities. Three major aims are contained in this research: 1. What are the factors that influence older Chinese professors/carers in balancing their careers with their family caring responsibilities in the changing environment? 2. How older Chinese professors/carers respond to the Chinese context? 3. How older Chinese professors negotiate 'turning points' (in the form of macro-economic, social and political change; community, workplace and family changes; and changes in their own individual plans and expectations)?

The findings of this research will help to understand the lives of older Chinese people, and development of social security and pension systems and future interventions targeting this group of people.

The qualitative data will initially be in the form of audio-recorded. After collection of qualitative data, the sound files of the interviews will be transcribed verbatim, effectively converting it from sound to text data. Participants' personal details along with audio records, transcript (Chinese), translated transcript (English) of the interviews will be stored safely. They are will all be kept in password protected lockable files in the researcher's personal laptop and rigid disk. All hard copies of consent forms and writing notes of the interviews will be locked in a safe place. All the documents related to data collection in the research will only be accessed by the researcher and her PhD supervisors. A copy that summarises the data collected from the interviews will be sent to each participant respectively. Thus, participants are aware of how the information they have provided are used, coded and analysed. Participants have the right to respond to or comment on the outcome of the data collected. However, they don't have right to add or change contents of the outcome. As they were permitted the right to stop, skip any questions, or withdraw any time during the interviews. Participants are also welcomed to any enquiries both related to the interviews and uses of the data any time in the future.

Thank you again for your participation! If you have any further enquiries, please feel free to contact the researcher.

Xueying Wang
 PhD student at Newcastle University, United Kingdom
 x.wang40@ncl.ac.uk

References:

Aluko, Y. A. (2009). Work-Family Conflict and Coping Strategies Adopted by Women in Academia. In *Gender and Behaviour*, 7(1), pp. 2095-2324.

Ang, M.; Hwa, C. and Teh, G. M. (2018) 'Work Intensification and Turnover Intention in Academia: The Mediating Role of Work-Life Balance', *Journal of Asian Scientific Research*, 8(5), pp. 188-196.

Angela, M.O. (2018) Structuration and Individulatisation: The Life Course as A Continuous, multivevel Process. In *Generationg Social Stratification*, Routledge, pp. 3-16.

Baltes, P.B. and Smith, J. (2004) 'Lifespan Psychology: From Developmental Contextualism to Developmental Biocultural Co-constructivism', *Research in Human Development*, 1(3), pp. 123-144.

Bandura, A. (2001) 'Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication', *Media Psychology*, 3(3), pp. 265-299.

Bandura, A. (2006) 'Toward a Psychology of Human Agency', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(2), pp.164-180.

Bartlett, H. and Phillips, D.R. (1997) 'Ageing and Aged Care in the People's Republic of China: National and Local Issues and Perspectives', *Health & Place*, 3(3), pp.149-159.

Baruch, Y. (2013) 'Careers in Academe: the Academic Labour Market as An Eco-System', *Career Development International*, 18(2), pp. 196-210.

Bell, A. (2005) '"Oh Yes, I Remember it Well!" Reflections on Using the Life-Grid in Qualitative Interviews with Couples', *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 1(1), pp. 51-67.

Bian, Y.J. (1994) 'Guanxi and the Allocation of Urban Jobs in China', *The China Quarterly*, pp. 971-999.

Binstock, R. H.; George, L. K.; Cutler, S. J.; Hendricks, J. and Schulz, J. H. (2011). *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*. 6th edn. US: Academic Press.

Blackaby, D., Booth, A. L. and Frank, J. (2005). Outside Offers and the Gender Pay Gap: Empirical Evidence from the UK Academic Labour Market, *The Economic Journal*, *115*(501), pp. F81-F107.

Blau, F. D. and Kahn, L. M. (2001) 'Understanding International Differences in the Gender Pay Gap', *National Bureau of Economic Research*, pp. 1-47.

Bloom, D.E.; Canning, D. and Fink, G. (2010) 'Implications of Population Ageing for Economic Growth', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 26(4), pp.583-612.

Bowling, A. (2008) 'Enhancing Later Life: How Older People Perceive Active Ageing?', *Aging and Mental Health*, 12(3), pp. 293-301.

Bradbury-Huang, H. (2010) 'Sustainability by Collaboration', *Organisational Dynamics*, 39, pp. 335-344.

Brannen, J. and Nilsen, A. (2005) 'Individualisation, Choice and Structure: a Discussion of Current Trends in Sociological Analysis', *The Sociological Review*, 53(3), pp. 412-428.

Brooke, L. (2009) 'Prolonging the Careers of Older Information Technology Workers: Continuity, Exit or Retirement Transitions?', *Ageing & Society*, 29(2), pp. 237-256.

Bruckner, H. and Mayer, K.U. (2005) 'De-Standardization of the Life Course: What it Might Mean? And if it Means Anything, whether it Actually Took Place?', *Advances in Life Course Research*, 9, pp. 27-53.

Bruening, J. E. and Dixon, M. A. (2008) 'Situating Work-Family Negotiations within a Life Course Perspective: Insights on the Gendered Experiences of NCAA Division I Head Coaching Mothers', *Sex Roles*, 58, pp. 10-23.

Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods*. 5th edn. Oxford Univeristy Press: New York.

Burnay, N. (2010) 'Older Workers in a Changing Social Policy Patterns', *Studies in Social Justice*, 3(2), pp. 155–171.

Burnay, N.; Kiss, P. and Malchaire, J. (2005). Sociability, Life Satisfaction and Mental Health according to Age and (Un)employment Status. I*n Assessment and Promotion of Work Ability, Health and Well-being of Ageing Workers* (Vol. 1280). London and Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp. 347–352.

Burnett, J. (2010) 'Women's Employment Rights in China: Creating Harmony for Women in the Workforce', *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*,17(2), pp. 289-318.

Cai, F.; Giles, J. and Meng, X. (2006) 'How Well Do Children Insure Parents Against Low Retirement Income? An Analysis Using Survey Data from Urban China', *Journal of Public Economics*, 90(12), pp. 2229-2255.

Cai, Y. and Cheng, Y. (2014) 'Pension Reform in China: Challenges and Opportunities', *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 28(4), pp. 636-651.

Cai, Y.; Yang, Y. and Guo, P. (2013) 'Helpless Dependents or Active Independents: a Cluster Analysis of Elders in China', *Social Indicator Research*, pp. 1-17.

Cao, J.X. (2009) 'The Analysis of Tendency of Transition from Collectivisom to Individualism in China', *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 5(4), pp. 42-50.

