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Researching and Rethinking the Culture and Practice of Eldercare in Hong Kong: A Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Following the double whammy of the anti-extradition bill movement and COVID-19 in 2019, Hong Kong experienced a significant ‘BNO exodus’ that has reshaped the city’s demographic landscape. The phenomenon accelerates Hong Kong’s transition toward a super-aged society and a pool of ‘stay-behind’ elderly, creating shortages in eldercare personnel and further straining the city’s support systems for its aging population. This corpus-assisted discourse analysis examines how the culture and practice of eldercare are represented in Chinese news media in post-2019 Hong Kong. The findings show that eldercare is generally depicted as a socio-economic issue in a neoliberal frame. News articles primarily report on the social welfare implemented by the government and the needs and community services provided for the ageing population. It is argued that the traditional virtue of filial piety to eldercare has been transformed into a neoliberal practice of the government; and that the voices of the elderly are undermined, though societal assistance for them has been explicated in the news media. Implications for journalistic practices in the portrayal of eldercare are also offered.

1 Introduction

In April 2019, the Hong Kong government introduced plans to pass an extradition bill that would allow criminal suspects in Hong Kong to be extradited to mainland China. In protest, over a million Hong Kong people marched to the government headquarters, voicing their fears that the bill would compromise the city’s legal autonomy. Over the following year, as protesters’ voices were met with inertia and suppression, the protests escalated in scale and violence, dividing Hong Kong society politically along generational lines (BBC, 2019). This political opposition fractured many families and parent-child relationships (Yu et al., 2023, cited in Chan and Chiu, 2025), while violent clashes

paralyzed the city until COVID-19’s second wave brought temporary stasis through social distancing measures (Woo et al., 2021). The National Security Law (NSL) was subsequently implemented in June 2020, triggering a surge in emigration inquiries and marking the beginning of the ‘BNO exodus’ (Benson, 2025; Mak, 2020, cited in Ho, 2025). From the introduction of the BN(O) visa route in 2021 to December 2023, 163,850 applications were submitted, with 157,576 approved — approximately 2.1% of Hong Kong’s 2024 population — and 140,300 individuals already settling in the UK (Home Office, 2024, as cited in Lam and Fong, 2025, p.149). Most critically, these emigrants typically took only their children abroad, leaving elderly parents behind (Rolle and Benson, 2023, cited in Chan, 2025a), creating a population of 移民遺老 ‘elderly abandoned in migration’ that gained media attention (Chan and Chiu, 2025).

This demographic shift has intensified Hong Kong’s transition to a ‘super-aged society’ (Choy, 2022), facing economic austerity and healthcare shortages (LegCo Research Office, 2023, cited in Lam and Fong, 2025). The shift has also created shortages in eldercare personnel, further straining the city’s support systems for its aging population (Lam and Fong, 2025). While existing literature addresses ageism, voice, and agency in news coverage of the elderly during COVID outbreaks, and separately examines the BNO exodus through qualitative studies with key populations, including the elderly, their caretakers, and family members, there remains a gap in research that is both current and specifically focused on media coverage of the elderly and eldercare, along with their sociocultural implications. Eldercare has been one of the crucial issues that the Hong Kong government has to address to improve the living quality of this increasing population in the city. News media can reflect the ideologies, attitudes, and problem-solving approaches to be shaped to deal with the tasks

involved in eldercare provision. Researching news articles focusing on eldercare can enhance our understanding of the established culture and practices of eldercare in Hong Kong and offer implications for the care culture cultivation and care practices. Conducting a corpus-assisted discourse analysis, this study examines how Hong Kong's elderly and local eldercare culture are represented in news media in post-2019 Hong Kong, serving as a pilot investigation for a larger study, aiming to identify salient discourse(s) and establish future research directions.

