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**POWERLESS OR PERILOUS?
AGEING WOMEN AS AN EMERGING SOCIAL FORCE
IN HONG KONG**

LUK KIT LING

PHD

Lingnan University

2007

**POWERLESS OR PERILOUS?
AGEING WOMEN AS AN EMERGING SOCIAL FORCE
IN HONG KONG**

**by
LUK KIT LING**

**A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

Lingnan University

2007

ABSTRACT

Powerless or Perilous? Ageing Women as an Emerging Social Force in Hong Kong

by

LUK Kit Ling

Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies

Ageing women have so often been represented in government policy rhetoric, gerontology literatures and journalistic discourse as the genderless, powerless and passive objects of welfare and services; by and large, as a social problem that needs to be monitored and managed. Taking a cultural research approach, this thesis explores ageing women's actual practices in Hong Kong social movements and aims to re-represent ageing women as active social agents capable of generating multiple "tactical identities" enabling them to participate in and interact with an environment that poses concrete challenges to their participation.

In filling the gap between research on social movements and in social gerontology, both massively studied areas but ones whose mutual interactions are rare, this thesis reviews the social participations of three women at their late 60s and early 70s, who have been actively involved around issues of involuntary removal in public housing, and in health care and rent issues. The research explores how ageing women have used the notions of "Old Hong Kong" and "Old residents"—a rhetoric long bound up with their life histories in Hong Kong—to create a 'mask of ageing' in negotiation and interaction with the authorities, with neighbours, their community and, most importantly, their children. On the other hand, by acting as mothers, as grandmothers and as the "*po po*" (older woman in Cantonese) living next door, ageing women in effect compose collectives and form networks in their community to support their independent mode of living. The thesis argues that a new politics of ageing which addresses the everyday realities of ageing women's lives is essential if we are to offer an alternative interpretation of their ageing experiences.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

(LUK Kit Ling)
Date: 28 February 2007

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Chapter One.

Introduction: Ageing women's activism and people's power in a post-handover

Hong Kong

As the twenty-first century began, Hong Kong attracted international news coverage for its mass demonstration of July 1, 2003, when half a million people took to the streets in protest against a proposed “anti-subversion” amendment to the Basic Law. Captioning this event “The Long March,” *TIME Asia* magazine made it a cover story entitled “Standing up for Hong Kong” and used a photograph of a flag-waving female activist: the flag was of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).¹ In 2004, *TIME Asia* released the third of its annual series of specials on “Asia’s Heroes” and selected Jackie Hung, spokeswoman of the Civil Human Rights Front (the organisation that had organised the July 1 demonstration in 2003) as one of twenty members of a new generation taking the stage in Asia. Calling Hung “the chief organizer of the pro-democracy rally that brought as many as 500,000 people onto the streets on July 1,” *TIME Asia* described the protest as “an amazing display of people power for non confrontational Hong Kong.”²

This protest movement and the solidarity it triggered surprised the world; Hong Kong people are usually thought of as politically apathetic “economic

animals” (Cheung and Louie 1991, p. 2).³ In addition, such a large mass demonstration (the biggest since 1989, when Hong Kong people took to the streets to support students’ pro-democracy movement in Mainland China) is no doubt of particular interest to an international community sceptical about Hong Kong’s retention of autonomy and of economic prosperity under the “One Country, Two Systems” policy that took root with the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997.

In Hong Kong studies today, the discussions of human rights, democracy, and people’s power have gained popularity as they address the post-1997 challenges of China’s rule. From a cultural-studies perspective, Ma (2000) has argued that “a post-97 shift in the political economy of Hong Kong culture” is of particular interest to cultural researchers with regard to two questions: “what are the cultural articulations of the rise of state power and the restructuring of *laissez faire* capitalism in this once *depoliticalised* [my emphasis] colony? What will be the implications on issues of meaning, power and subjectivity?” (Ma 2000, p. 173).

In this study, I intend to address the above two questions by focusing on an aspect of postcolonial contestation that has been overlooked by the media and the general public in the handover phase. In Fred Chiu’s essay entitled “Combating the Double Processes of Decolonisation/Recolonisation in Hong Kong, or ‘Postcoloniality’ as a Double-pronged Politics”, he argued that to Hong Kong people,

the shift of sovereignty was chiefly a media event and a dispute between the Chinese state and the British authorities (2002, p. 34). Nevertheless, Chiu (2002) argued that the understudied local protests by Hong Kong people during the handover period succeeded in prompting the Chinese state to adopt a more open attitude towards issues concerning direct elections and human rights. My study echoes Chiu's call for researchers to deepen and to broaden their treatment of the populace: "the social actions with which Hong Kong people responded to the circumstances were much more lively, proactive and creative" than the social actions that stereotypes concerning Hong Kong people would lead one to predict (Chiu 2002, p. 35).

For my study here, I will focus on three case studies of ageing women's struggles as they concern housing, rent, and health issues. On a timeline, the case studies extend to activities unfolding from early 1996 to 2005. On the basis of the three case studies, I will argue that ageing women's everyday-life struggles can and do emerge as a social force grounded in the women's own local communities and that, in the context of Hong Kong's recent history, the women's solidarity constitutes a type of people power linking the colonial past to the post-colonial present. Ageing women's activism diverges from Chiu's model insofar as the activism, rather than directly engage with the Hong Kong polity, links the women's everyday activities to the formation of "senior-advocacy groups." These groups often work closely with

Non-government Organisations (NGOs). I will argue that although ageing women's activism has been ignored or under-represented generally in the media, in social-movement studies, and in gerontologist studies in Hong Kong, this activism is in fact a significant aspect of Hong Kong's emerging people-power movement, which it further helps to illuminate.

Hong Kong in transition: Global gaze and local movements

Hong Kong has long been represented internationally as the “Pearl of the Orient,”⁴ situated in the Pearl River Delta and well known for its “economic miracle” in the 1970s (Vogel 1991; Wade 1990). In the mid-1970s, Hong Kong caught the attention of the world as one of the “newly industrialised” countries⁵ achieving economic-performance success. Amongst the four “tigers” that consisted of Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong, it was Hong Kong that was identified as “an excellent current example, [although] it is by no means the most important example of limited government and free societies in practice” by Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman ([1979] 1980, p. 55).

In its sociological explanations of Hong Kong's economic success, Hong Kong-studies scholarship has attributed the success largely to the effectiveness of the colonial government in maintaining political stability in the colonial period

(Ambrose King, 1973). As one of the first-generation post-war sociologists, S.K.

Lau (1982, p. 1) described this relative political stability in Hong Kong as “the miracle of the twentieth century.” Stability rather than conflict was considered the “hallmark” of Hong Kong’s political development (Norman Miners, [1975] 1995).

In sum:

The unique case of Hong Kong has been explained by and large in terms of the ethos and the political culture of the indigenous population—the Chinese tradition of political apathy, the “don’t rock the boat” refugee mentality, and utilitarian[istic] familism. (Leung 1996, p. 139)

In the 1980s, the discussions of Hong Kong in the media concerned largely the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declarations on the 1997 reunification of Hong Kong to China. Emmons commented on this topic: “Since late 1982...the ‘1997’ issue has been headline news on virtually an everyday basis in Hong Kong press” (1984, p. 2). Many questions from scholars on Hong Kong studies focused on the possibilities for sustaining the “One Country, Two Systems” proposed by Deng Xiao-ping, the former leader of the People’s Republic of China. The proposal aimed at allowing Hong Kong to remain “unchanged”—that is, to maintain its capitalist society for 50 years. Could Hong Kong people enjoy their pre-1997 freedom or their pre-1997 living styles thereafter? Would Hong Kong retain its political stability and

its economic growth under Chinese sovereignty? The world's focus was similarly on whether the China government or the one-party rule would abide by these conditions and would, at least until 2047, thereby allow Hong Kong to remain capitalist while China remained "socialist."

In reviewing the dynamics of Hong Kong social movements, Lui and Chiu pointed out that "the observers of Hong Kong politics downplay the significance of social conflict and social movement in Hong Kong's political life" because past studies had declared that Hong Kong exhibited a "lack of serious disputes" (2000, p. 2). This misinterpretation of local Chinese people's political apathy has characterised most of Hong Kong's social-movement studies, which consequently have under-researched areas of people's power—especially the changing politics from below, before and after 1997 (Lui and Chiu 2000). I agree with Lui and Chiu's observation that the political context of Hong Kong discussions reflects a few overriding concerns: threats to the freedom of press, the future of pro-democracy political groups, and post-1997 changes in social and political environments. In the following sections, I will briefly review the prevalent social-movement paradigm and also the popular groups in social-movement studies in Hong Kong.

Social-movement studies in Hong Kong

Rather than focus on celebrating the stability of Hong Kong, a few observers have questioned both the “political stability” assumption and the general “political apathy” assumption concerning Hong Kong people. Cheung and Louie (1991, p.2) made the very first research attempts to further explore the social conflicts that surfaced in Hong Kong from 1975 to 1986, a period characterised by economic changes and by the expansion of the Hong Kong government’s role. Their study suggested that:

there is an increasing trend of social conflicts which have extended to issues relating to quality of life and civil and political rights. More social conflicts are resorted to for the articulation of sectoral and local interests, with the demands increasingly aiming at longer-term institutional changes and non-material rights. (Cheung and Louie, 1991, p. 53)

In contrast to a general belief that local Chinese are “politically apathetic” and that they handle their problems within the confines of the family, Cheung and Louie (1991) argued that there is rather a gradual change occurring in the attitudes and the beliefs of political participants. Based on the newspaper reports of 882 cases from 1975 to 1986, their study argues that people in Hong Kong are “becoming relatively more socially aware, rights-conscious and increasingly susceptible to organized

articulation of their wants and demands” (Cheung and Louie, 1991, p. 53).