Chang, S. H. and Yu, C. L. (2013) 'Perspective of Family Caregivers on Self-Care Independence among Older People Living in Long-term Care Facilities: A Qualitative Study', *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 50(5), pp. 657-663.

Chan, K.W. (2009) 'The Chinese Hukou System at 50', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 50(2), pp. 197-221.

Chandra, V. (2012) 'Work-Life Balance: Eastern and Western Perspectives', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(5), pp. 1040-1056.

Chang, M. H. (2018). *Return of the Dragon: China's Wounded Nationalism*. Routledge.

Chen, F. (2005) 'Residential Patterns of Parents and Their Married Children in Contemporary China: A Life Course Approach', *Population Research and Policy Review*, 24(2), pp.125-148.

Chen, F.; Yang, Y. and Liu, G. (2010) 'Social Change and Socioeconomic Disparities in Health over the Life Course in China a Cohort Analysis', *American Sociological Review*, 75(1), pp.126-150.

Chen, J.; Chen, S. and Landry, P. F. (2013) 'Migration, Environmental Hazards, and Health Outcomes in China', *Social Science and Medicine*, 80, pp. 85-95.

Chen, M.J. (2008) 'Conceptualizing the Competition-Cooperation Relationship a Transparadox Perspective', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17(4), pp. 288-304.

Chen, S.; Riner, M.E.; Stocker, J.F. and Hsu, M. (2019) 'Uses and Perspectives of Aging Well Terminology in Taiwanese and International Literature: A Systematic Review', *Journal of Tanscultural Nursing*, 30(1), pp. 64-74.

Chen, Z. X. and Francesco, A. M. (2000) 'Employee Demography, Organizational Commitment, and Turnover Intentions in China: do Cultural Differences Matter?', *Human relations*, 53(6), pp. 869-887.

Cheng, L.G.; Liu, H.; Zhang, Y. and Zhao, Z. (2018) 'The Heterogeneous Impact of Pension Income on Elderly Living Arrangements: Evidence from China's New Rural Pension Scheme', *J Popul Econ*, 31, pp. 155-192.

Cheng, Y.; Xi, J.; Rosenberg, M. W. and Gao, S. (2018) 'Intergenerational Differences in Social Support for the Community‐Living Elderly in Beijing, China', *Health Science Reports*, 1(11), pp. 96-106.

Chesnais, J. and Wang, S. (1990) 'Population Ageing, Retirement Policy and Living Conditions of the Elderly in China', *Population: An English Selection*, 2, pp.3-27.

Cheung, M. F. Y. and Wu, W. P. (2011) 'Participatory Management and Employee Work Outcomes: The Moderating Role of Supervisor‐Subordinate Guanxi', *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 49(3), pp. 344-364.

Cheung, M.F.Y.; Wu, W.P.; Chan, A.K.K.; and Wong, M.M.L. (2008) 'Supervisor-Subordinate Guanxi and Employee Work Outcomes: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 88, pp. 77-89.

Chevalier, A. (2007) 'Education, Occupation and Career Expectations: Determinants of the Gender Pay Gap for UK Graduates', *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 69(6), pp. 819-842.

Chiu, W. C. K.; Chan, A. W.; Snape, E. and Redman, T. (2001) 'Age Stereotypes and Discriminatory Attitudes towards Older Workers: An East-West Comparison', *Human Relations*, *54*(5), pp. 629-661.

Chong, A.M.; Ng, S.; Woo, J. and Kwan, A.Y. (2006) 'Positive Ageing: the Views of Middle-Aged and Older Adults in Hong Kong', *Ageing & Society*, 26, pp. 243-265.

Cieri, H.D. and Bardoel, E.A. (2009) 'What Does 'Work-Life Management' mean in China and Southeast Asia for MNCs?', *Community, Work & Family*, 12(2), pp. 179-196.

Clarke, A. and Warren, L. (2007) 'Hopes, Fears and Expectations about the Future: what do Older People's Stories Tell us about Active Ageing?', *Ageing and Society*, 27(04), pp. 465-488.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2017) 'Thematic Analysis', *The Journal of Positive Psychology: Qualitative Positive Psychology,* 12(3), pp. 297-98.

Creswell, J. W. (2009) *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3rd edn. SAGE Publications, Inc: London.

Crompton, R. and Birkelund, G.E. (2000) 'Employment and Caring in British and Norwegian Banking: An Exploration Through Individual Careers', *Work, Employment & Society*, 14(2), pp. 331-352.

Das, M. and N'Diaye, P. (2013) 'Chronicle of a Decline Foretold: Has China Reached the Lewis Turning Point?', *International Monetary Fund.* [online] Available at: http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2013/wp1326.pdf (Accessed: 15 October 2014).

Dautzenberg, M.G.H.; Diederiks, J.P.M.; Philipsen, H.; Stevens, F.C.J.; Tan, F.E.S. and Vernooij-Dassen M.J.F.J. (2000) 'The Competing Demands of Paid Work and Parent Care Middle-Aged Daughters Providing Assistance to Elderly Parents', *Research on Ageing*, 22(2), pp. 165-187.

Dentinger, E. and Clarkberg, M. (2002) 'Informal Caregiving and Retirement Timing Among Men and Women', *Journal of Family Issues*, 23(7), pp. 857-879.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2002) *The Qualitative Inquiry Reader*, Sage.

Ding, G.; Liu, H.; Huang, Q. and Gu, J. (2017) 'Moderating Effects of Guanxi and Face on the Relationship between Psychological Motivation and Knowledge-Sharing in China', *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 21(5), pp.1077-1097.

Dingemans, E. and Mohring, K. (2019) 'A Life Course Perspective on Working After Reitrement: What Role does the Work History Play?', *Advances in Life Course Research*, 39, pp. 23-33.

Dong, B.; Yue, J.; Cao, L.; Yang, M.; Ge, N.; Hao, Q.; He, L.; Wang, Y.; and Flaberty, J.H. (2018) 'Transformation of a Geriatric Department in China', *International Health Affairs*, 66, pp. 184-190.

Du, P. and Yang, H. (2010) 'China's Population Ageing and Active Ageing', *China Journal of Social Work*, 3(2-3), 139-152.

Du, S.; Mroz, T.A.; Zhai, F.Y. and Popkin, B.M. (2004) 'Rapid Income Growth Adversely Affects Diet Quality in China – Particularly for the Poor!', *Social Science & Medicine*, 59, pp. 1505-1515.

Duan, D.D.; Dong, Y.L.; Zhang, H.; Zhao, Y.X.; Diao, Y.T.; Cui, Y.; Wang, J.; Chai, Q. and Liu, Z.D. (2017) 'Empty-Nest-Related Psychological Distress is Associated with Progression of Brain White Matter Lesions and Cognitive Impairment in the Elderly', *Scientific Reports*, 7(43816), pp. 1-10.