2 Shifting Narratives of Eldercare in Post-2019 Hong Kong

At the crux of lasting health consequences post-COVID, social support shortages, and austerity measures compromising elderly mobility, the 'stay-behind' elderly face with an additional challenge of having to navigate living alone in contemporary Hong Kong, exacerbating their existing intersectional plights. The sociopolitical upheaval brought about by the 2019 circumstances not only raised pressing pragmatic concerns for our elderly population, but also a cultural change that destabilized and restructured the way this population navigates its self-orientation and identity (Chan, 2025b; Chan and Chiu, 2025). It is, therefore, essential to examine eldercare in Hong Kong.

Neoliberal Reimagination of Filial Piety. For millennia, traditional Chinese eldercare culture has revolved heavily around the notion of filial piety and the Confucian wulun (五倫), where adult children—or the "sandwich generation"—were expected to live with their elderly parents, forming multigenerational households and serving as the primary caregivers as a reciprocal gesture for the care and support they received during their younger years. Research found that traditional Chinese eldercare structures appear to have been actively evolving since 2000s, both in terms of execution and ideology. With growing society-wide pressure to prioritize financial growth, increasingly exorbitant housing costs, and an informal social security regime, most Hong Kong families' capacity for eldercare has significantly declined (Wong, 2022; Phillips, 2018). For families with better financial circumstances, their eldercare modes are characterized by commodification: care responsibilities are "subcontracted" to migrant workers and private caretakers (Leung et al., 2019), and when home ac-

commodation is no longer feasible, families resort to institutional care as the ultimate solution (Lam, 2022). Families with limited financial resources have significantly fewer options: they often juggle full-time work and caretaking responsibilities with limited community support (Wong, 2022). Recent literature suggests that filial beliefs of the elderly have been redefined under Hong Kong's current socioeconomic climate (Bai et al., 2020). The provision of eldercare appears to be highly neoliberalized, and the traditional Chinese virtue of filial piety is hardly applicable to elucidate the culture and practice of eldercare in Hong Kong.

The 'Stay-Behind' Elderly: Eldercare in Post-2019 Hong Kong. This neoliberal adaptation of filial expectations appears to have carried forward to post-2019 Hong Kong in the context of the BNO exodus. Chan and Chiu's (2025) study on parent-child dynamics between BNO emigrants and their 'stay-behind' elderly parents argued, through transnational care theory, that these elderly are fully autonomous agents with control over how they navigate the new relational configurations, with some even having agency over their transnational mobility. However, as empowering as this narrative, the mass media generally tell tales of desolation and subsistence (see Appendix A). One could contest this "neoliberal" desire for self-reliance with the notion of "acquiescence": Bai et al. (2020) highlighted a nuanced yet paramount conflict shared by most participants—while most elderly individuals deeply yearn to age in place with family members, they hesitate to expect care from their children due to practical constraints.

While mass media may use sensationalizing language, there is a harsh truth to their depiction: the conditions for aging alone in Hong Kong remain incredibly unfavourable, particularly for individuals of lower socioeconomic status. Access to accommodation, government-funded financial support, post-retirement benefits, community services, and support networks remains disproportionately limited for elderly individuals who receive little guidance on maintaining their own interests (Hung, 2022; Wong, 2022; He and Chou, 2019).

The heated debates on the BNO exodus and the 'stay-behind' elderly are rooted in a myriad of complex and intertwined issues, including existing eldercare policies, post-retirement security, and the aging population amid economic austerity. These pieces of the puzzle, when combined, form a broader picture of the sociopolitical realities of the

elderly in Hong Kong—pieces that can be uncovered by delving into their surrounding discourse and exploring the underlying perspectives. This study aims to identify salient discourse(s) in local Chinese newspapers surrounding the elderly, and eldercare culture and practices in post-2019 Hong Kong. It conducts corpus-assisted discourse analysis to address the following research questions:

1. What are the discourses regarding eldercare in Hong Kong, and how have they been shaped in Chinese-language news media since 2019?
2. What are the implications of the media-shaped discourses for the culture and practice of eldercare in Hong Kong post-2019?

