Chinese-style Late Life[[1]](#footnote-0)

Everyone ages old and will eventually enter the late stage of life one day.

The elderly are meant to rely on their children but reality turns this into a fairy tale. This is because the ever beloved young ones are growing up to adults who undertake and suffer the most in families. ‘80s’[[2]](#footnote-1) are now tortured to be short of breath by being ‘slaves’ to houses, cars and children, making the elderly feel compassionate hence not to drop the another straw on their back. Therefore, instead of letting their children to look after themselves, the elderly turned to caring centers. However, they find it’s too crowded to live in public ones while it’s too expensive to live in private ones. Eventually, they asked help from the society but talking about supporting the elderly, the mechanism is not finalized and the coverage of insurances is still to be improved, even the pension is like a drop in the bucket. In the twilight, the elderly sighs and says “How painful it is that you get old but have nothing to rely on”.

The tide of aging old is currently rising in China. According to the statistics from Ministry of Civil Affairs, there are 162 million old people in our country, making up of 12.79% of total population. Starting from the year of 2010, population of the elderly grew by 8 to 9 millions per year indicating that our country was starting aging old very quickly.

At the same time, with families in the new “421” mode, the pressure of supporting aged ones falls much more heavily on ‘80s’ than on ‘70s’ and ‘60s’. There was one investigation deriving that in such “421” mode, about 70 percent of ‘80s’ made it straightforward that they couldn’t manage to support their parents’ later lives.

Supporting the aged ones has just never been as tough.

Facing a series of chaining issues brought by the widespread problem of aging old, How on earth can the elderly go through their later lives well nowadays? What are the difficulties encountered by children when supporting their aged parents? And How can the society provide help and care to the old ones? We really need to spend time pondering.

We are having about 90 billion people being the only child of their parents in our country as shown by National Family Planning Commission. The oldest among them are about to face these issues soon. Can the young ‘80s’ bear all this weight?

**“the single-child generation”: the unbearable weight in taking care of the elderly**

I received a phone call from one relative all in a sudden at that night, getting to know my father who had been living alone in hometown ShanDong fainted with no sign before being sent to the hospital. I got so stunned at that moment. It has always been my biggest worry that my father was suffering from hypertension and I wanted to bring him to Beijing last year after my mother passed away. But he was not willing to. So what I had been worrying about the most eventually happened this time. On the second day, I asked for leave early in the morning, heading back to my hometown and planning to take my father to Beijing.

My father had been reluctant to move to Beijing, keeping saying “It is so expensive to go to hospital in Beijing. How can I possibly get reimbursed as I only have my medical insurance covered in Shandong?”

“It’s not time to save money. Don’t you want me to quit my job and hang around with you in hospitals all day, do you?”, I yelled at him like I was crying and he immediately got as quiet as a kid.

A good news was that the disease was not all that severe and after receiving an operation, he stayed at hospital for one week before getting discharged. However, after going through this hospitalization, I became aware of the harsh elderly-caring problem to be faced soon.

The first issue was the expense caused by the illness. We spent more than 50 thousand yuan on my father staying in the hospital and we could only pay by ourselves since the medical insurance cannot cover any expense outside its area of coverage. If my father ever got treated in Shandong instead, we could have only spent over 30 thousand yuan, even reducing to above 10 thousand yuan if the medical insurance is taken into account. And the 50 thousand yuan we actually spent suffice for me to pay off my house loan for the next two years.

The second issue was caretaking. It was the end of the year when my father went in hospital therefore I got loads of things to deal with at work. However, for my father’s sake, I still bit the bullet and and asked for one week’s leave, asking my colleagues for help on things I was doing. The perfect-attendence bonus was apparently gone and the salary also got deducted. Ah, these were not key points whatsoever.

My father didn’t like the food provided by the hospital. Therefore I brought all three meals from home every day. Though my husband has been helping me with it, but since my father didn’t want to tire his son-in-law, I have been the caregiver at night. After few days, I got my face pale and my husband asked for swapping for the next few days. But I still had to take over the role in the morning so that he can go to work as usual. My colleague, Mrs Li, got her mother in hospital before. She has a total of 4 brothers and sisters and the five of them took turns to take care. Then her mother got discharged before two rounds of them five. Since then on she got to know with brothers and sisters some jobs get easier.

Fortunately my father was not catching a bad illness this time hence got discharged shortly after. However, the doctor told my father to recuperate as informed and should keep a caretaker around in case of the relapse. Considering my husband and I are at work for most of the time leaving no one at home to take the role, I wanted to hire a caregiver. But my father immediately rejected, saying a caregiver would be paid even more than his pension. I could get his point. My husband and I have salaries adding up to just above 8000 yuan, remaining 4000 yuan after paying for the house loan, leaving really nothing if we spend another 2000 yuan on a caregiver.

Moreover, we have been living in a small two-bedroom apartment, thinking about moving into a bigger one after having a baby which can also accommodate the elder ones if they come. However, we started to hesitate getting a child after my father got sick without mentioning the new house. What a cost it would be to raise a child nowadays! Thinking of taking care of both elder ones and children at the same time, I got my scalp tingled.

Truly we have three elder ones to take care of. What can we really do if my parents in law somehow catch some disease as well when aging older? If all three of them come to Beijing, how to accommodate them in this tiny house?

It’s not we don’t want to be devoted to our parents, but life really spares us no budget to be devoted!

1. “养老”have different meaning when we have different subjects. To the elderly themselves, it means to go through their late life well. To their children and the society, it means to support the elderly in their late life. But here in the title it has no clear subject so I choose a general expression “late life”. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. “80后” is translated to 80s. It means the generation of people born in 1980s, thus 70s means people born in 1970s, so and so on. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)