Dyk, S.V. (2014) 'The Appraisal of Difference: Critical Gerontology and the Active-Ageing-Paradigm', *Journal of Aging Studies*, 31, pp.93-103.

Egri, C.P. and Ralston, D.A. (2004) 'Generation Cohorts and Personal Values: A Comparison of China and the United States', *Organization Science*, 15(2), pp. 210-220.

Elbasha, T. and Wright, A. (2017) 'Reconciling Structure and Agency in Strategy-As-Practice Research: Towards a Strong-Structuration Theory Approach', 20(2), pp. 107-128.

Elder, G.H. (1994) 'Time, Human Agency, and Social Change: Perspectives on the Life Course', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, pp.4-15.

Elder, G.H. (1998) 'The Life Course as Developmental Theory', *Child Development*, 69(1), pp.1-12.

Elder, G.H. and George, L.K. (2016) 'Age, Cohorts, and the Life Course', *In Handbook of the Life Course*, *Springer International Publishing*, pp. 59-85.

Emirbayer, M. and Mische, A. (1998) 'What is Agency?' *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(4), pp. 962-1023.

Evans, A.; Nistrup, A.; Henderson, H.; Allen-Collinson, J. and Siriwardena, A.N. (2018). *Reflexivity in Qualitative Research : Two Figurational Studies*. London: SAGE Research Methods Ltd.

Evandrou, M.; Glaser, K. and Henz, U. (2002) 'Multiple Role Occupancy in Midlife: Balancing Work and Family Life in Britain', *The Gerontologist*, 42(6), pp. 781-789.

Falkingham, J.; Evandrou, M.; Qin, M. and Vlachantoni, A. (2019) 'Informal Care Provision Across Multiple Generations in China', *Ageing and Society*.

Fang, F. (2018) 'Ideology and Identity Debate of English in China: Past, Present and Future', *Asian Englishes*, 20(1), pp. 15-26.

Fang, Q.; Stegall, S.; Gritzmacher, D.; Fuqua, R. and Fitzpatrick, P. (2013) 'A Primary Study on Long Term Care in China: perceptions of the Elderly', *Journal of Management Policy and Practice*, 14(4), pp. 115-123.

Feldstein, M. (1999). Social Security Pension Reform in China. In *China Economic Review*, 10(2), pp. 99-107.

Feng, W.; Gu, B. and Cai, Y. (2016). The End of China's One-Child Policy.*Studies in Family Planning*, 47(1), 83-86.

Fleetwood, S. (2007) 'Re-thinking Work–life Balance: Editor's Introduction', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(3), pp. 351–359.

Frone, M.R. (2000) 'Work-Family Conflict and Employee Psychiatric Disorders: The national Comorbidity Survey', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(6), pp. 888-895.

Gade, P.A. (1991) 'Military Service and the Life-Course Perspective: A Turning point for Military Personnel Research, *Military Psychology*, 3(4), pp. 187-199.

Gallie, D. and Russell, H. (2009) 'Work-Family Conflict and Working Conditions in Western Europe, *Social Indicators Research*, 93(3), pp. 445-467.

Garriga, C.; Tang, Y. and Wang, P. (2014) *Rural-urban migration, structural transformation, and housing markets in China* (No. w23819). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Giele, J. Z. and Elder, G. H. (1998) Methods of Life Course Research Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. 1st edn. California: Sage Publications.

Gilbert, T. and Powell, J.L. (2005) 'Family, Caring and Ageing in the United Kingdom', *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 19(1), pp.53-57.

Goh, C.C.; Luo, X.B. and Zhu, N. (2009) 'Income Growth, Inequality and Poverty Reduction: A Case Study of Eight Provinces in China', *China Economic Review*, 20, pp. 485-496.

Gong, P.; Liang, S.; Carlton, E.J.; Jiang, Q.; Wu, J.; Wang, L. and Remais, J.V. (2012) 'Urbanisation and Health in China', *The Lancet*, 379(9818), pp.843-852.

Gravador, L.N. and Teng-Calleja, M. (2018) 'Work-life Balance Crafting Behaviors: An Empirical Study', *Personnel Review*, 47(4), pp. 786-804.

Green, F.; Felstead, A. and Gallie, D. (2016) 'Job Quality and Inequality, the Unequal World of Work in UK, 1986-2012' , *Juncture*, 22(4), pp. 329-333.

Greenhaus, J.H.; Collins, K.M. and Shaw, J.D. (2003) 'The Relation between Work-Family Balance and Quality of Life', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 63, pp. 510-531.

Gries, T. and Redlin, M. (2011) 'International Integration and the Determinants of Regional Development in China', *Econ Change Restruct*, 44, pp. 149-177.

Hämäläinen, H. and Tanskanen, A. O. (2019). 'Sandwich Generation': Generational Transfers towards Adult Children and Elderly Parents. *Journal of Family Studies*, pp. 1-20.

Harper, S. (2006). *Aging Societies: Myths, Challenges and Opportunities*. 1st edn. London: Oxford University Press..

Higo, M. and Klassen, T.R. (2017) 'Reforms of Retirement Policies: Three Common Paths in Aging in Japan and Korea', *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 29(1), pp. 70-83.

Hitlin, S. and Elder, G.H. (2007) 'Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency', *Sociological Theory*, 25(2), pp.170-191.

Hillcoat-Nallétamby, S. (2014) 'The Meaning of "Independence" for Older People in Different Residential Settings', *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 69(3), pp. 419-430.

Hom, P. W. and Xiao, Z. (2011) 'Embedding Social Networks: How Guanxi Ties Reinforce Chinese Employees' Retention', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 116(2), pp. 188-202.

Howden, D. and Zhou, Y. (2014) 'China's One-Child Policy: Some Unintended Consequences', *Economic Affairs*, 34(3), pp.353-369.

Hsu, H, (2007) 'Exploring Elderly People's Perspectives on Successful Ageing in Taiwan', *Ageing & Society*, 27, pp. 87-102.

Huang, R. J.; Zhang, Y.; Bozzetti, C.; Ho, K. F.; Cao, J. J.; Han, Y.; ... and Zotter, P. (2014) 'High Secondary Aerosol Contribution to Particulate Pollution during Haze Events in China', *Nature*, 514(7521), pp. 218-222.

Hubacek, K.; Guan, D.; Barrett, J. and Wiedmann, T. (2009) 'Environmental Implications of Urbanization and Lifestyle Change in China: Ecological and Water Footprints', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 17(14), pp. 1241-1248.