3 Research Methods

This study focuses on Chinese news articles because there are significantly more Chinese than English news publishers in Hong Kong. Focusing on Chinese news provides wider representation in voice, stance, and audience orientation.

Emergent search phrases were developed based on key themes identified in the literature and a preliminary scoping search using Google News (see Appendix B). These phrases reflect core topics related to Hong Kong eldercare and were derived from inputting 香港長者 ('Hong Kong' and 'elderly') into Google News. Six broad and semantically neutral search phrases were used, with word boundaries parsed by space, including 移民長者 ('migration' and 'elderly'), 人口老化香港 ('aging population' and 'Hong Kong'), 長者政策 ('elderly' and 'policy'), 香港安老 ('Hong Kong' and 'elder-care'), 香港長者晚年 ('Hong Kong' and 'elderly' and 'later years'), and 香港長者情況/現況 ('Hong Kong' and 'elderly' and 'situation'). Searches were performed using an incognito browser session and a blank account to reduce algorithmic bias. The search settings were set to 'by relevance' and accounted for the search IP address geolocation (i.e., Hong Kong). The first 50 articles per keyword were chosen based on the following criteria:

- **Range:** April 2019 - July 22, 2025
- **Language:** Chinese (distinction between varieties not drawn)
- **Format:** Online articles, excluding those that were predominantly reposts of third-party content (e.g. infographics taken from other sources)

- **Publishers:** No restrictions, unless the content was cross-posted
- **Word count:** Articles under 200 words (excluding punctuation, numbers, and symbols) were eliminated
- **Theme:** Articles must focus on Hong Kong elderly issues or the social welfare system. Excluded articles were those that: 1) mentioned the elderly only in passing; 2) focused on unrelated social issues with no direct relevance to the elderly (see Appendix C).

The initial search yielded 300 articles, with nine search results directly skipped as it was apparent from the preview that they were irrelevant to our scope. After applying the selection criteria to the 300 articles, 18 were removed and replaced due to insufficient word count, cross-posting, or thematic irrelevance. Textual data was then extracted from the articles and collated manually for analysis. The compiled corpus consists of 397,222 Chinese words. Unlike other mega-size corpora with millions of words, this corpus is undeniably small. However, "smaller corpora are more suited for studying specialist genres" (Handford, 2010, p. 256). Several previous studies have shown that small corpora can be as powerful as their larger counterparts (Sinclair, 2001; Lam, 2018). This corpus enables us not only to capture the predominant themes/discourses of eldercare in Hong Kong newspapers, but also to conduct qualitative analysis, such as cross-case analysis that examines and compares similarities and differences of multiple cases based on the reviewed literature and the news reports in the corpus.

The analysis began with generating a word frequency list using *AntConc 4.3.1*. While the list contained Chinese lexical items and function words, we filtered out the function words, focusing on the lexical items, as "lexical words are the main carriers of information and contribute more to the semantic construction and communication" (Lam, 2018: 200). The most frequently occurring lexical terms in the list represented 'the likely source of lexical cohesion both within and across the texts in the corpus, and may also be predicted to be wholly, or part of, the core of the lexical item' (Cheng, 2012: 330).

Table 2: The predominant discourse and sub-themes of the top ten frequently occurring lexical

items. The top 10 most frequently occurring lexical words were thematically classified into discourses/themes via an iterative analysis of their concordances, which offer analysts a general sense of the word meanings in contexts. The corpus was further investigated by examining collocates of the most frequent lexical words. Specifically, the collocation lists of each of the frequently occurring lexical words in the discourse(s)/theme(s) were generated. The specified window span was set to 8L 8R (i.e., 8 words to the left of the word of interest and 8 to the right) owing to relatively long and complex sentences in Chinese news articles. The collocates were combined and compared according to their log-likelihood scores to identify the top ten collocates of each discourses/theme. This approach aims to avoid redundant analyses of collocates shared by multiple lexical words and lengthy data analysis presentations (Yip and Kong, 2025). Each of the discourses/themes related to eldercare in Hong Kong was examined qualitatively and quantitatively based on the most frequently occurring lexical words, their collocates, and concordances. Apart from the corpus-based analysis, we also conducted a critical cross-case analysis through in-depth and iterative reading of the collected news articles and literature review on eldercare, and then compared specific cases that critically delineate the research questions to offer insights into the topic.