Cheung and Louie’s (1991) study has been an important reference for subsequent social-movement analyses whose aim was treat social movements in terms of the nature and scope of related issues in a specific period.⁶ Cheung and Louie (1991) noted that workers and unionists, residents, and community activists constituted the three demographic groups whose involvement in social conflicts between 1975 and 1986 was greatest. The researchers noted, as well, that the main areas of social conflicts during the same period concerned housing, politics, transportation, environment, and education. In reviewing the social conflicts that surfaced between 1986 and 1995 in Hong Kong, Lau and Wan (1997) suggested that labour and employment, civil rights and liberties, and housing were the top three issues. Their analysis revealed that, during Hong Kong’s transition period, frequent participants in social movements were workers, residents, professionals, consumers, and students (Lau and Wan, 1997).

In reviewing social movements in the 1980s, Chiu and Lui (2000) summarised the most popular categories of social movements in Hong Kong including the pro-democracy movement, the trade union and labour movement, the housing movement, and the student movement. The final two chapters of their work deal with the women’s movement and the environmental movement, which fall under the

category “New Social Movements” (arising in the 1980s and the 1990s). Moreover, in 1997, the July 1 Link⁷ published a collection of articles concerning writers who emerged from the Christian-influenced activist community. This collection documented how Hong Kong people struggled for a say in the running of their communities and in addressing the problems that these people faced. This served a purpose in documenting some “not so popular” groups like Protestants, Catholics, *Tongzhi* [queer], and women in addition to the labour and student movements. The emerging trend of uncovering and reviewing social actors’ views has enriched the social movements in Hong Kong. However, amongst these newly added categories, none of the social-movement studies that I mentioned has included older women as an emerging category in social movements.

Benjamin Leung (1992), as one of Hong Kong’s sociologists, has widely written on social conflicts and social movements and commented that there is a “hiatus” in Hong Kong’s social-movement studies, which neglect the important roles played by “sentiments” and “aspirations” therein. He proposed a so-called cognitive approach (see Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) that would focus not solely on the “mechanics” but also on the “meaning” of social movements (Leung 1992). The mechanics perspective, he stated, characterises the influential resource-mobilization theory and the political-process model, which explain only “how social movements

come about” and “what social movements are about” whilst neglecting the possibilities that:

social movements [are] sparked...and sustained by sentiments not akin to the rebel’s anger or the strategist’s rational calculation. These sentiments may be rooted in the larger contexts—in a people’s collective history, and in events and developments that evoke memories of that history or that impact on the collective consciousness (Leung, 1992, p. 27).

In general, the structural approach exerts the greatest influence on the prevailing paradigm of social-movement studies in Hong Kong; and within this approach, the aforementioned resource-mobilization theory⁸ and the political-process theory⁹ are particularly prominent. However, some scholars have identified these structural approaches’ limitations relative to sociologists’ understanding of Hong Kong social movements. Amongst new sociologists is a general and growing discontent regarding the power of a single theory—chiefly, the resource-mobilization theory—to explain the changing landscape of Hong Kong’s social movements (for example, Ho 2000b; Butenhoff 1999). Responding to the assertion that resource-mobilization theory has limited application in social-movement studies, Butenhoff (1999) proposed an integrated approach to social-movement studies by including identity politics and a structural approach

with the prevailing resource-mobilization theory. Similarly, Ho (2000b) proposed an integrated approach to urban movements via a synthesis of resource-mobilization theory, the political-process model, and social-construction perspectives such that the synthesis would reveal the active role of actors in collective action.

Earlier, Lee (1982) stated that a new pattern of social conflict in the form of interest-group politics was emerging in the 1970s. According to Lee, citizenship, employee status, consumer status, and community–resident status were new bases of solidarity in the 1980s. I would argue that the current categorisation of social conflicts or of social movements has made older women invisible because many previous studies on Hong Kong’s social movements did not treat gender or age as significant attributes. Indeed, these studies never made the social actors the subject of the study. Rather, the researchers’ objective was to name the social movement or to identify the nature of its issues. For example, the housing movement denoted the targeted issue rather than those residents who participated therein. This focus away from the participants significantly limits social-movement studies’ understanding of “who” participated. In my study here on ageing women’s activism, I propose a renewed framework in which social-movement theories would account for gender and feminist theories account for gerontology. The result of this combination will be the very first research project that explores the intersection between ageing women

and social movements with a particular focus on the Hong Kong context.

The feminization of later life: a global phenomenon

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there were 600 million people living aged 60 and over in 2000; there will be 1.2 billion by 2025 and 2 billion by 2050 (The world is fast ageing: Have we noticed? 2006). As for sex ratio, the WHO pointed out that “women outlive men in virtually all societies; consequently in very old age, the ratio of women/ men is 2:1” (The world is fast ageing: Have we noticed? 2006). Statistics and data collected by the WHO suggest that the ratio of ageing women to ageing men in rapidly growing ageing populations will be even greater for “developing countries” (World Health Organization, 1998). Earlier reports by the WHO also highlighted the “feminisation of ageing” (women made up a majority of the ageing population), which corresponds to the current experience of many developed countries and also of many rapidly industrialising countries such as Thailand and South Korea (Bonita, 1998, p. 14).

Discussion of the impact of a fast-ageing population has focused on the vulnerability of ageing women, including their poor health, poverty and lack of social protection—factors that are prevalent in both developed and developing countries (World Health Organization 1998). Nevertheless, in addressing the

political activism of the massive retiree migration to Florida in the United States between 1975 and 1980, Rosenbaum and Button (1989) dramatically asked, “Is there a gray peril?”. As they explained the worst-case scenario assumed by the “gray peril” hypothesis:

It expresses a fear that increasing numbers combined with widespread political activism among older persons will result in resistance to local government taxing and spending for programs lacking immediate benefits for aging people and increasing demands for services benefitting principally the elderly population at the expense of younger persons (Rosenbaum and Button 1989, p. 301).

Their study revealed, however, that in Florida, advocacy of the ageing population’s gray power was “hardly active at all in most of the constituencies studied. At best, advocacy was highly fragmented, episodic, and variable in intensity and effectiveness” (Rosenbaum and Button 1989, p. 305). In Christine Day’s (1993) summary, three divergent views prevail amongst researchers themselves on the growing political impact of the ageing population as, respectively, 1) “perilous”, if described as a formidable political force of “greedy geezers” who fight for their benefits; 2) “powerless”, since the old-age organisations are relatively less effective in initiating new policies and issues and in solving the problem of the neediest among the aged; and 3) “progressive”, through intergenerational unity or in arguing

for more comprehensive and compassionate social welfare policy.

In most Hong Kong gerontology discussions, the “feminisation of later life” has focused on the poverty of ageing women and on their role as caregivers. Not until the late 1990s and the early 2000s did scholars begin to address the specific needs of ageing women at the policy level (for example, Cheung 2000; Law and Ho, 1999). Along with these discussions, ageing women stand out as activists in social events at which participants voice their concerns regarding seniors’ housing and seniors’ health issues. In the 2004 newspaper coverage, the mass-circulation daily *Ming Pao* (2004) devoted only a small paragraph to older women demanding to join the July 1 march despite their physical difficulties on what was a very hot day. However, *The Start of an End* (2004) a television documentary by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), included “older women” as a category along with young people and middle class professionals in a report on participation in the direct election of Legislative Council members. Another documentary TV programme produced later, *The Power of Footsteps* (2005) focused on ageing groups’ active participation in civil society and in people power in Hong Kong.

In understanding ageing women as a category of social-movement participants, it is necessary to review the ageing-related experiences of older women in Hong Kong and also globally. Over the past thirty years, academic sociologists,

psychologists, and health and social “care” professionals have established and organised a rigorous set of knowledges about ageing. Paralleling the increasing importance of ageing policy as a government priority has been the significant development of social gerontology in Hong Kong. This knowledge of ageing and the images and the stereotypes it generates together have acquired a powerful narrative authority to prescribe generalised and shared meanings of ageing as a “social problem,” and these operate in turn as part of *public* knowledge about old age, often reinforcing negative images of older persons as frail, helpless, and weak (for example, Gibb and Holroyd 1996). These images have become a significant reference point not only for the public but also for older persons’ self perceptions. This dual function underlies a paradox of empowerment whereby, on the one hand, “empowerment” is an expected outcome of social movements or of social-movement participation while, on the other hand, images of older persons’ powerlessness surface repeatedly in the media. It is important to explore how older women have worked with these situations and how they make sense of these experiences in the process itself.

The local communities where these ageing women resided and interacted with social institutions (such as the welfare system and the healthcare system) was a site of contestation for ageing women as they negotiated between their own histories

and modernisation—between their preferred ways of life and the economic development of the wider society. In regard to this negotiation, my study explores two critical issues: the under-representation or the mis-representation of ageing women’s activism relative to the women’s ageing-related environments; and the women’s experiences of, interpretations of, and transformations of these representations. Based on its three cases of ageing women’s struggles, this study argues that Hong Kong should acknowledge the serious and significant contributions that older women make, in particular, to Hong Kong’s emerging social-movement base and, in general, to Hong Kong’s unique history.

As with any argument, my two-fold argument, above, rests on several important questions. Did older women in Hong Kong who were asserting their rights and their agency face negative criticism for their assertions? If so, what factors contributed to the negative criticism, particularly regarding ageing women’s related social participation? How did any negative criticism relate with the dominating belief that ageing experiences are of a certain definite character and that “age-appropriate” behaviours should govern ageing women’s behaviours? And if negative criticism was present, how did ageing women respond to it—which is to ask, how did the criticism affect their daily life and their activism? My study here could strengthen both gerontology studies, which suffer from a “biomedical” gaze,¹⁰

and social-movement studies, which have rarely identified ageing women as core actors.

From sociology to cultural studies

In 1999, when I enrolled in a PhD program as a part-time student, my intention was to document the “small stories” of older women’s active participation in communities—stories that I had observed during my twelve years as an activist involved in local housing issues and rent issues in Hong Kong. In addition to these observations, my relationships with my grandmother and my mother shaped my desire to get close to older women and to understand their world—a world that is rarely represented in a complex or subtle way and that has often been unclear to me. Of course, getting to know older women and learning from their insights into the ageing process is also a way in which I can prepare for my own ageing in this society.¹¹ Initially, though, my hope when I first began working in 1998 as a professional researcher in ageing studies was to understand how gerontologists could better contribute to forming a mode of knowledge that would benefit, but not set boundaries on, older persons.