Hung, E.P. and Chiu, S.W. (2003) 'The Lost Generation: Life Course Dynamics and Xiagang in China', *Modern China*, pp.204-236.

Hvinden, B. and Halvorsen, R. (2017) 'Mediating Agency and Structure in Sociology: What Role for Conversion Factors?', *Critical Sociology*, 44(6), pp. 865-881.

IBM Business Consulting Services (2006) 'Healthcare in China toward Greater Access, Efficiency and Quality', *Institute for Business Value.* [online] Available at: http://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/imc/pdf/g510-6268-healthcare-china.pdf (Accessed: July 28, 2016).

International Labour Office (2015) 'People's Republic of China: Universal Pension Coverage', *ILO Social Protection Department.* [online] Available at: http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/RessourcePDF.action?ressource.ressourceId=51765 (Accessed: July 24, 2016).

Jensen, K.W.; Liu, Y. and Schott, T. (2017) 'Entrepreneurs Innovation Bringing Job Satisfaction, Work-Family Balance, and Life Satisfaction: In China and around the World', *International Journal of Innovation Studies*, 1, pp. 193-205.

Jin, X.; Li, S.Z. and Feldman, M.W. (2005) 'Marriage Form and Age at First Marriage: A Comparative Study in Three Counties in Contemporary Rural China', *Social Biology*, 52(1-2), pp. 18-46.

Johnson, R.W. and Favreault, M.M. (2001) 'Retiring Together or Working Alone: The Impact of Spousal Employment and Disability on Retirement Decisions', CRR Working Paper No. 2001-01. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=265143.

Keene, J.R. and Prokos, A.H. (2007) 'The Sandwiched Generation: Multiple Care giving Responsibilities and the Mismatch between Actual and Preferred Work Hours', *Sociological Spectrum*, 27, pp. 365-387.

Khan, S. N. (2014) 'Qualitative Research Method – Phenomenology', *Asian Social Science*, 10(21), pp. 298-310.

Kim, S. and Lee, J.H. (2006) 'Changing Facets of Korean Higher Education: Market Competition and the Role of the State', *Higher Education*, 52, pp. 557-587.

Kincannon, C.L.; He, W. and West, L.A. (2005) 'Demography of Aging in China and the United States and the Economic Well-being of Their Older Populations', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 20(3), pp.243-255.

King, D. and Pickard, L. (2013) 'When is A Carer's Employment at Risk? Longitudinal Analysis of Unpaid Care and Employment in Midlife in England', *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 21(3), pp. 303-314.

Kirk, D.S. (2012) 'Residential Change as A Turning Point in the Life Course of Crime: Desistance or Temporary Cessation?', *Criminology*, 50(2), pp. 329-258.

Kohli, M. (2007) 'The Institutionalization of the Life Course: Looking Back to Look Ahead', *Research in Human Development*, 4(3-4), pp. 253-271.

Komp-Leukkunen, K. (2019) 'Capturing the Diversity of Working Age Life-courses: A European Perspective on Cohorts Born Before 1945', *PloS One*, 14(2), pp. 1-21.

Kooij, D.; Lange, A.D.; Jansen, P. and Dikkers, J. (2008) 'Older Workers' Motivation to continue to Work: Five Meanings of Age: A Conceptual Review', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(4), pp. 364-394.

Lane, D. C. (2001) 'Rerum Cognoscere Causas; Part II Opportunities Generated by the Agency/Structure Debate and Suggestions for Clarifying the Social Theoretic Position of System Dynamics', *System Dynamics Review*, 17(4), pp. 293-309.

Lee, Y. J. and Xiao, Z. Y. (1998) 'Children's Support for Aging population Parents in Urban and Rural China: Results from a National Survey', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 13, pp. 39-62.

Leung, J.C.B. (1994) 'Dismantling the 'Iron Rice Bowl': Welfare Reforms in the People's Republic of China', *Cambridge University Press*, 23(3), pp. 341-361.

Leung, J. C.; Walker, A. and Wong, C. K. (2005) Social welfare in China. In *East Asian welfare regimes in transition: From Confucianism to globalisation*, 49.

Lewis, S. and Beauregard. T.A. (2018). The Meanings of Work-life Balance: A Cultural Perspective. In Johnson, R.; Shen, W. and Shockley, K.M. (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbbok of the Global Work-Family Interface*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 720-732.

Li, G.W.; Zhang, P.; Wang, J.P.; Gregg, E.W.; Yang, W.Y.; Gong, Q.H.; Li, H.; Li, H.L.; Jiang, Y.Y.; An, Y.; Shuai, Y.; Zhang, B. and Zhang, J.J. (2008) 'The Long-term Effect of Lifestyle Interventions to Prevent Diabetes in the China Da Qing Diabetes Prevention Study: 1 20-Year Follow-Up Study', *The Lancet*, 371(9626), pp. 1783-1789.

Li, L. and Wu, X. (2017) 'The Consequences of Having a Son on Family Wealth in Urban China', *Review of Income and Wealth*, 63(2), pp. 378-393.

Li, H. and Yu, W. (2011) 'Enhancing Community System in China's Recent Health Reform: An Effort to Improve Equity in Essential Health Care', *Health policy*, *99*(2), pp. 167-173.

Li, K. and Zhao, C. (2011) 'Determinants of Self‐Employment in China: Evidence from Cross‐Regional Data', *China & World Economy*, 19(3), pp. 49-67.

Li, L.W.; Long, Y.; Essex, E.L.; Sui, Y. and Gao, L. (2012) 'Elderly Chinese and Their Family Caregivers' Perceptions of Good Care: A Qualitative Study in Shandong, China', *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 55(7), pp. 609-625.

Li, M. and Sicular, T. (2013) 'Aging of the Labor and Technical Efficiency in Crop Production: Eviudence from Liaoning Province, China'*, China Agricultural Economic Review*, 5(3), pp. 342-359.

Li, S. and Wan H. (2015) 'Evolution of Wealth Inequality in China', *China Economic Journal*, 8(3), pp. 264-287.

Li, S. (2004) 'Life Course and Residential Mobility in Beijing, China', *Environment and Planning A*, 36(1), pp.27-43.

Liu, J. and Cook, J. (2018) 'Ageing and Intergenerational Care in Rural China: a Qualitative Study of Policy Development', *Journal of the Academy of Social Science*, pp. 1-14.

Lim, V.K.G. (2003) 'An Empirical Study of Older Workers' Attitudes towards the Retirement Experience', *Employee Relations*, 25(4), pp. 330-346.