4 Findings

The investigation begins with the top ten most frequently occurring lexical words, which are also evenly dispersed throughout the corpus.

Word	Rank	Freq	Norm Freq	Dispersion
elderly 長者	1	4094	20378	0.923
Hong Kong 香港	2	1974	9825	0.899
government 政府	3	1199	5968	0.837
services 服務	4	1021	5082	0.857
society 社會	5	800	3982	0.880
living 生活	6	704	3504	0.878
population 人口	7	696	3464	0.878
plan 計劃	8	624	3106	0.924
needs 需要	9	525	2613	0.910
provide 提供	10	519	25836	0.888

Table 1: *Top ten most frequently occurring lexical words and their dispersion.*

Table 1 shows the generated word frequency list which indicate the word frequencies and their dispersion scores. These frequently occurring words provide a foundation for examining the predom-

inant discourses associated with eldercare represented in the Chinese news articles. The dispersion scores of the most frequently occurring lexical words are higher than 0.8, indicating that their high frequencies are not the result of dominance by individual texts in the corpus but they are evenly distributed throughout. Thus, the lexical items in the list enable us to reveal and examine the predominant discourses/ themes of the corpus.

As word meaning is “established by the consistent co-occurrence of a form with a certain semantic environment” (Sinclair, 1991, p. 112), the concordances of these high-frequency lexical items are examined to classify them into discourse(s)/theme(s) that offer a systematic picture for understanding what the corpus is about (Baker, 2023). The words are categorized into one predominant discourse, which consists of two sub-themes, as shown in Table 2. Specifically, with the words 香港 ‘Hong Kong’, 長者 ‘elder’, and 生活 ‘living’, the predominant discourse largely contextualizes the corpus, indicating that the news focuses on the elderly and their lives in Hong Kong. More importantly, the discourse frames eldercare as a socio-economic issue in Hong Kong. The discussion regarding the elderly’s living covers a range of topics, including their mental health, living environment, and financial consideration. As signaled by the lexical words 人口 ‘population’ and 社會 ‘society’, the sub-theme of population and social welfare reports the statistics and growing trends of the elderly population in Hong Kong society, along with discussion of derived social issues such as ageing, poverty, and low birth rate. The words 政府 ‘government’ and 計劃 ‘plan’ mark the HKSAR government’s implementation of welfare policies for the elderly population as responses to the issues. In the sub-theme of the elderly’s needs and community services, the word 需要 ‘need’ literally highlights the needs of the elderly and the words 提供 ‘provide’ and 服務 ‘services’ denote the services offered by the community, such as rehabilitation services and care home services. Residential care home services have been among the predominant social welfare policies for the elderly and disabled in Hong Kong (Yip, 2024a). The following section illustrates the specific meanings of the predominant discourse and sub-themes based on the analysis of the collocates and concordances of the concerned high-frequency lexical words.

The Predominant Discourse: The Elderly as a Socio-Economic Issue in Hong Kong. The top-

Discourse	Highly frequent words (rank)	Sub-themes	Highly frequent words (rank)	Concordance example
The elderly as a socio-economic issue in Hong Kong	Elderly 長者(1), Hong Kong 香港(2), Living 生活(6)	The population and social welfare	government 政府(3), society 社會(5), population 人口(7), scheme 計劃(8)	當中，在擁有超過100 萬人口的地區裏，香港預計在2050 年會成為全球人口老化程度最高的城市。(Hong Kong is expected to have the highest proportion of elderly residents globally by 2050 among regions with populations over one million.)
		The elderly's needs and care services	services 服務(4), need 需要(9), provide 提供(10)	不少身體、家庭情況許可的長者也會選擇居家安老，並使用由政府提供的社區照顧服務，包括日間護理中心、家居照顧支援等。(A significant proportion of elderly individuals with adequate physical capacity and family support opt for aging in place, utilizing government-subsidized community care services such as daycare centres and home support services.)