At the outset, I made an important choice to do my doctoral study in a department of cultural studies rather than in a sociology school or department,

preferring as I do to use qualitative methods. In Hong Kong at least, scholars have long held the belief that the study of both social movements and older women is a matter for sociological inquiry rather than for cultural analysis. In the first place, there is an entrenched sociological understanding of “movements” as reflecting and entailing social changes that need to be monitored and managed. In the second place, older women are perceived as the genderless, passive objects of welfare and services; in short, as a social problem.

While my early training was in sociology, my experiences as a junior researcher working with older persons pushed me to search for alternative approaches to ageing studies. I learnt how to conduct research while studying sociology and social work between 1978 and 1982 at the academic institution formerly known as Hong Kong Baptist College. It was there that I learned about the great importance attached to large-scale surveys, appropriate sampling methods, questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and statistical considerations in the study of Hong Kong society and the people within it. In my experience, social research was grounded in quantitative research methods backed up by bulky sets of statistical data—an approach with a long history, of course, in methodological discussion. Indeed, few qualitative studies have been conducted in Hong Kong, and very few have been situated in an innovative framework in which research can be

exploratory, small scale, and concerned primarily with raising critical *questions* of validity. Joel Best (2001, p. 13) has shown how “during the nineteenth century.... statistics—numeric statements about social life—became an authoritative way to describe social problems,” and how social research became less theoretical and more quantitative as objectivity and accuracy became its core values—not least, as a way of increasing the credibility of the policy proposals generated from the findings of a study. This is perhaps particularly the case in Hong Kong, where social-policy formation as a process arose within and has been shaped by a history of colonial management (Law 1998; Chiu, 2002).

In studying a social problem, social scientists would inquire into the extent of a problem’s effect on the society as a whole. In identifying the problem’s effect, the inquiry would calculate also the cost of solving the problem. Rigorous answers to these inquiries need to rest on evidence that usually took the form of measurements, statistics, and other numbers (Best 2001, p. 5). However, as Best (2001, pp. 9-10) points out, the same set of statistics can be “manipulated” by different actors, including activists and policy makers. Law and Lee (1999) stated that interest groups and Non-government Organisations (NGOs) have been keen to use surveys and statistics. Of increasing interest to me, then, was the way in which the effect of statistical dominance on social *research* was relayed by media coverage

and also by social activists and policy makers involved with the movement that I wanted to study. Best argues that the general public still needs statistics and “depends upon them to summarise and clarify the nature of our complex society. This is particularly true when we talk about social problems” (2001, p. 5). All parties use statistical statements to establish their arguments about a “problem” or a social-movement issue; seeking objectivity by trying to establish a comprehensive picture composed of different viewpoints and grounded in statistical information is still the dominant practice for all. Thus, the methodological issues raised here are not, in fact, solely methodological but indicative of a socially prevalent ideology—one that is pervasive in the everyday life politics facing older women in particular.

These experiences led me to seek a new, multi-disciplinary approach to understanding older women’s participation in housing-related activism. Cultural studies is of great interest to me as a field of inquiry oriented to the culture of everyday life, in which culture is understood as a *process* rather than a set of quantifiable phenomena (Morris, 1997). Stuart Hall asserts that “cultural studies has multiple discourses; it has a number of different histories.... It always was a set of unstable formations.... It had many trajectories...it was constructed by a number of different methodologies and theoretical positions, all of them in *contention* [my emphasis]” (1992a, p. 278). I see the possibilities of contention within the discipline

itself as capable of enabling me to uncover the complex, ever-changing, and malleable identities and interactions of older women that I experienced every day but never found represented in the media, the policy documents, the social movement pamphlets, or the gerontology literature that I dealt with and sometimes helped to produce. These possibilities also enable me to discover elements of contestation at work *within* various ways of representing older women and also within these women's processes of negotiating to play a role in forming their own representations.

Cultural researchers can articulate their experiences more freely than can sociology researchers insofar as the former use a wider variety of methods to construct and interpret their subjects than do the latter. Based on this premise, my point of departure is to establish a reflexive approach capable of addressing "the dynamic nature of cultural and social processes and of meaning production, and [of having] the potential to respond to the complex ways in which individuals, or agents, or subjects, inhabit their specific formations, identities, and subjectivities" (Ann Gray 2003, p. 18). Ultimately, I choose to be "a visible narrator and co-participant in the text," (Hertz 1997, p. viii) working with my own ambivalence as a researcher trained to be objective in the pursuit of accuracy and comprehensiveness, yet seeking as a feminist researcher in cultural studies to address questions of authority

and power, including those raised by research process itself.

Qualitative research involves the collection and the use of a variety of empirical materials—case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life stories, interviews, artefacts, cultural texts and productions, observation, historical texts, inter-actional texts, and visual texts—that describes routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. In this study, I employed a mix of methods: in-depth interviews, participant observations, and available video documentary that the women in question and their advocacy groups had compiled. Also, I compiled related news reports on the campaigns in which the ageing women were involved.

The importance of variety in research methods is not lost on researchers. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 18) argue that “we are in a moment of discovery and rediscovery, as new ways of looking, interpreting, arguing, and writing are debated and discussed.” Gray (2003, p. 21-22) summarised a reflexive approach as one that questions the theoretical and other assumptions of a project and that encourages the researcher to actively interrogate research categories. The researcher is expected to enter into a range of dialogues with the subject of the research, with different theoretical perspectives and frameworks, and with colleagues when writing or presenting the work. Perhaps the most important outcome of these dialogues

concerns the researcher's sense of self: "Researchers are acknowledged as active participants in the research process, [and] it is essential to understand the researcher's location of self" (Hertz 1997, p. viii). My life experiences as a social activist working with older women have shaped the research questions that I raise here insofar as these questions reflect challenges that, since the 1980s, have confronted the professionalism of activist-grounded social workers. It is important to keep in mind that the 1980s was a period of social unrest in Hong Kong, especially in matters of housing. Since then, of course, the "helping" professions everywhere have been hit by economic cutbacks, service re-structuring, and an increasingly problematic public image. In Hong Kong in particular, however, doubt was cast on the professionalism of social workers. For example, wide swaths of Hong Kong society began to conclude that community workers who were involved with "deprived" groups, namely families or single elderly people living in poverty on derelict housing estates, were instigating the clients' action issues (see, for example, Cheung, 1997).

As a helping professional myself, I challenged the traditional practices of community organizing and, in turn, experienced accusations that I was a radical and that I had consequently failed to follow social-work principles of objectivity and detachment (Luk, 1994a). When I began my PhD, I intended to ignore this sensitive

area (I find it both boring to keep harping about “the role of the social worker” and too subjective to review my own personal experiences); instead, I would focus on media representations of older women in the hope of helping the women’s own voices be heard. However, I very quickly came to see that social movements themselves have been immensely influenced by the professionalism debates that began in the 1980s and that continue today. Hertz rightly argues that “self-knowledge as a central source of data” and personal experiences have gained popularity, becoming “another acceptable scholarly basis of understanding social life and human behaviour”: and that “the self becomes both the subject of the study and the narrator” (1997, p. xii-xiii). Thus, I retain my voice in my study in order to stress the important role that person-to-person relationships play in community work. If we acknowledge this importance, then we can more rigorously discuss the possibility that society should transform community work from a worker-client model into a model that no longer neglects or marginalises the role of care therein. I found that care—whether in the form of friendship or of family-like relationships—operated in and benefited the organisations where I worked and that I studied.

Subjectivity matters, because while I am interested in how older women make sense of their social experiences in Hong Kong, I am aware that I never asked these questions when I was a community worker; rather, I focused on the social

issue at hand. Nor was I particularly conscious of seeing older women as inhabiting a category different from other social-work categories such as “residents of the community” or “one-person and two-person households”. Policy-makers’ failure to address older women as a specific group might contribute to the genderless, ageless discourse that concerns older persons and that prevails in academic articles, policy documents, and social-movement discussions in Hong Kong. My recognition of this failure has led me to ask not only how Hong Kong society represents Hong Kong’s older women both generally and in social movements, but also what distinct situations older women, as such, face in their social participation.

Narrating Ageing Women’s Activism

In this study, I focus on older women who have been active in social movements that concern issues significantly affecting the women’s everyday lives. The three issues that attract most of my attention are forced removal within the public-housing system, healthcare costs, and rent issues. Moreover, the literature has established that these three issues are core concerns for older persons (Phillips 1988, 1992, 2000). With regard to the women’s activism, I identify and explore different kinds of related social organisations and social movements: some are self-organised groups, whereas others are affiliated with formal social-welfare organisations or

with self-help organisations. As far as possible, I interviewed each organisation's core member, that is, the older woman who (1) best knew the issues from the perspective of an organiser or (2) had attracted widespread media coverage or (3) both 1 and 2. I also interviewed the women in their groups. Interviews and focus groups are common in gerontology studies.

All the women are from a similar background in terms of (1) class position assessed in relation to their living environment (all lived on public-housing estates), (2) marital status (all were or had been married), (3) economic status (all were retired, engaged in no formal work, and received an old-age allowance), and (4) health status (all suffered from chronic illness). However, the women differed from one another in terms of their family relationships; two were widowed and living alone, whereas one lived with either a spouse or children. The women's educational backgrounds differed from one another (one woman could only read, one could write and read, and one could neither read nor write Chinese). Most important, all had emigrated from mainland China to Hong Kong in the 1950s.

The women's friendliness, openness, and willingness to share their thoughts and life experiences with me transformed the traditional process of cold, detached interviews into a deep sharing of knowledge and beliefs. I asked each woman to talk not only about her involvement in a specific issue but also about her family and life

history and daily-life activities. Our discussions touched on topics ranging from how they perceive their images in various media; their experiences as women and as older women; and their relationships with the government, with family, and with the local community including the organisations and the social workers with which the women pursued their activist agendas. Senior-advocacy groups were the core platforms that the women organised with other ageing women in the community. From these many dimensions of my study, one point reasserted itself again and again: older women are not reified, isolated cases, but subjectively complex agents participating in and interacting with an environment. Below, I briefly introduce the three ageing women, who were in their late sixties to their late seventies.