Lindfelt, T.; Ip, E. J.; Gomez, A. and Barnett, M. J. (2018) 'The Impact of Work-Life Balance on Intention to Stay in Academia: Results from A National Survey of Pharmacy Faculty', *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy*, 14(4), pp. 387-390.

Lin, J. and Yi, C. (2011) 'Filial Norms and Intergenerational Support to Aging Parents in China and Taiwan', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 20(1), pp. 109-120.

Liu, C.; Liu, W.; Lu, D.; Chen, M. and Dunford, M. (2016) 'Eco-compensation and Harmonious Regional Development in China', *Chinese Geographical Science*, 26(3), pp. 283-294.

Liu, L. and Guo, Q. (2007) 'Loneliness and Health-Related Quality of Life for the Empty Nest Elderly in the Rural Area of a Mountainous County in China', *Quality of Life Research*, 16(8), pp. 1275-1280.

Liu, J.; Hui, C.; Lee, C. and Chen, Z. X. (2013) 'Why Do I Feel Valued and Why Do I Contribute? A Relational Approach to Employee's Organization‐Based Self‐Esteem and Job Performance', *Journal of Management Studies*, 50(6), pp. 1018-1040.

Liu, Y., Hsiao, W. C. and Eggleston, K. (1999) 'Equity in Health and Health Care: the Chinese Experience', *Social Science & Medicine*, 49(10), pp. 1349-1356.

Liu, X.; Zhang, Y.; Fang, L.; Li, Y. and Pan, W. (2015) 'Reforming China's Pension Scheme for Urban Workers: Liquidity Gap and Policies' Effects Forecasting', *Sustainability*, 7, pp. 10877-10894.

Loerbroks, A.; Ding, H.; Han, W.; Wang, H.; Wu, J.P.; Yang, L.; Angerer, P.; and Li, J. (2017) 'Work Stress, Family Stress and Asthma: A Cross-Sectonal Study Among Women in China', *Int Arch Occup Environ Health*, 90, pp. 349-356.

Lomazzi, V.; Israel, S. and Crespi, I. (2019) 'Gender Equality in Europe and the Effect of Work-Family Balance Policies on Gender-Role Attitudes', *Social Sciences*, 8(1).

Loretto, W. and Vickerstaff, S. (2012) 'The Domestic and Gendered Context for Retirement', *Human Relations*, 66(1), pp. 65-86.

Ma, J.; Hu, Z. and Gocłowska, M. A. (2016) 'Cultural Orientation in China: Differences across Five Generations of Employees', *Social Behavior and Personality: An International journal*, 44(4), pp. 529-540.

Malul, M. (2009) 'Older Workers' Employment in Dynamic Technology Changes', *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 38(5), pp. 809-813.

Mann, S. (2016). *The Research Interview: Reflective Practice and Reflexivity in Research Processes*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Marks, N.F. (1998) 'Does it Hurt to Care? Caregiving, Work-Family Conflict, and Midlife Well-Being', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, pp. 951-966.

Marshall, V. W. (2003) 'Agency, Events, and Structure at the End of the Life Course', *Advances in Life Course Research, 10, pp. 57-91*.

Mayer, K. U. (2004) 'Whose Lives? How History, Societies, and Institutions Define and Shape Life Courses', *Research in Human Development*, 1(3), pp. 161-187.

Mayer, K. U. (2009) 'New Directions in Life Course Research', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, pp. 413-433.

McMunn, A.; Lacey, R.; Worts, D.; McDonough, P.; Stafford, M.; Booker, C.; Kumari, M. and Sacker, A. (2015) 'De-standardization and Gender Convergence in Work-Family Life

Courses in Great Britain: A Multi-Channel Sequence Analysis', *Advances in Life Course Research*, 26, pp. 60-75.

Meng, Q.; Xu, L.; Zhang, Y.; Qian, J.; Cai, M.; Xin, Y.; Gao, J.; Xu, K.; Boerma, J. T. and Barber, S. L. (2012) 'Trends in Access to Health Services and Financial Protection in China between 2003 and 2011: a Cross-sectional Study', *The Lancet*, 379(9818), pp. 805-814.

Meng, X.; Gregory, R. and Wang, Y. (2005) 'Poverty, Inequality, and Growth in Urban China, 1986-2000', *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 33, pp. 710-729.

Menichetti, J.; Cipresso, P.; Russolin, D. and Graffigna, G. (2016) 'Engaging Older People in Healthy and Active Lifestyles: A Systematic Review', *Ageing Society*, 36, pp. 2036-2060.

Millar, R.; Jian, W.; Mannion, R. and Miller, R. (2016) 'Healthcare Reform in China: Making Sense of a Policy Experiment?', *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 30(3), pp. 324-330.

Mocan, H. N.; Tekin, E. and Zax, J. S. (2004) 'The Demand for Medical Care in Urban China', *World Development*, 32(2), pp. 289-304.

Moen, P. and DePasquale, N. (2017) 'Family Care Work: a Policy-Relevant Research Agenda', *International Journal of Care and Caring*, 1(1), pp. 45-62.

Moen, P. and Sweet, S. (2010) 'From 'Work-Family' to 'Flexible Careers', *Work and Family*, 7(2), pp. 209-226.

Moschis, G. P. (2019) The Life Course Paradigm: Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations. In *Consumer Behavior over the Life Course*. Springer, Cham, pp. 37-59.

Moulaert, T. and Biggs, S. (2013) 'International and European Policy on Work and Retirement: Reinventing Critical Perspectives on Active Ageing and Mature Subjectivity', *Human Relations*, 66(1), pp. 23-43.

Ng, S. H. (1998) 'Social Psychology in an Ageing World: Ageism and Intergenerational Relations', *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 1(1), pp. 99-116.

Nie, J.B. (2016) 'Erosion of Eldercare in China: a Socio-Ethical Inquiry in Aging, Elderly Sucide and the Government's Responsibilities in the Context of the One-Child Policy, *Ageing Int*, 41, pp. 350-365.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015) 'Pensions at a Glance 2015: OECD and G20 Indicators', OECD: Paris.

Parry, O., Thompson, C. and Fowkes, G. (1999) 'Life Course Data Collection: Qualitative Interviewing Using the Life Grid', *Sociological Research Online*, 4(2), pp. 1-11.

Peng, D. and Fei, W. (2013) 'Productive Ageing in China: Development of Concepts and Policy Practice', *Ageing Int*, 38, pp. 4-14.

Ping-kwong, K. (1997) 'Towards Empowerment and Advocacy: Practice and Policy in Social Services for Older People in Hong Kong', *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, 7(2), pp. 46-62.