Table 2: *The predominant discourse and sub-themes of the top ten frequently occurring lexical items*

ics and foci that newspapers select in their reports to represent the elderly construct and reflect the culture and practice of eldercare in Hong Kong. The predominant discourse offers a general understanding of the newspapers' tendency to depict the elderly as a socio-economic issue in Hong Kong. The collocates and concordances of the words 長者‘elderly’, 香港‘Hong Kong’, and 生活‘living’ provide details of how the elderly population is portrayed as an issue in the contexts.

Collocate	Rank	Freq(Scaled)	Likelihood
allowance 津貼	1	1328	246.968
quality 質素	2	1296	185.885
stay-behind 留守	3	1120	122.960
resident 居民	4	1920	120.013
Christian 基督教	5	912	102.594
increase 提升	6	2848	98.600
population 人口	7	11136	93.484
society 社會	8	12800	92.653
the elderly 老年人	9	3008	92.572
Incentive scheme 優惠計劃	10	1136	92.310

Table 3: *Top-ten frequently occurring collocates of elder, Hong Kong and living*

As shown in Table 3, the collocate 人口‘population’ often precedes 香港‘Hong Kong’ to form the phrase 香港人口‘Hong Kong population’. The news reports tend to adopt the perspective of social administration and economics to discuss eldercare in Hong Kong. Thus, demographic information, including 香港人口‘general

population’, 勞動人口‘working population’ and 長者人口‘elder population’, as well as the collocate 社會‘society’, are frequently mentioned to provide background information and rationale for highlighting eldercare as an issue in Hong Kong society. It is not uncommon to see the collocation 人口問題‘demographic crisis’ in the corpus. For example,

香港人口問題早已引起社會有識之士的關注，人口老化又遇上生育率持續保持低位，令香港人口結構發生較大的變化，由原來的鑽石型轉變為倒金字塔型，而且情況仍在持續。

Hong Kong's demographic crisis has drawn sustained attention from insightful observers. The dual pressures of population aging and chronically low fertility rates have drawn sustained attention from insightful observers. The dual pressures of population aging and chronically low fertility rates have led to a significant change in Hong Kong's population structure, causing a dramatic shift from a diamond-shaped distribution to an inverted pyramid configuration, with this trend continuing unabated.

The elderly is frequently associated with financial support, such as 津貼‘the government subsidies’, and 優惠計劃‘incentive schemes’. The

collocate 津貼‘allowance’ spotlights 長者生活津貼‘the Old Age Living Allowance’, which is frequently mentioned to indicate the government’s efforts to enhance the elderly’s living conditions. In addition, the collocate 基督教‘Christian’ denotes the NGO Hong Kong Christian Service, which provide services and financial assistance for the elderly, which provide services and financial assistance for elderly in need, such as care home services and mental health support. The collocates of 質素/質量‘quality’, and 提高‘increase’ literally signal the goals of improving the elderly’s quality of life after retirement by providing a better living environment.

...促請政府制訂政策及投放資源推廣軟餐，以照顧長者的需要；並加強對照顧者的支援，以提升長者的生活質素和福祉。

...urge the government to formulate policies and allocate resources to promote soft meals to address the needs of elderly citizens, as well as to enhance support for caregivers in order to increase the quality of life and well-being of the elderly.