Madam Choi¹² and her senior-advocacy group on a public-housing estate successfully achieved their objective: they convinced the Housing Authority to relocate them from their old blocks to the new blocks built on the playground next to them in 2002. Madam Choi no doubt was the core of her senior-advocacy group's social petition. I kept in contact with Choi and her associates from June 2003 till June 2004, visiting them, touring their estates, and spending afternoons with Madam Choi in a local café or the eye clinic. Also, Madam Choi participated in an activity that my academic Department had organised for a group of visiting Australian scholars. All the women were active, as these examples illustrate; however, the

senior-advocacy group explained to me how it is that ageing women make use of pre-existing, pre-constructed perceptions of their vulnerability and how it is that the women turn this vulnerability into a powerful weapon in support of their claims. As I show in Chapter Four, Madam Choi's self-caring community turned into what I call a self-care movement. This transformation was a response to the Housing Authority's 1996 redevelopment plan to relocate this group of older women out of the estate on which they had resided for half of a lifetime. To Madam Choi, this forced removal threatened to break up her supportive network that the women in the local community had formed. Therefore, they formed a senior-advocacy group to launch their protests against the Housing Authority's arrangement.

Madam Wan¹³ (Wan) and her senior-advocacy group actively voiced their opinions regarding the rent of public-housing estates, urging the Housing Authority to reimburse the estates' residents for excessive charges that the estates had charged residents after 2000. Wan joined in the event and took up the role as one of the two representatives of the senior-advocacy group who sued the Housing Authority for over-charging the tenants. Wan's three-year rent struggle (from 2002 to 2005) successfully attracted wide media coverage. Her activism, however, attracted the disapproval of her youngest daughter, particularly because news and magazine stories about the mother also published details concerning the daughter's private life.

Madam Wan chose to continue her activism despite her daughter's objections. In the presence of such hardships, Madam Wan found strength in a support network to which her senior-advocacy group informally belonged and which also included social workers and volunteers, all of whom were essential for her continuation of her struggle. And family remained important for Madam Wan, who—as a mother and a grandmother—wanted to extend her care-giving to her children in her later life by taking care of her son's rent and by offering other forms of assistance to her children when necessary.

Last, the subject of Chapter Six centres on Ho (as she wishes to be called), who actively participated in the Campaign against Increased Healthcare Charges from November 2002 to April 2003. Her advocacy covered a wide range of issues that concern older persons: healthcare costs, estate-based relocation arrangements, and the formation of new, independent post-relocation communities. Also, she acted as a volunteer for a social-work organisation, visiting single older persons and helping out in all sorts of local activities. Her participation as the representative of her estate in the Legislative Council occurred at the behest of the social worker with whom she most closely worked. However, her participation incurred fierce criticism from segments of the local community that objected to her speaking on behalf of the estate. These difficulties upset and depressed her, but with her family's support, she

was able to continue both her “active ageing” and her strong attachment to her local social-work organisations. Amongst the three cases, Madam Ho’s case presents the strongest depiction of an ageing woman’s affiliation and attachment to a social-service organization. She also participated in a joint alliance of ten older-persons groups that had formed with the assistance of social-welfare-services organisations. Her case reveals how social-service organisations support ageing women’s participation in social movements. All three cases present ageing women who, in their later life, struggled to preserve their economically, socially, and physically independent living in a comfortable and enabling environment.

Reflections on how I conducted my study

In this study, I drew on a broad range of qualitative methods, including participant observations and in-depth interviews, to explore women’s understanding of the social dimension to their participations. This social dimension was rooted chiefly in relationships between and among ageing women. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) influenced my study by articulating the important role that qualitative methodology plays in cultural studies—a methodology that makes sense of “a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). I

would also emphasize my study's use of ageing women's natural settings as sites from which I launched various interviews and other investigations: these sites included the women's home, social-service organisations, a petition venue, restaurants and a café, and other activities.

According to mainstream rules, an interview used in social work and social science work is supposed to happen in a normal setting: a closed-door room that is likely in an office and that is a common setting for small group discussions or meetings. Thus, the typical interview that an organisation arranges will be formal. I can still recall the first interview that I conducted as a researcher: it was with an older man and took place in a closed-door room that featured plain white walls and relatively immovable tables and chairs. It was highly formal, cold, and distant. I remember that I preferred to talk with him at the centre where he went to exercise, have meals, and engage in other leisure activities. However, the noise there and the gaze from other elderly there made it even more awkward to talk of anything, and others could overhear our conversation.

My first contact with one of my case-study participants, Choi, and with two other older women took place on a single occasion in the councillor's office on the Ta Hoi Tun (THT) Estate¹⁴, a location that the office staff had arranged for me. The room was big and crowded with stuff, very office-like with a big table for formal

meetings. I was the last one to arrive, and Madam Choi and the other older women left me to take the seats of the chair persons. The set-up made me feel uncomfortable, as it gave me the impression that, rather than talking with them, I was holding a meeting with the three women. I had the same reaction to my first interview with another case-study participant, Madam Ho. A social worker arranged for us to meet in one of the estate's activity rooms. These experiences further confirmed my decision that I had to go for a more natural (in comparative terms) setting: "more natural" in this context means a place that better evokes the everyday life experiences of older women. Hence, I paid visits to the three case-study participants' respective local communities and asked the women to show me important places (such as markets, bus stops, and parks). I interviewed all of them not only in centres but in their homes, as well. Thus it is that I had a particularly memorable conversation with Wan as we sat on the edge of her bed in her tiny bedroom, a place where she spent a good deal of her everyday life. I also tried to involve myself in the three case-study participants' activities: I accompanied Madam Choi to an eye clinic when she had to attend an eye exam, and I had afternoon tea with Madam Choi and two older women at a local café. I also joined Madam Wan's lunch with her neighbours in the local restaurant near their estate.

As a qualitative cultural researcher, I attempted to make sense of, or to

interpret, social-movement practices in terms of the meanings that ageing women themselves assigned to these practices. As an experienced community worker, I found myself able to build trustful relationships quickly with the ageing women whom I engaged in the study. This trust enabled me to strive for deeper sharing between me and each of the ageing women and for a profound grasp of their personal ageing-related experiences. Ann Oakley (1981) argued that researchers who recognize the commonalities between themselves and their subjects would strengthen the research because, just as mutual acknowledgement of commonalities helped women in Oakley's research open up to her, the same type of acknowledgement in various research projects from various fields of inquiry would have similar results. I agree with Ann Oakley on this point, for the richness of material that I uncovered was directly related to the formulation of a non-rigid, non-distant relationship between interviewer and interviewees. In addition to the benefit of greater openness, my informal relationship with workers in social-service organisations bestowed on me the benefit of rather easy access to materials and relevant documentaries.

However, my past history in an allegedly radical NGO¹⁵ posed difficulties for me as I sought to establish contact with some formal organisations. They labelled my previous participation in social movements as “radical” and then engaged with

me accordingly. Mr. Fu, one of the social workers whom I contacted, recommended that I not contact the social worker for interviews with the senior-advocacy group as Mr. Fu anticipated that my meeting with the group would get the responsible social worker into trouble with his supervisor or management of the organisation he is working with. As for older women, they responded to my question of whether they found me a stranger to their community by saying that they perceived me as someone who was willing to help them, to do something good for them. By all accounts, older women were comfortable with me and, indeed, enjoyed the opportunity to share their thoughts with me. These women took me in as one of their supporters, much as the women welcomed the support of their families, neighbours, centre workers, news reporters, and other related parties.

As I am both wary of the “aloof observer” role and keen to be “objectively” accurate, I was ambivalent as to whether or not I should participate in the women’s organising and petition activities. One petitioning organisation invited me to participate in one of their oral-history projects on ageing women and also to share my views on ageing-related policy. I finally decided to participate in some work that concerned my study, and I strove to balance this workload in relation to my research goals. I hope that, in sum, my efforts as a researcher who undertakes qualitative research constitute an encompassing and rigorous response to “the crisis of

representations” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 16).¹⁶ I believe that it is healthy for researchers to challenge the authority of the author over the subjects whom the author studies, and the importance of this challenge is especially noteworthy in ethnography studies, where the traditional ethnographer, as an “outsider,” comes and leaves: comes to a community to study a particular group there, and then leaves the community upon completion of the fieldwork.

I drew much of my inspiration for the current study from qualitative researchers who, by replacing the “aloof observer” with the “activist-oriented” researcher, gained tremendous insights into their respective research topics (Fine et al. 2000, p. 17). Speaking from a perspective of a feminist gerontologist, Ray in her projects on life-story writing groups states that she has two primary concerns: “improving the image of older women and extending the possibilities for womanhood in old age” (2000a, p. 6). She also argues that feminist gerontologists “must learn how their personal and professional relationships with older adults affect their understanding of aging” (Ray 2000a, p. 6).

In understanding their relationship with me, the older women whom I studied showed little interest in my study, but they all welcomed my interviews and my participation in their daily activities. They considered me to be not so much a researcher as “someone who was interested in their stories and their life” and as

“someone who liked to listen” or even as “a friend.” The ageing women took me—an academic—to be simply another source of support from the public.

In my research process, my review of feminist literature on methodology (Wolf 1996; Lal 1996; Gullette 2004) benefited my growing awareness of my relationship with the older women and with workers in the organisations where I conducted most of my field observations. I am aware that a text is a site of struggles where the reproduction of meaning mirrors and often furthers the conflicts of interest between various camps. In this research as in any other context, discourse involves power relations and is thus a social act that may promote or oppose the contextually dominant ideology, and in complex, unintended or sometimes conflicting ways.