Podoshen, J.S.; Li, L. and Zhang, J. (2011) 'Materialism and Conspicuous Consumption in China: a Cross-Cultural Examination', *International Journal of Consumer Studies'*, 35, pp. 17-25.

Population Council (2005) 'Social Security in China: Government White Paper', Population and Development Review', 31(1), pp. 185-189.

Pozen, R. C. (2013). Trackling the Chinese Pension System. Chicago: The Paulson Institute. [online] Available at: http://www.paulsoninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/China-Pensions-English.pdf

Prabhakar, A.S.; Stolterman, E. and Sabanovic, S. (2019) Understanding Life Transitions: A Case Study of Support Needs of Low-Income Mothers. In *CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems Proceedings (CHI 2019)*, May 4-9, 2019, Glasgow, Scotland UK. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 10 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3290605.3300878

Prince, M.J.; Lloyd-Sherlock, P.; Guerra, M.; Huang, Y.; Sosa, A.L.; Uwakwe, R.; Acosta, I.; Liu, Z.; Gallardo, S.; Guerchet, M.; Mayston, R.; Oca, V.M.D.; Wang, H. and Ezeah, P. (2016) 'The Economic Status of Older People's Households in Urban and Rural Settings in Peru, Mexico and China: a 10/66 INDEP Study Cross-Sectional Survey', *Springer Plus*, 5, pp. 1-16,

Quach, A. S. and Anderson, E. A. (2008) 'Implications of China's Open-Door Policy for Families: a Family Impact Analysis', *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(8), pp. 1089-1103.

Ratnesh, M.; Ali, A. and Sinha, A.R. (2019) 'Determinants of Work-Life Balance: A Cross-Cultural Review of Selected Asian Countries', *Space and Culture*, 7(1). pp. 223-239.

Ren, S. and Chadee, D. (2017) 'Is Guanxi always Good for Employee Self-Development in China? Examining Non-Linear and Moderated Relationships', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 98, pp. 108-117.

Ren, X. and Caudle, D. (2016) 'Walking the Tightrope Between Work and Non-work Life: Strategies Employed by British and Chinese Academics and Their Implications', *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(4), pp. 599-618.

Rhoads, R. and Gu, A. (2012) 'A Gendered Point of View on the Challenges of Women Academics in The People's Republic of China', *Higher Education,* 63(6), pp. 733-50.

Rindfuss, R.R.; Morgan, S.P. and Swicegood, G. (1988) *First Births in America: Changes in the Timing of Parenthood*. Berkeley: University of California Press. R.

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (2014) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. SAGE Publications Ltd: London.

Ringen, S. and Ngok, K. (2013) 'What Kind of Welfare State is Emerging in China?', United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. [online] Available at: http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/httpNetITFramePDF?ReadForm&parentunid=28BCE0F59BDD3738C1257BE30053EBAC&parentdoctype=paper&netitpath=80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/28BCE0F59BDD3738C1257BE30053EBAC/$file/Ringen%20and%20Ngok.pdf (Accessed: 15 October 2014).

Rosen, K.T. and Ross, M.C. (2000) 'Increasing Home Ownership in Urban China: Notes on the Problem of Affordability', *Housing Studies*, 15(1), pp. 77-88.

Ross, L. (1998) 'China: Environmental Protection, Domestic Policy Trends, Patterns of Participation in Regimes and Compliance with International Norms', *The China Quarterly*, 156, pp. 809-835.

Rowland, A.A.; Dounas-Frazer, D.R.; Rio, L.; Lewandowski, H.J. and Corwin, L.A. (2019) 'Using the Life Grid Interview Technique in STEM Education Research', *International Journal of STEM Education*, 6(32), pp. 1-13.

Sampson, R.J. and Laub, J.H. (1996) 'Socioeconomic Achievement in the Life Course of Disadvantaged Men: Military Service as a Turning Point, Circa 1940-1965, *American Sociological Review*, 61(3), pp. 347-367.

Sanderson, J.P. and Burnay, N. (2017) 'Life Course and Ends of Career: Towards De-standardization? An Analysis of the Belgian Case', *Journal of Population Ageing*, 10(2), pp. 109-124.

Santos, G.G. and Cabral-Cardoso, C. (2008) 'Work-Family Culture in Academia: A gendered View of Work-Family Conflict and Coping Strategies', *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 23(6), pp. 442-457.

Saunders, M.; Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research Methods for Business Students*. 7th edn. Pearson Education Limited: Edinburgh.

Schmidt, C.M. and Yang, K. (2019) 'Controlling Active Ageing: A Study of Social Imaginaries of Older People in Chile', *Ageing & Society*, 1-27.

Schwartz, S.J. and Petrova, M. (2019) 'Prevention Science in Emerging Adulthood: A Field Coming of Age', *Prevention Science*, pp. 1-5.

Seay, S.E. (2010) 'A Comparison of Family Care Responsibilities of First-Generation and Non-First-Generation Female Administrators in the Academy', 28(5), pp. 563-577.

Sen, A. (2009). Capitalism beyond the Crisis. In *The New York Review of Books*, *56*(5), 26.

Shaffer, M. A.; Joplin, J. R. and Hsu, Y. S. (2011) 'Expanding the Boundaries of Work—Family Research: A Review and Agenda for Future Research', *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 11(2), pp. 221-268.

Shan, J.; Jiang, L. and Wei, W. X. (2016) 'Who is the Real Fan for Luxury? Generational Differences in China', *Social Behavior and Personality: an International Journal*, 44(6), pp. 953-963.

Shanahan, M.J. (2000) 'Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies: Variability and Mechanisms in Life Course Perspective', *Annual Reviews*, 26, pp. 667-692.

Shanahan, M.J.; Elder, G.H. and Miech, R.A. (1997) 'History and Agency in Men's Lives: Pathways to Achievement in Cohort Perspective', *Sociology of Education*, pp.54-67.

Shen, Y. and Yeatts, D. E. (2013). Social Support and Life Satisfaction among Older Adults in China: Family-based Support versus Community-based Support. In *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 77(3), pp. 189-209.

Schrader, S.V. and Nazarov, Z.E. (2016) 'Trends and Patterns in Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) Charges', *Research on Aging*, 38(5), pp. 580-601.

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing Qualitative Research*. 4th edn. SAGE Publications Ltd: London.

Sirgy, M. and Lee, D. (2018) 'Work-Life Balance: An Integrative Review', *Applied Research Quality Life*, 13, pp. 229-254.

Solinge, H.V. and Henkens, K. (2017) 'Older Workers' Emotional Reactions to Rising Retirement Age: The Case of the Netherlands', *Work, Ageing and Retirement*, 3(3), pp. 273-283.