Noteworthily, the most frequently occurring word with 長者 or 老年人‘the elderly terms’ in the corpus is 留守‘stay-behind’. The collocation stay-behind elders is specifically used to describe elderly individuals whose family members have emigrated overseas, indicating that a group of elders have been separated from their families since 2019 (Chan and Chiu, 2025). The following excerpts provide further details:

調查顯示留守長者最需要的服務依次為醫療保障、生活照顧及社區支援，當中子女移民未滿兩年的長者更覺港府提供的支援不足，顯示仍處適應階段的留守長者更可能有多方面需求，建議當局及社福界推出 有關政策。

The survey shows that the services most needed by the stay-behind elderly are medical security, daily care, and community support services. Among them, those whose children have emigrated within the past two years feel that the support provided by the Hong Kong government is insufficient, indicating that stay-behind elderly in the adaptation stage may have a wider range of needs. It is

recommended that the authorities and the social welfare sector introduce relevant policies.

The stay-behind elderly have drawn the government’s attention and have been surveyed to analyse their needs in society. It is concluded that their needs, which are similar to those of non-stay-behind elderly, include medical security, personal care support, and community-based assistance. The government has been urged to implement relevant welfare policies to address the needs of the elderly. As part of this discourse, the following sub-themes outline the topics discussed in news articles about eldercare.

Collocate	Rank	Freq(Scaled)	Likelihood
population 人口	1	11136	662.157
ten thousand 萬	2	2880	449.617
year 年	3	18480	398.141
special region 特區	4	2080	397.594
estimate 推算	5	1520	358.613
working 勞動	6	1392	332.743
occupy 佔	7	2896	274.175
years 歲	8	10336	274.148
scheme 計劃	9	9984	225.08
Health care voucher 醫療券	10	1968	211.137

Table 4: *Top-ten frequently occurring collocates of government, society, population and scheme*

Sub-Theme: The Population and Social Welfare. Table 4 shows the top-ten most frequently occurring collocates of the words 政府‘government’, 社會‘society’, 人口‘population’ and 計劃‘scheme’. As mentioned, eldercare in Hong Kong is often emphasized and discussed from the perspective of social administration and policy. Thus, the elderly population is mentioned with collocates such as 人口‘population’, 萬‘ten thousand’, 年‘year’, 佔‘occupy’, 歲‘years old’ and 推算‘estimate’. The news reports tend to indicate the estimated millions of people who are 60 years old and occupy a certain percentage of the overall population, suggesting that there are more and more elderly in society. The growth of the elderly population is often associated with the working population, as the increase in the elderly population means a decrease in the working population. The collocate 特區‘special region’ denotes that the Special Admiration Region (SAR) government plays the main role in tackling the issue. For instance,

人口持續老化對香港社會安老支援系統造成巨大壓力，特區政府多年來提倡「居家安老為本，院舍照顧 為後

援」的政策方針，意在通過推動「居家安老」，減輕社會和醫療體系的壓力。

The continuous aging of the population has placed enormous pressure on Hong Kong's social elderly care. The continuous aging of the population has placed enormous pressure on Hong Kong's social elderly care support system. For many years, the HKSAR Government has advocated the policy principle of 'home-based elderly care as the foundation, with institutional care as a backup,' aiming to alleviate the burden on society and the healthcare system by promoting home-based elderly care.

The news articles report the government's efforts to allocate budgets to implement measures that enhance the quality of life for the elderly, including several schemes indicated by the collocates 計劃'scheme' and 醫療券'health care voucher', such as 預設照顧計劃'Advance Care Planning Scheme', 長者醫療券'Elderly Health Care Voucher', 長者醫療券大灣區試點計劃'Greater Bay Area Voucher Pilot Scheme', and 福建計劃'Fujian Scheme'. These schemes demonstrate the government's emphasis on elderly care and advocate for having their retirement lives in mainland China. For example,

所有參與基層醫療健康計劃的醫生必須加入《基層醫療健康指南》，計劃包括疫苗資助計劃、慢性疾病共同治理先導計劃、長者醫療券計劃、大腸癌篩查計劃和普通科門診公私營協作計劃等。

All physicians participating in the Primary Healthcare Scheme must be enrolled in the Primary Healthcare Directory. The program encompasses multiple initiatives, including the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme, Chronic Disease Co-Care Pilot Scheme, Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme, Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme, and the General Outpatient Clinic Public-Private Partnership Programme.