In my participant observations, I attended some regular meetings of each of the three case-study participants, I joined in activities there, and I seized opportunities to walk or accompany the women home from the meetings. As a part-time student, I could engage in these observations only on Saturdays or Sundays or on holidays. Therefore, I did not attend all regular meetings, but kept track of the ageing women’s struggles. I also maintain contact with the social workers who updated me on information about meetings and activities. By quietly following the women’s participation patterns, I hoped to minimise disturbances that

I might otherwise have caused if I had peppered the women with related questions. I observed the women's interactions with other people, in particular focusing on the women's interactions with other ageing people who, in one way or another, were involved in the activism. However, I was still a detached researcher, somehow free to choose when to come and go even though I had forged strong connections with the older women involved.

My handling of interview settings limited my tape recording of the interviews. Sometimes it was possible for interviews to be tape-recorded and then transcribed into Chinese script for analysis. Video documentaries produced for TV and the corresponding transcripts also proved useful for my analysis of other people's interviews with the ageing women in question. Frequently, however, I relied on field notes, which I normally wrote up immediately after the interviews. I often wrote notes while I was conducting field observations, and these notes served a secondary purpose by stimulating my self-reflection. I also jotted down my reflections whenever I come across something interesting about older women and how they were represented in the media, including in newspapers, radio programmes, TV programmes, and films. In this regard, my friends and colleagues helped me out by alerting me to material for field observations, which I duly recorded. By incorporating an encompassing interview approach and an encompassing

field-observation approach into my study, and by recording these interviews and these field observations in thoughtful ways, I tried to understand ageing from many perspectives, not simply from common portrayals of ageing women that appear in films, advertisements, and newscasts. I would say that my overall approach in this regard was to integrate the content of my research into my daily activities.

In an aside, I should note that not all media representations of ageing women are simplistic or common. I remember how the film *The Road Home*,¹⁷ which I went to see for entertainment, made me realize the complex conflicting representations that attach themselves to ageing women. The film depicted an old woman as, on the one hand, weak and helpless when her husband died and, on the other hand, as strong and persistent in her insistence that her husband's body be carried back home in memory of how they had fallen in love with each other. This and other relatively mainstream media representations can open our eyes to the richly complex contestations that underlie the lives of ageing women.

The older women whom I studied were not familiar with the debate amongst social workers with regard to the influence that media could have on their activism (for example, Luk 1994b). During the research process, older women talked at length about their daily life, their relationships with their family, and their life history, but only infrequently responded to my questions about how they related to

the media. In this study, I discuss at length their understanding of whether the media was helping them disseminate their stories to the public. I will note here that the women's views on media differed from the views that I expected them to have. My findings in this regard are inconsistent with the findings that characterise analyses of "rationale" in the social sciences, including in social-movement studies. I tried to apply a "rational analysis" to the ageing women's views on media, but again, my findings stand in contrast to mainstream conceptions of positive images and negative images as these images concern older women. For example, as I showed my case-study participants the various news clippings and magazine photos that dealt with the participants' activism, the women answered quickly that they either had not examined the media coverage or were unconcerned with it.

I have found that representations of femininity in popular culture address issues of immediate concern to women as they negotiate their subjectivities in their everyday lives. Some media fall in the category "women's genres," which includes talk shows, soap operas, and women's magazines and which articulates these issues. However, there is a significant difference between the depictions of older women in women's genres and the depiction of older women in hard news. This dynamic contrast can bolster discussions on related issues. To this end, I made ample use of media texts as I analysed media's representations of older women; indeed, my study

would have suffered greatly had I not referred to this subject, which is critical to social-work training and to social movements.

When I use the term ‘media’, I include not only mainstream media documentaries and newscasts but also digital documentaries and photos produced by organisers and activists. Much social-work literature in Hong Kong argues that media is a crucial channel through which the voiceless can make their voices heard. Many social-work professionals believe in the motto “Win media support,” which would garner them public support, and social workers have modified their relations with the media accordingly. At the same time, the general public relies on the news to understand current events, including social-movement events. After all, very few people directly ask newsmakers for a summary of their news-worthy activities. Thus, it is on the basis of news outlets that the general public judges the actions of newsmakers. I mention this widespread and varied reliance on news media to underscore my perhaps surprising finding that the older women whom I studied seldom kept any hard-news record of the women’s news-making activities except for photos that served as memory recalls. Social workers and NGOs were more concerned than the women about records and documentaries.

Outline of the Chapters

In Chapter Two, “Empowering the Powerless? Invisible Women in Social Movements,” I will review the prevailing social-movement theories so as to explore three factors that make ageing women’s activism invisible: narrow definitions of ‘social movement’; a shifting social-movement paradigm that still neglects cultural politics; and a women’s movement that privileges younger women’s concerns over older women’s concerns. Drawing on the development of cultural research and on age narratives in feminist gerontology, I will argue for a new frame through which we can perceive and understand ageing women’s practices.

In Chapter Three, “The ‘Deprived’ Group: Ageing Women and Their Social Environment,” I will discuss how the social environment in which this study’s ageing women were ageing both shaped and governed the ageing women’s experiences. Regarding social environment, I pay particular attention to the policy domain, to gerontology formations (their disciplines and their social practices), and to media that were significant to the ageing women in their later life.

In Chapter Four, “Turning Vulnerability into Power,” I will focus on Madam Choi’s housing struggle to remain on the THT Estate, where she and a group of ageing women had resided for half of their lives. I will stress the tactical identities of “Old Hong Kong” and “Old THT residents” that these women developed in

defending their activism. Madam Choi and her senior advocacy group used the mantle of frailty as a powerful weapon that would help them negotiate with the Housing Authority, which controlled where they would reside in their later life.

In Chapter Five, “Caring as Source of Power: From Grandmother to Housing Heroine,” I will focus on Madam Wan’s legal protest against the Housing Authority’s excessive rent charges and particularly on media representations of her, insofar as media widely covered her story after 2002. I will argue that Madam Wan’s desire to extend her caregiver role to her family motivated her to join the rent protest. In her case, as we will see, her family and her neighbours expressed their strong disapproval of her participation therein. Nevertheless, Madam Wan successfully re-represented herself as “not defeated,” and also she was able to form a care-giving network that, consisting of social workers, volunteers, and councillors, supported her protest.

In Chapter Six, “Composing Collectives, Organising a Network,” I will first review Madam Ho’s 2002 participation in the joint-action group’s platform to protest the Campaign against Increased Healthcare Charges. I will pay specific attention to the fluidity of these loosely formed collectives amongst ageing women of different communities. Then, I will show how her housing struggle exemplifies how ageing women’s activism has benefited—and will benefit—whole communities.

This spill-over effect, as it were, is a distinctive feature of the emerging social force of ageing women in Hong Kong.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, my conclusion, I will summarise both the activist practices of ageing women and the factors that support the women's solidarity. Then, I will propose a new, feminism-inflected approach to the politics of ageing—one that accounts for the meanings that ageing women assign to their ageing experiences. As I understand it, women's activism constitutes resistance to the social labels that identify ageing women as a burden to society, and on this premise, I will argue that gerontologist researchers and cultural researchers should work together to “empower” not individuals or groups thereby defined as fundamentally powerless, but rather a new and more productive mode of cultural *research* on ageing capable of recognising the energies and powers of older women and thus of understanding their achievements .

NOTES

¹ *TIME Asia*, vol. 162, no. 1, July 14, 2003.

² *TIME Asia*, vol. 164, no. 15, October 11, 2004; [Online] Available at http://www.time.com/time/asia/2004/heroes/hjackie_hung.html, retrieved on January 16, 2005.

³ For a detailed discussion, see Lau (1982) and Lau and Kuan (1988). For a critique of this orthodoxy, see Fred Chiu (2002); DeGolyer and Scott (2003).

⁴ “Pearl of the Orient” is a common term that names Hong Kong. For example, this

term is the name of a Cantonese pop song that was released in 1981 and that was sung by a popular singer in the eighties, Jenny Tseng. The song describes the life of Hong Kong people during that period.

⁵ Hong Kong and three other territories—Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore—were experiencing economic growth while the United States and other established economies were experiencing economic downturns during the 1970s and the 1980s. The four territories were identified as newly industrialised countries (NICs) in economic studies. The other title—“four little dragons”—symbolizes their strong economic performance (Vogel, 1991).

⁶ Chui and Chan (1994) reviewed social conflicts that had taken place from 1967 to 1974, the period before that covered by Cheung and Louie. By the end of the 1990s, Chui and Lai (1999) reviewed the social protests that had taken place from 1980 to 1991; whilst Lau and Wan (1997) reviewed the social conflicts that had taken place from 1987 to 1995, a period that followed Cheung and Louie’s period.

⁷ The July 1 Link was formed in 1995 by several Catholic and Protestant groups in Hong Kong. The group organised the first prayer service at which participants would pray for Hong Kong’s future. The group also organised newsletters, workshops, and forums whose function was to rebuild the people’s confidence, to advocate democracy, to uphold the principles enshrined in the Joint Declaration, and to pressure both the British government and the Chinese government to fulfill their commitment to the people of Hong Kong. In search of support, the group also aims to establish links with the intentional organisations (July 1 Link, 1997).

⁸ On the basis of Leung’s study (1990a) on collective violence in Hong Kong from 1950 to 1985, Leung found that the resource-mobilisation perspective seemed a particularly useful way to show that “collective actions undertaken for the control and defence of resources were the major underlying factors for the genesis of collective violence” (1990a, p. 161). Ho (2000b) has used the resource-mobilization theory and also the political-process theory and the social construction of protests as his core theoretical analysis framework. Emmons suggested that the collective behaviour in 1997 Hong Kong appears to fall into two main categories: the first category hinges on “rumours and panic” (by non-elites) which fits the standard collective-behaviour theory; the second category hinges on “organised political social-movement activity” (by wealthy investors and high-status professions), which better fits resource-mobilisation theory (1984, p.4).

⁹ For detailed discussion, see Lui and Chiu (2000, pp. 9-10).

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion on the biomedical gaze, see Powell, Jason L. (2006).

¹¹ Two insightful texts on this subject are by Betty Friedan (1993); and Kathleen Woodward (1991).