Spedale, S. (2019) 'Deconstructing the 'Older Worker': Exploring the Complexities of Subject Positioning at the Intersection of Multiple Discourses', *Organization*, 26(1), pp. 38-54.

Stauvermann, P. J. and Hu, J. (2018) 'What can China Expect from an Increase of the Mandatory Retirement Age?', *Annals of Economics and Finance*, 19(1), pp. 229-246.

Steel, M. (2013) 'Growing Old: The Negative effects of Ageism and Inequality on the Health of the Elderly', *JOSHUA*, pp. 33-36.

Stones, R. (2005) *Structuration Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Stratham, J.; Simon, A. and Mooney, A. (2002) *Pivot Generation: Informal Care and Work after Fifty*, The Policy Press: Bristol.

Su, Z.; Hu, Z.; and Peng, X. (2017) 'The Impact of Changes in China's Family Patterns on Family Pension Functions', *The International Journal of health Planning and Management*, 32, pp. 351-362

Sun, J. and Wang, X. (2010) Value Differences between Generations in China: A Study in Shanghai, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(1), pp. 65-81.

Tang, C. S. K.; Wu, A. M.; Yeung, D. and Yan, E. (2009) 'Attitudes and Intention toward Old Age Home Placement: A Study of Young Adult, Middle-aged, and Older Chinese', *Ageing International*, 34(4), pp. 237-251.

Tang, S., Brixi, H. and Bekedam, H. (2014) 'Advancing Universal Coverage of Healthcare in China: Translating Political Will Into Policy and Practice', *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, 29(2), pp. 160-174.

Tao, L.; Hui, E. C.; Wong, F. K. and Chen, T. (2015) 'Housing Choices of Migrant Workers in China: Beyond the Hukou Perspective', *Habitat International*, 49, pp. 474-483.

Tartari, V. and Salter, A. (2015) 'The Engagement Gap: Exploring Gender Differences in University-Industry Collaboration Activities', *Research Policy*, 44(6), pp. 1176-1191.

The United Nations (2002) 'Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing', *United Nations*. [online] Available at: http://c-fam.org/docLib/20080625_Madrid_Ageing_Conference.pdf (Accessed: 15 October 2014).

Timonen, V. (2016). Critique of Active Ageing Models. In *Beyond Successful and Active Ageing: A Theory of Model Ageing*. Policy Press.

Titma, M. and Tuma, N.B. (2005) 'Human Agency in the Transition from Communism: Perspectives on the Life Course and Aging', *Historical Influences on Lives and Aging*, pp.108-143.

Toffoletti, K. and Starr, K. (2016) 'Women Academics and Work–Life Balance: Gendered Discourses of Work and Care', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 23(5), pp. 489-504.

Tsai, M. and Chen, W. (2017) The Family-Work Nexus and Wellbeing in Asia: An Introduction. In *Family, Work and Wellbeing in Asia* (Vol. 9), Singapore: Springer, pp. 3–7.

Twigg, J. (2004) 'The Body, Gender, and Age: Feminist Insights in Social Gerontology', *Journal of Aging Studies*, 18, pp. 59-73.

Vellandics, K.; Henkens, K. and Dalen, H.P.V. (2006) 'Do Different Welfare States Engender Different Policy Preferences? Opinions on Pension Reforms in Eastern and Western Europe', *Ageing & Society*, pp. 475-495.

Vlachantoni, A.; Evandrou, M.; Falkingham, J. and Gomez-Leon, M. (2019) 'Caught in the Middle in Mid-Life: Provision of Care Across Multiple Generations', *Ageing and Society*, pp. 1-21.

Wah, C.K. (2010) 'Prosperity or Inequality: Deconstructing the Myth of Home Ownership in Hong Kong', *Housing Studies*, 15(1), pp. 29-44.

Walther, A. (2006) 'Regimes of youth Transitions, Choice, Flexibility and Security in young People's Experiences Across Different European Contexts', *Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, 14(2), pp. 119-139.

Walker, A. (2008) 'Commentary: The Emergence and Application of Active Ageing in Europe', *Journal of Ageing & Social Policy*, 21(1), pp. 75-93.

Walker, A. and Maltby, T. (2012) 'Active Ageing: A Strategic Policy Solution to Demographic Ageing in the European Union', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 21(1), pp.117-130.

Wang, F. and Yang, Q.H. (1996) 'Age at Marriage and the First Birth Interval: The Emerging Change in Sexual Behavior Among Young Couples in China', *Population and Development Review*, 22(2), pp. 299-320.

Wang, L.; Béland, D. and Zhang, S. (2014) 'Pension Financing in China: is there a Looming Crisis?', *China Economic Review*, 30, pp. 143-154.

Wang, Y. and Gonzales, E. (2019) 'Examining the Prevalence, Risk and Protective Factors to Family Caregiving in China: Findings from CHARLS', *China Journal of Social Work*, pp. 1-17.

Wang, Y. and Wang, Z. (2017) 'Influence of New Generation Succession on Team Performance: Evidence from China', *Social Behavior and Personality: an International Journal*, 45(2), pp. 281-298.

Wei, L.; Chiang, F.F.T. and Wu, L. (2012) 'Developing and Utilizing Network Resources: Roles of Political Skill', *Journal of Management Studies*, 49(2), pp. 381-402.

Wei, L.; Liu, J.; Chen, Y. and Wu, L. (2010) 'Political Skill, Supervisor-Subordinate Guanxi and Career Prospects in Chinese Firms', *Journal of Management Studies*, 47(3), pp. 437-454.

Wei, Y. and Liefner, I. (2012) 'Globalization, Industrial Restructuring, and Regional Development in China', *Applied Geography*, pp. 102-105.

Widmer, E.D. and Ritchard, G. (2009) 'The De-standardization of the Life Course: Are Men and Women Equal?', *Advances in Life Course Research*, 14, pp. 28-39.

Wolf, D.A.; Freedman, V. and Soldo, B.J. (1997) 'The Division of Family Labor: Care for Elderly Parents', *The Journals of Gerontology Series B*, 52B, pp. 102-109.

Wong, V. C. and Chiu, S. W. (1997) 'Health-Care Reforms in the People's Republic of China: Strategies and Social Implications', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, *10*(1/2), pp. 76-92.

Woo, J.; Kwok, T.; Sze, F.K.H. and Yuan, H. (2002) 'Ageing in China: Health and Social Consequences and Responses', *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 31(4), pp.772-775.

Wu, A. M. S.; Tang, C. S. K. and Yan, E. C. W. (2005) 'Post-retirement Voluntary Work and Psychological Functioning among Older Chinese in Hong Kong', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 20, pp. 27-45.