Sub-Theme: The Elderly's Needs and Community Services. This sub-theme highlights the needs of the elderly and the community services provided for them. To obtain more details of the discourse, the top-ten collocates of 服務'services',

需要'needs' and 提供'provide' (see Table 5) are examined.

Collocate	Rank	Freq(Scaled)	Likelihood
provide 提供	1	8304	271.003
services 服務	1	16336	271.003
centre 中心	3	6400	187.446
take care of 照顧	4	7696	170.374
assistance 支援	5	7792	144.577
community 社區	6	7568	140.178
home 家居	7	2032	135.238
daytime 日間	8	800	131.848
medical 醫療	9	8064	121.252
elderly care 安老	10	5264	100.368

Table 5: Top-ten frequently occurring collocates of services, needs, and provide

The collocate 提供'provide' is frequently used to show the care, assistance and services offer to the elderly at the community level. Thus, this collocate is associated with other collocates that denote the various types of support for the elderly, including 服務'services', 支援'assistance', 醫療'medical', and 安老'elderly care'. The collocates 中心'centre', 社區'community', 家居'home', 日間'daytime' and 照顧'take care of' indicate the support providers or specific support schemes for the elderly. For instance, the support providers are often NGOs subsidised by the government, such as 基督教家庭服務中心'Christian Family Service Centre', 社區服務中心'community service centre' and 日間護理中心'day care centre'. For instance,

不少身體、家庭情況許可的長者也會選擇居家安老，並使用由政府提供的社區照顧服務，包括日間護理中心、家居照顧支援等。

A significant proportion of elderly individuals with adequate physical capacity and family support opt for aging in place, utilizing government-subsidized community care services such as daycare centres and home support services.

5 Discussion

The findings indicate that eldercare is generally framed as a socio-economic discourse, illustrated with survey-based statistics and supported by academic authorities from academia. As a result, one of the predominant themes of eldercare in the news media emphasizes the welfare policies implemented by the SAR government to address the

“socio-economic issue” of the increasing elderly population. In other words, eldercare has been interpreted as one of the government’s main responsibilities. This corresponds to Bai et al. (2020), who suggest that eldercare is redefined under the current socioeconomic climate of Hong Kong. The virtue of filial piety in traditional Chinese eldercare culture has faded out in the culture of eldercare in Hong Kong. Although the term *居家安老* ‘home-based eldercare’ has been mentioned, it is not literally related to the Confucian concept of filial piety, which emphasizes children’s care, obedience, and remembrance of parents. Home-based eldercare acts as a pragmatic advocate, encouraging reduced demand and consumption of public eldercare resources, which are already insufficient, as care for the elderly has largely been commodified through subcontracting to migrant workers and private care services institutions (Wong, 2022; Leung et al., 2019). Without a doubt, the transition to a “super-aged society” in Hong Kong (Choy, 2022) will probably lead to economic turmoil and shortages of healthcare and eldercare resources. This is not contradictory to the cultivation and advocacy of traditional core values in eldercare, such as respect and company. Nevertheless, the virtue of filial piety appears not to be illuminated in the news articles about eldercare.