¹² Madam Choi chooses not to use her own real name. The estate is also not a real name. It is an old estate built in the 1960s and, in 1999, was under redevelopment arrangements set out by the Housing Authority.

¹³ Madam Wan told me that she did not care whether I used her real name in my text. However, she asked me not to mention her children's name, since she worried that this revelation would upset her younger daughter, who frowned on Madam Wan's activism. I chose to use the short name of Wan to make her anonymous.

¹⁴ Ta Hoi Tun (THT) Estate is public rental housing that was built in early 1960s. The name is a made-up one for the purpose of preserving anonymity.

¹⁵ Tsuen Wan Ecumenical Social Services Centre (TWESSC) is an NGO that was established in 1972 with funding from the World Council of Churches. Starting in 1976, the centre took up new projects (1) that received funding from the Social Welfare Department, (2) that took place in public-housing estates, (3) that functioned according to redevelopment plans, (4) that catered to low-income families, and (5) that concerned labour rights (TWESSC, 1994). The organisation was closed in 1997 owing to disputes between the organisation's management committee and the organisation's staff regarding the professional guidelines that governed the staff members' practices. Many people believed that the centre—rather than maintain its professional distance from clients—was taking on a radical approach, which translated into a fight for social justice.

¹⁶ Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 16) identified the crisis of representations that ethnographers faced in the mid-1980s, when relatively novel theories competed for attention in ethnography. Interpretive theories, as opposed to linear theories, were in vogue, as writers continued to challenge older models of truth and meaning.

¹⁷ *The Road Home* (1999) was directed by Zhang Yimou in 1999, a Guangxi Film Studios and Beijing New Picture Distribution Company Production.

Chapter Two.

Empowering the powerless? Invisible women in social movements.

“Empower people, individually and collectively, to utilise their own problem-solving and coping capabilities more effectively” comes as the first on the list of twelve tenets for the social work profession (Brenda DuBois and Karla Krogsrud Miley [1992] 2005, p. 445). In arguing that social work is an empowering profession, DuBois and Miley ([1992] 2005, p. 446) assert that “empowerment is achieved to the extent that people gain mastery over their lives and to the extent that institutional structures respond humanely and equitably to human needs” and that “the process of social work is empowering, and the product of professional activities is empowerment” (DuBois and Miley [1992] 2005, p. 445).

Grounded in the paradigm of development studies, the notion of empowerment as the objective of community participation, including people’s movements, has gained “widespread, albeit divergent, popularity” in community development projects operating in developing countries (Marjorie Mayo and Gray Craig 1995, p. 2). In the global context of increasing poverty, polarization, and social exclusion, many local, national, and international NGOs such as the World Bank and the United Nations (see S. Paul 1987; UNDP, 1993) have come to agree

on the necessity of community participation, so that “empowering the poor has become an almost universal slogan” (Thomas 1992, p. 132). That is, participation is the key to the poor’s struggles for equity, human rights, and democracy (Clark 1991 cited in Mayo and Craig 1995, p. 2). Despite the fact that there may be diversified uses of “empowerment” by the World Bank and by local community development projects, we should acknowledge that empowerment is “a desired process by which individuals are to take direct control over their lives” and that, once empowered, poor people will then have an opportunity to be agents of change (Thomas, 1992, p. 132). However, the polarisations that distance the powerful from the powerless and the uses of empowerment within these polarisations tend to undermine any power to which the powerless lay claim (Rahnema 1993, p. 123).

Taking on a feminist viewpoint, Lena Dominelli (1990, p. 3) argues that women’s participation in the community should be central to feminist analysis because the community is “where women defended the rights of their families and themselves to enjoy decent standards of living, acquire facilities enhancing their lives, and be treated with dignity and respect.” In focusing on women’s distinct experiences of empowerment and undertaking public action in Peru, Hazel Johnson (1992, p. 156) argues that:

women's daily struggles and strategies for survival will lead them to organise themselves in ways that help change or improve some basic conditions of existence. Organising in this way is an empowering process, even if the organisations created do not change formal power structures.

Johnston emphasises movements' outcomes as tangible responses to females' local needs such as access to basic utility services rather than to females' overarching needs such as greater equality in formal power structures. Johnston further points out that women's form of solidarity is distinctive in the formation of collective identity when this identity derives from common identities. In forging a collective identity, women recognise their similar circumstances regarding, for example, class identity, sexual division of labour or of the family, ethnic ties, cultural background, and age (Johnson 1992, p. 156).

Feminist scholarship on gender-related social movements has enriched our understanding of women's participation in, and women's empowering contribution to, social movements by shifting the focus of movement inquiries to the various identities that mobilise women. These identities include family status, gendered discourses in movements (see Kuumba 2001; Taylor and Whittier 1999), and emotions and passions in movements (Cheryl Hercus 1999; Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta 2001). This scholarship has helped us to recognise

that social movements constitute a process that, in general terms, is identity oriented (or that concentrates not on material needs as much as on group rights such as the rights of blacks or of gays and lesbians). In particular terms, this identity-oriented process underlies women's activism. Nevertheless, in this study, I argue that it is insufficient to understand women's struggles on the basis only of gender because ageing women are bounded not only by their gender but by their age-related experiences, as well. Here, we confront what Susan Sontag (1972, p. 29) called the "double standard of aging".

My analysis here of age-related women's activism suggests that age-related women's movements are "simultaneously spontaneous and strategic, expressive (of emotion and need) and instrumental (seeking some concrete ends), unruly and organized, political and cultural," according to Marcy Darnovsky, Barbara Epstein, and Richard Flacks, who describe contemporary movements that take on "established cultural categories and social identities" (1995, p. vii).

To account for this seemingly contradictory mix of spontaneity and strategy in the movement practices of ageing women (that is, in the women's *modus operandi*),¹ I argue that a reconstructed framework wherein social movements and their related activities exemplify "everyday-life politics" interwoven with the age-related experiences of the involved social actors will help us both to understand

these social actors precisely *as* ageing women and to clarify the wider meaning of ageing in contemporary society. This reconstructed framework can also open up a renewed dialogue between social movement studies and movement actors, both of whom create meaning in contemporary social movements.²

To account for ageing women's daily struggles and daily strategies for survival in contemporary society, I aim in this study to explore both the practices of ageing women in social movements and the evolving meaning of ageing in local and global contemporary contexts. According to Brett Neilson (2006, p. 154), for example, "anti-ageing medicine" is one particular "culture of ageing" that has emerged within the social and cultural shifts occasioned by the decline of the social state and the impact of globalisation. He points out that:

Profound changes in labour relations, social programs, retirement and demographic patterns, as well as the cultural and medical stretching of middle age into later life have led to a reorganisation and reconceptualisation of the life course in advanced capitalist societies. (Neilson 2006, p. 154)

Hence, ageing women's struggle is not just local: it is also closely linked with the global society insofar as ageing has become a global issue.

In the following section, I will first review the prevailing social movement theories so as to explain how ageing women's activism has remained invisible in

three main areas: the narrowness of definitions of social movements; the prioritisation of economic concerns over cultural politics in prevailing social movement paradigms; and the prioritisation of younger women's concerns over older women's concerns in women's movements.

From linearity to fluidity: defining social movements

To make definitions, either of a social phenomenon or of a group of people, appears to be a necessary and crucial starting point for a discussion or a study. This task is always a primary concern for scholars who try to characterise their areas of study so that any related matters are not excluded from important discussions therein. Policy-makers, too, need to define clearly which groups of people are entitled to certain benefits, to differentiate these groups from groups of people who are not entitled to the benefits, and to define the benefits clearly. At this point in my study, I will not “define” social movements; rather, I will focus on how social movement theorists use definitions to set the scene for social movement scholarship. As we will see, social movement studies focus primarily on the pragmatism or on the instrumental criteria of movement formation and on movement maintenance or decline. Ultimately, this pragmatism advocates “the systematic study of movements so that their institutionalization and routinization would be fostered by rational elites

and informed publics “(Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995, p. ix). Social movement studies are hence, in this view, unable to appreciate “the rationality of disorder and disruption, the capacity for collective challenge in cohesive communities, the intricate complexity of relations between leaders and followers, the interplay of spontaneity and organization” (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995, p. x).

In response to the growth of social movement studies in the last two decades, Wallace, Williamson with Rita (1992, p. viii) observe that there is now wide diversity in definitions of social movements and that there is no commonly accepted definition of the term *social movement*. Marwell and Oliver (1984, p. 4) have even contended that “the concept ‘social movement’ is a theoretical nightmare,” as they found diverse and contradictory definitions in their review of published definitions of the concept, and what is most important, “much of the confusion seems to arise from a lack of focussed attention to the problem.” Disagreement amongst scholars also concerns whether “empirical phenomena ought legitimately to be encompassed by the definition” and, second, whether the disagreements about the right “theoretical approach” are always genuine. I discuss these two matters in detail later. Nevertheless, despite the diversity of definitions and the contradictions among these diverse definitions, two common features of social movements presented themselves

to Marwell and Oliver (1984), and these two features throw light on people's *predominant* understanding of what social movements are about.

First, social movements are about goals and about participants who are “wanting and trying to promote or resist some kind of social change” (Marwell and Oliver 1984, p. 5). This two-fold characteristic helps explain how it is that social movements arise and what it is that social movements yield. Second, Marwell and Oliver (1984) point out that, in most discussions involving social movements, a common element emerges: the “connotation of size, scope or significance” of the social movement, whether it is a civil rights movement, an anti-war movement, a labour movement, or a nationalist movement. In this respect, Marwell and Oliver (1984, p. 6) differentiate isolated protests within social movements and propose an interesting suggestion:

social movements are most usefully understood as complex *aggregates* of collective actions or events, aggregates which meet certain criteria of scope and size. This is in contrast to most definitions in the literature which tend to equate social movements with particular *kinds* of actions. We believe it is essential to recognize that real social movements are extraordinary complex phenomena. They are aggregates of hundreds, thousands, even millions of discrete events: meetings, rallies, riots, petitions, conversations, and so forth.