Wu, B. and Yang, W. (2018) 'What do Chinese Consumers want? A Value Framework for Luxury Hotels in China', *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 30(4), pp. 2037-2055.

Wu, X. and Li, L. (2012) 'Family Size and Maternal Health: Evidence from the One-Child Policy in China', *Journal of Population Economics*, *25*(4), pp. 1341-1364.

Xiao, Y. and Cooke, F.L. (2012) 'Work-Life Balance in China? Social Policy, Employer Strategy and Individual Coping Mechanisms', *Asia Pachific Journal of Human Resources*, 50, pp. 6-22.

Xie, Y. and Jin, Y. (2015) 'Household wealth in China', *Chinese sociological review*, 47(3), 203-229.

Xue, B.; Head, J. and McMunn, A. (2017) 'The Associations Between Retirement and Cardiovascular Disease Risk Factors in China: A 20-Year Prospective Study', *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 185(8), pp. 688-696.

Yang, F. (2014) 'Guanxi Human Resource Management Practices as a Double‐Edged Sword: the Moderating Role of Political Skill', *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 52(4), pp. 496-510.

Yang, F.; Smith, G. D. and Liu, X. H. (2014) 'Content Validity of the Chinese Version of Resilience Scale for Older People', *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 23(13-14), pp. 2077-2079.

Yao, S. (1999) 'Economic Growth, Income Inequality and Poverty in China under Economic Reforms', *Journal of Development Studies*, 35(6), pp. 104-130.

Yi, X.; Ribbens, B.; Fu, L. and Cheng, W. (2015) 'Variation in Career and Workplace Attitudes by Generation, Gender, and Culture Differences in Career Perceptions in the United States and China', *Employee Relations*, 37 (1), pp. 66-82.

Yingwattanakul, P. and Moschis, G.P. (2019) 'A Life Course Study of the Effects of Experienced Life Events on the Onset and Continuity of Preventive Healthcare Behaviors', *Health Marketing Quarterly,* 36(1), pp. 71-91.

Yuan, C.; Li, C.J. and Johnston, L.A. (2018) 'The Intergenerational Education Spillovers of Pension Reform in China', *J Popul Econ*, 31, pp. 671-701.

Yue, X.D. and Ng, S.H (1999) 'Filial Obligations and Expectations in China: Current Views from Young and Old People in Beijing', *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 2, pp. 215-226.

Yueh, L. (2009) 'Self-employment in Urban China: Networking in a Transition Economy', *China Economic Review*, 20, pp. 471-484.

Zhang, C.; Xue, Y.; Zhao, H.; Zheng, X.; Zhu, R.; Du, Y.; Zheng, J. and Yang, T. (2019) 'Prevalence and Related Influencing Factors of Depressive Symptoms Among Empty-Nest Elderly in Shanxi, China', *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 245, pp. 750-756.

Zhang, H. (2010) 'The Hukou System's Constraints on Migrant Workers' Job Mobility in Chinese Cities', *China Economic Review*, 21(1), 51-64.

Zhang, H.; Yip, P.S.F.; Chi, P.; Chan, K.; Cheung, Y.T. and Zhang, X. (2011) 'Factor Structure and Psychometric Properties of the Work-Family Balance Scale in an Urban Chinese Sample', *Social Indicators Research*, 105, pp. 409-418.

Zhang, J.; Zhou, M.; Yu, N.X. and Zhang, J. (2019) 'Future Time Perspective and Well-Being in Older Chinese Adults: Moderating Role of Age Stereotypes', *Research on Aging*, 1-17.

Zhang, N. J.; Guo, M. and Zheng, X. Y. (2012) 'China: Awakening Giant Developing Solutions to Population Aging', *The Gerontologist*, 52(5), pp. 589-596.

Zhang, Q. F. and Pan, Z. (2012) 'Women's Entry into Self-Employment in Urban China: the Role of Family in Creating Gendered Mobility Patterns', *World Development*, 40(6), pp. 1201-1212.

Zhang, X. (2002) 'Amendment of the Marriage Law in China', *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 16(3), pp. 399-409.

Zhang, Y.; Long, L.; Wu, T. Y. and Huang, X. (2015) 'When is Pay for Performance Related to Employee Creativity in the Chinese Context? The Role of Guanxi HRM Practice, Trust in Management, and Intrinsic Motivation', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(5), pp. 698-719.

Zhang, Y. and Goza, F.W. (2006) 'Who will Care for the Elderly in China?: A Review of the Problems Caused by China's One-Child Policy and Their Potential Solutions', *Journal of Aging Studies*, 20(2), pp.151-164.

Zhang, Y. and Zhang, Z.G. (2006) 'Guanxi and Organizational Dynamics in China: a Link between Individual and Organizational Levels', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 67, pp. 375-392.

Zhan, H.Y.J.; Feng, Z.L.; Chen, Z.Y. and Feng, X.T. (2011) 'The Role of the Family in Institutional Long-term care: Cultural Management of Filial Piety in China', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 20, pp. 121-134.

Zhan, S. (2011) 'What Determines Migrant Workers' Life Chances in Contemporary China? Hukou, Social Exclusion, and the Market', *Modern China*, 37(3), pp. 243-285.

Zhao, Q.; Xu, H. and Yang, Y. (2018) 'Variations in Non-ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction Care Across Three Levels of Hospitals in China: Analysis from The China Acute Myocardial Infarction Registry', *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 77(11), pp. 10-12.

Zhou, F. and Jiang, T. (2017) 'A Discussion of and Suggestions to the Problems in Chinese Family Education – Based on the Observations of American Family Education', *Creative Education*, 8, pp. 347-358.

Zhou, X. and Hou, L. (1999) 'Children of the Cultural Revolution: The State and the Life Course in the People's Republic of China', *American Sociological Review*, pp.12-36.

Zhou, X. and Moen, P. (2001) 'Explaining Life Chances in China's Economic Transformation: A Life Course Approach', *Social Science Research*, 30, pp. 552-577.

Zhou, Y. and Wei, Y.H. (2011) 'Globalization, Innovation, and Regional Development in China', pp. 781-785.

Zhu, W.; W, L. and Yang, C. (2018) 'Corruption or Professional Dignity: An Ethical Examination of the Phenomenon of "Red Envelopes" (Monetary Gifts) in Medical Practice in China', *Special Issue*, 18, pp. 37-44.

Zimmer, Z. and Kwong, J. (2003) 'Family Size and Support of Older Adults in Urban and Rural China: Current Effects and Future Implications', *Demography*, 40(1), pp. 23-44.