Moreover, to rationalize the demand for eldercare services and resources, newspapers tend to construct a discourse of vulnerability, as indicated by the sub-theme of needs and community services. This portrayal seemingly positions the elderly as inferior in society and can result in social exclusion and reduced opportunities for older adults (Levy and Banaji, 2002; Loos and Ivan, 2018). Previous studies suggest that elderly individuals who adopt the devaluing views in social discourse are likely to suffer from lower self-esteem, mental illness, and reduced longevity (Swift et al., 2017). Moreover, these representations play a critical role in shaping both public discourse and policy decisions regarding the elderly. When older adults are predominantly portrayed as passive recipients of care or as burdensome to society, the resulting policy responses often take on a paternalistic character. Such policies tend to prioritize the provision of basic care and the containment of perceived risks, rather than fostering opportunities for empowerment, active participation, and social inclusion among older individuals. This framing can ultimately marginalize the elderly further, reinforcing

stereotypes and limiting their agency within society (van Dyk, 2016).

While plenty of research discloses the impacts of the surge in emigration since 2019 on the population composition in Hong Kong (Chan, 2025a; Lam and Fong, 2025; Tran, 2025), this study shows that major newspapers appear to overlook the correlation between emigration and the increase in the elderly population, who are referred to as stay-behind elders. The stay-behind elders have become a new group within Hong Kong’s elderly population, characterized as the newest additions. However, their difference from the non-stay-behind elderly appears to be overlooked. Prior research has highlighted the phenomenon that the elderly tends to opt to live alone or stay behind in Hong Kong despite their desire to age in a place with family members (Bai et al., 2020), as they are afraid of being a burden on their children’s families. Thus, solely using a neoliberal approach to eldercare is unlikely to address the root of the issue and what assistance the elderly really needs from the government. For instance, the elderly might desire for travel allowance to visit their children overseas. It is important to ensure that what the support givers provide is what the support receivers need (Yip, 2024b).

6 Conclusion

This study reveals that newspapers in Hong Kong generally represent eldercare as a socio-economic issue. The discourse frames the elderly as a population in needs of support and as a financial burden on the government. The vulnerability of this population is highlighted as a means to rationalize the provision of government assistance, including subsidies and care services. A significant portion of the news coverage focuses on reporting the needs of the elderly and the welfare policies that have been implemented. However, the voices of the elderly have been inaudible in the Hong Kong news media. Without listening to the elderly’s thoughts, it is difficult to provide support that caters to their real needs. Moreover, the news media play a key role in shaping public perception of eldercare and its core virtues. The virtues of filial piety deserve greater emphasis in news articles to raise citizens’ awareness of taking care of their parents’ physical and mental needs.

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A News tales of desolation and subsistence

Google 搜尋結果顯示，有關「香港 移民潮 長者」、「Hong Kong」、「migration trend」、「elderly」的新聞報道，反映了社會對這一群體的憂慮。

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- 香港01** - 調查 | 近半長者稱子女移民 「留港長者」依賴以老護老
香港人移民潮持續，循道衛理中心於2023年6月至12月期間，向205名本地65歲或以上的長者進行網上問卷
6 May 2024
Survey | Close to half of the interviewed elderly claim that their children's emigration have left them reliant on "caring for the old by the old"
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B A preliminary scoping search using Google News

Google 搜尋結果顯示香港長者與社會問題的多樣性：

- Search phrase: 人口老化 香港 ("aging population" & "Hong Kong")**
Theme: Aging population and socioeconomic realities
- Search phrase: 香港 長者 情況/現況 ("Hong Kong" & "elderly" & "situation")**
Theme: Elderly social welfare policies
- Search phrase: 香港 安老 ("Hong Kong" & "eldercare")**
Theme: Ethics, voice & agency
- Search phrase: 移民 長者 ("migration" & "elderly")**
Theme: BNO Exodus
- Search phrase: 香港 長者 晚年 ("Hong Kong" & "elderly" & "later years")**
Theme: Hong Kong Migration Exodus: After the emigration of their families, how do Hong Kong's stay-behind elderly navigate depression and rebuild their lives?
- Search phrase: 香港長者 "Hong Kong" "elderly"**
Theme: Hong Kong Migration Exodus: After the emigration of their families, how do Hong Kong's stay-behind elderly navigate depression and rebuild their lives?

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C Sample of excluded news articles