In view of the expected scope and the expected influence that would attach

themselves to a definition of the “real” social movement, Marwell and Oliver ask, “But do we really want to call a single protest, no matter what the issue, a social movement?” and comment that, “few, if any, of us are comfortable calling a protest of dormitory residents who want fewer restrictions on their hours a social movement, but such a protest would easily fit several definitions of “social movement” (Marwell and Oliver 1984, p. 5).

In defining social movement research, on the one hand, as more related to explicitly political or broad social change than to implicitly political or local social change and, on the other hand, as more related to large-scale organisations than to small-scale organisations, social movement studies place less emphasis on seemingly isolated protests that appear to affect smaller populations and that are perceived to have a “lesser” impact on the society at large. As a result, movements that are of a smaller scale and that concern everyday matters rather than explicitly political changes have only a marginal place or even no place in mainstream discussions of social movement. In this regard, Joseph R. Gusfield calls this discussion of social movement as “a linear image” (1981, p. 319).

In reviewing the Townsend Movement³ in order to understand both social and cultural change, Gusfield (1981, p. 330) argues that social change is related not solely to one single event and to its programmatic goals. It is related also to the

interplay of one or several organized efforts that underlies the production of social change. He points out that “Some historians and political scientists give a great deal of weight to the Townsend movement and sees its programs and agitation for pensions of \$200 a month as crucial to the emergence and ‘successful’ passage of the [Social Security] Act. For these observers [Abraham Holtzman 1963, and Daniel Sanders 1973], the social movement organization created a protest movement for which the Act was a response.” From a different point of view, Piven and Cloward (1979, p. 31) argue that the Townsend movement—although it managed to induce some twenty five million people to sign supporting petitions—was unable to achieve its goal since the Social Security Act could only benefit future aged people; other people received no coverage from a work-related insurance scheme as they were no longer. This latter group of people gained nothing from the movement and claimed that the Act strengthened the moral claims of the movement more than it did the people, themselves.

Scholars have arrived at starkly different judgements regarding the success and the failure of this movement. According to Gusfield (1981, p. 321), linear understandings of the movement’s outcomes focus on “programmatic goals” (such as the monthly pension of \$200 for older persons) whilst neglecting the society wide “transformation of meaning.” In this case, this linear way of understanding social

movements insufficiently supports our understanding of the act as a “watershed in the development of a welfare state: from a reliance on voluntary, private activities to assure welfare to a commitment from public, governmental sources” (Lubove 1968; Schlesinger 1959 cited in Gusfield 1981, p. 330). Also, the linear model of social movements takes as its predetermined unit of observation an association that functions to achieve change. Consequently, adherents of this model do not recognise efforts other than the Townsend movement—efforts that also paved the way for change. Gusfield states, “In June of 1934, before the Townsend Movement gained momentum, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (as the New York governor) named a cabinet Committee on Economic Security...and formulated a program for Unemployment Compensation and for Social Security and in January 1935, the legislation was introduced into the Senate” (Schlesinger 1959 cited in Gusfield 1981, p. 331).

Gusfield frames social movements and their outcomes in a manner that emphasises the vague and the diffuse. Gusfield asserts that “movement is seen as a change in the meanings of objects and events rather than the occurrence of associations” (Gusfield 1981, p. 322). He then refines his argument:

The perspective of fluidity emphasizes the cultural side of movements—the transformations of meaning—and the interactive side of consequences—the less public aspects of life. Politically, the focus shifts away from the short-run search for goals and goal realization and toward less political parts of human life in long-run

perspective. Society rather than the State becomes the area of analysis.
(Gusfield 1981, p. 323)

Alongside this fluidity that characterises some understandings of social movements is the cultural side of social movement studies, which is well illustrated by Alberto Melucci, who argues that “collective action must be understood in terms of the processes through which individuals communicate, negotiate, produce meanings, and make decisions within a particular social field or environment” (John Keane and Paul Mier 1989, p. 4). Melucci’s notion of collective identity and its construction have significantly shifted the attention of social movement studies from a political one that emphasises political opportunity to a cultural one that emphasises meaning making, and the corresponding discussions have concerned chiefly the “new social movements” whose objective is “bringing culture back in” to social movement research (Buechler 1993, p. 230; Hart 1996); in other words, reintroducing cultural analysis into this field of inquiry (Johnston and Klandermans, 1995).

At this point in my study, I will first present an overview regarding the 1970s shift in social movement theories, a shift that has significantly influenced academics and movement activists in Hong Kong. Then, I will build on the “cultural turn” initiated by new social movement theorists, the “gendering of social movements” by feminists and the “formation of age-related experiences” by social gerontologists.

By way of this three-pronged effort, I will formulate a theoretical frame whose focus concerns how movement actors make sense of their participation in connection with the actors' everyday life realities and, especially, with the actors' experiences of ageing. As I distance myself from the prevailing social movement paradigm, which privileges a linear understanding of power and outcomes, I will argue that if social movement studies could expand their scope to understand the cultural politics that occur in local communities and that are grounded in everyday life, then ageing women's daily struggles would emerge as a crucial and enriching component of the current social movement paradigm.

Shifting paradigm in social movement theories

Social movement theorists have long sought answers to puzzles concerning the rise and fall of social movements. These theorists try to explain why and how social movements come about, and do so by tracing social movements' dynamics (mobilisation and strategies) and social movements' outcomes. From the 1970s onwards, social movement studies have fallen into two distinct traditions: the new social movements (NSM) approach, on the one hand, and, on the other, the resource-mobilisation theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977) combining with political-opportunity theory (Doug McAdam 1982). The latter tradition involves

mostly scholars from the United States, whilst European schools primarily subscribe to “new social movement” theories (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995; Nick Crossley 2002, pp. 10-11; Janet M. Conway 2006, p. 6)⁴. However, Crossley (2002, p. 10) warns us that any attempt to distinguish these two traditions sharply from each other is likely both to offend and to sound over-simplified. Nevertheless, an examination of the differences between these two traditions would better illustrate, in general, the shifts and the turns that social movement theories have undergone and, in particular, the positions that social actors occupy in social movement analyses. By identifying and exploring these differences, I will show that the social movement paradigm generally under-represents ageing women’s activism.

As we will see, the shifts and the turns in social movement theories have arisen not only because of the theoretical weakness of prior approaches but also because those prior approaches were unable to fit a new wave of protest movements into the older explanatory frameworks (Buechler 1993, p. 219). “None of the master interpretive frameworks survived the experiences of the civil rights movements, the new left, the youth revolt, antiwar protest, women’s liberation, and all that has come after” (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995, p. x). By the 1990s, all the established streams of thought about social movements were converging on a point of agreement: cultural and symbolic “meaning making” activities are important to

those movements (Conway 2006, p. 6).

To explore this topic, let's begin with the stream of thought that has emphasised resources or political opportunities as the core for movement studies, a stream that social movement scholarship in the United States has widely adopted.

Resource Mobilisation Theory

The resource mobilization (RM) framework emerged in the 1970s and gained prominence in the 1980s because it offered an appealing alternative to sociologists who argued that the paradigm of the classical models, such as the Marxist class analysis and the collective-behaviour model (see Mancur Olson 1971; Neil Smelser 1962), had neglected the interactions amongst social activists, the operating mechanisms of social movement organizations, and the movement actors' relations with the outer environment (Eyerman and Jamison 1991). In rejecting the views of early collective behaviourists, which treat social movements as generically similar to panics, crazes, riots, and other hostile outbursts (J. A. Banks 1972, p. 61, n. 33), RM theorists have regarded social movements as normal, rational, institutionally rooted, political challenges by aggrieved groups, as summarised by Buechler (1993).

On the basis of the rational-actor model, RM theorists tend to consider

movement participants to be rational actors who make choices by weighing the relative costs and benefits and who base their decision to participate or not participate in a movement on whether the costs outweigh the benefits (McCarthy and Zald 1977). This rational-actor theory has dominated movement studies that identify effective mobilisation and strategies in which participants' rational calculations play a notable role. Further, McCarthy and Zald (1977, pp. 1217-18) focus on the study of resources such as funding, number of participants, knowledge, legitimacy, and social movement organizations (SMOs).

Relying on the rational-actor model, RM theories have strengthened our understanding of why a social movement comes about. This success has no doubt facilitated the debate about, and the development of, movement studies whose focus is movement recruitment, movement mobilisation, and movement participation. In particular, there is a substantial effort underway, first, to understand the types of organisational structures that facilitate the growth and the effectiveness of social movements' resource acquisition (Gamson 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977) and, second, to recognize inter-organisational networks—the alliance systems that are crucial to the successful formation of SMOs (Klandermans 1992).

RM theories' growth in the 1970s was a response to the cycle of protest that the U.S. civil rights movement initiated. The nature of this movement suggested, at

the time, that social movement activities are neither spontaneous nor disorganised and that the participants are not irrational (Myra Marx Ferree 1992, p. 29). The contribution of the RM theories in the United States has spurred researchers' interest in the motivations of movement participants; however, the theories also suffer limitations as Singh (2001, p. 112) argues: "In the setting of everyday life, people do make sacrifices for causes not their own, risk their life to save the lives of others, even of complete strangers." He further argues that utilitarianism permeates the writings of most of the proponents of RM theories (Singh 2001, p. 106) and that this utilitarianism leaves the emergence of social collectives such as the solidary groups, the communities, the informal, intimate primary groups or the 'conscious constituencies' unexplained (Singh 2001, p. 108).

RM theories themselves have been re-examining their limitations and have identified a narrowness of vision relative to the full range of social and personal meanings that movements embody (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995, p. xv). In particular, I agree with Myra Marx Ferree's (1992, p. 31) view that RM theories built on a rational and individual choice base have led to theoretical and empirical lacunas:

First, a neglect of value differences and conflicts, second, a misplaced emphasis on the free-rider problem, and third, a pre-supposition of a pseudo-universal human actor without either a personal history or a gender, race, or class position within a societal history.

Furthermore, in discussing the collective good or public benefit, RM theories that characterise people as individuals in search of a community neglect the fact that people, from infancy, are already part of a number of communities of greater or lesser salience (Ferree 1992, p. 37). Ferree states, “Women, working class people, and disadvantaged racial-ethnic groups may be especially likely to put considerable emphasis on maintaining viable networks of relationship” (Ferree 1992, p. 37).

Rejecting the prevailing reliance on formal structures of organisations, feminist scholarship based mainly in community development emphasises the significant role that gender plays in micro-mobilisations. For example, in their study of social movement organisations, feminist scholars argue that “gender bias” has existed with regard to women’s roles in social organizations, where women are more often assigned to serve “in the backrooms—making tea, typing minutes, handling routine correspondence, and to all those ‘soft’ or ‘domestic’” tasks such as food preparation (Lena Dominelli 1990, p. 3; Mayo 1977; Gallagher 1977).

The RM framework overemphasises the development of formal social movement organisations such as associations that promote tenants’ rights and has not challenged the gender bias in organisational formats. Nor has the framework addressed the informal and interactive community networks of women that pre-exist

these organisations (Elizabeth Wilson 1977). As a result, RM theorists have neglected the “micro-mobilisation” (Zald 1992) that involves chiefly face-to-face interactions in informal social spaces and relationships that participants cultivate amongst themselves (Kuumba 2001, p. 52).

Political Process Model

Political-process theorists view the emergence of social movements as dependent more on the “structure of political opportunities” than on either the availability of resources or the formation of social movement organisations. Therefore, political-process theorists argue for the “primacy of the political” in explaining the ebb and the flow of movement activities (Doug McAdam 1982, Charles Tilly 1978). In his book *From Mobilisation to Revolution*, which focuses on the experiences of Western Europe and North America over the last few centuries, Tilly (1978) identifies ‘opportunity’ as one of the components of collective action analyses (1978, p. 7) and states specifically that opportunity means “political opportunity, coalition, repression, and relations amongst governments and well-defined contenders for power over those governments.” (1978, p. 8) Proposing the polity model, Tilly stresses that the government and its repression or facilitation are crucial for the emergence and the survival of social movements and that governments are highly selective and are always practicing a combination of

repression, toleration, and facilitation (Tilly 1978, p. 106).

Asserting that the political environment is one of the determinants of social movements, McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1988, p. 699) refer to the receptivity or the vulnerability of a political system to organised protests that operate outside the formal political structure (Gamson 1975; Tilly 1978). Tarrow (1994) argues that the larger socio-political context, which includes political-opportunity structures, is crucial for the growth or the decline of a movement, as for example when there is a regime change: a movement is more likely, then, to take advantage of the new political climate and to press its claims. In regards to the black protest movements in the 1950s and the 1960s United States, Doug McAdam (1982, as cited in McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988, p. 700) attributes the widespread expansion of the black movement to the growth of the black electorate, to its incorporation into the Democratic Party, and to the postwar competition for influence among emerging Third World nations—competition that compelled otherwise unwilling political figures to support the movement. The political-process model has gained popularity in large part because:

It explains why social movement activity often comes in “waves” or cycles, and why movements that have been unsuccessful for an extended period of time suddenly appear to grow and succeed (for example, the Bolshevik revolution movement in Tsarist Russia, and the American Labor Movement in the 1930s). (Harper [1989] 1993, p.

Criticism of this model points to the model's rigid definition of political power: the model's preoccupation with formal political power leads to neglect of, for example, "gender as a power relation" that contributes to wider political opportunities or of, for another example, what M. Bahati Kuumba (2001, p. 52) identifies as "gender differentiated political opportunities." In a case study, Rabab Abdulhadi (1998 cited in Kuumba 2001) argues that the heightened involvement of women in the Palestinians' national-liberation struggle is due to shifts in women's status and to the growth of the international women's movement globally.

Kuumba (2001, p. 52) contends that the political-opportunity process—which tend to stress the official male-dominated spheres of politics such as the state and elite networks—has resulted in the exclusion of spheres that are, perhaps, more female dominated and that include communication, family, or kinship networks. These female-dominated spheres are usually less organised and less visible than male-dominated spheres but were instrumental in the spread of the U.S. women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and the 1970s and in the spread of other feminist movements, as well.

Gusfield (1981, p. 320) has rightly pointed out that in heightening concern for state-directed changes, political process theory has limited social movement

studies in their understanding of other aspects of social movements. In rejecting the “instrumental” approach to understanding various organisations and political opportunities, Melucci (1995, p. 41) makes a noteworthy observation:

In the past twenty years emerging social conflicts in advanced societies have not expressed themselves through political action, but rather have raised cultural challenges to the dominant language, to the codes that organize information and shape social practices. The crucial dimensions of daily life (time, space, interpersonal relations, individual and group identity) have been involved in these conflicts, and new actors have laid claim to their autonomy in making sense of their lives.

Melucci’s observation significantly contributed to a shift in social movement inquiries. This shift encompasses the relationship between social movements and macro-power relations and Melucci argues that “social movements also publicize grievances and uncertainties about everyday life, as well as challenge the less visible power relationships crystallized in its shared conventions and sense of normalcy” (John Keane and Paul Mier 1989, p. 1). Melucci’s emphasis on the collective actors as “nomads of the present”, who focus on the present with temporal and replaceable goals, has developed into a “cultural turn” that has shifted the social movement paradigm, both the old stream and the new stream, toward the issues of collective identity, meaning making, and cultural politics.

From cultural turn to cultural studies

The “cultural turn” is a trend to reintroduce culture to social movement studies (Francesca Polletta 1997; Anne Kane 1997; Stephen Hart 1996; Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller 1992) and refers to a broader paradigm of putting cultural factors back in the new social movement (NSM) paradigm.⁵ Large-scale movements have emerged around issues that are basically humanist, cultural, and non-materialistic and whose actors possess a self-understanding that NSM theorists consider “historically new”—in other words, as distinct from “old” forms of social movements, sometimes labelled classical and neo-classical movements, which would focus on “anti-capitalism,” “class revolution,” and “class struggle” (Singh 2001, p. 96). Hence, NSMs refer to “various movements that have emerged in Western societies in the wake of the 1960s, including environmentalism, the peace movement, second-wave feminism, animal rights, and anti-psychiatry.” (Crossley 2002, pp. 10-11).

Muller proposes that the “newness” of NSMs concerns their emphasis on related actors and meaning construction:

In contrast with the economistic rational actor of early resource mobilization theory, the new social movement actor both actively constructs and is constrained by a world of social meanings rooted in

specific historic contexts and based in the experiences and identities of race, gender, class and nationality. Within these contexts, the new actor identifies and constructs the meanings that designate the relevance for mobilizations of grievances, resources, and opportunities. (Muller 1992, pp. 21-22)

Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (1995, p. 20) advocate a “cultural analysis” according to which “social movements are shaped by culture and at the same time, themselves form and transform culture.” In addition, they argue that it is not enough to simply add culture to the list of independent variables (Johnston and Klandermans 1995, p. 21), a criticism that is echoed by Hart (1996, p. 88), who posits that “social movements are excellent laboratories for observing cultural processes” (Hart 1996, p. 98). The cultural turn in social movement scholarship recognizes “a variety of submerged, latent and temporary networks that often undergrid [sic] collective action, rather than [assume] that centralized organizational forms are pre-requisites for successful mobilization” (Melucci 1989; Gusfield 1994; Mueller 1994 as cited in Buechler 1995, p. 442).

NSM theories unveil the varied forms of collective human actions relative to, for instance, feminism, ecology, peace, and human rights (Singh 2001, p. 213). Also, NSM theories identify the cultural sphere as a major arena in which a combination of collective action and instrumental action can have a substantive effect on the state sphere or the political sphere (Buechler 1995, p. 442). The book *Social Movements*

and Culture, edited by Johnston and Klandermans (1995, p. vii), represents the cultural turn in the mid-nineties and was the very first collection of essays that, under the frame of cultural analysis, explored the connection between culture and social movements. The book takes culture as a factor in the emergence of social movements and examines social movement cultures in relation to collective identity, symbols, public discourse, narratives, and rhetoric.

Despite the diverse focuses in NSM theories, NSM theorists are alike insofar as they “articulated both the networked or ‘disorganized’ nature of movements along with their constant production of a collective identity” (Jordan et al. 2002, p. 6). As Keane and Mier (1989, p. 4) summarize the argument, Melucci’s notion of collective identity was distinctive in his assertion that it is through collective action processes that “individuals communicate, negotiate, produce meanings and make decisions within a particular social field or environment.” This assertion has been crucial to social movement studies that treat collective actors who establish relations with other actors within an already structured context. Owing to these interactions, the actors produce meanings, express their needs, and constantly transform their relationships (Keane and Mier 1989, p. 4). Melucci’s own empirical research on movement networks in the Milano area well illustrates the contention that actors, by means of diverse processes, construct what Melucci calls collective identity, namely

“a movable definition of themselves and their social world, a more or less shared and dynamic understanding of the goals of their action as well as the social field of possibilities and limits within which their action takes place” (Keane and Mier 1989, p. 4).

NSM theories, in general, and Melucci's, in particular, have opened up a new space in social movement studies by addressing the individual and his or her experiences with “invisible” networks of small groups submerged in everyday life. Some scholars describe the transformation of ideology and culture as “identity politics” (or as cultural politics: see Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995), which not only emphasizes societal change but also equates a vision of self transformation with political change so that the end result is: to realise one's full potentials as individual (Keane and Mier 1989, p. 7) or the “democratization of everyday life” (Melucci 1988b). And according to his concept of “nomads of the present,” collective actors respond not to an all-embracing vision of some future order but to the present, and consequently their goals are temporary and replaceable, and their organisational means are valued as ends in themselves (Keane and Mier 1989, p. 7). It can be argued with reason that the fluidity and the incompleteness of this concept explain contemporary social movements better than do fixed all-embracing theories.

At the same time, the “cultural turn” in understanding identity politics,

meaning making, and collective identity in social movement studies extended to the field of social theory. On this point, Kate Nash (2001, p. 77) argues that, “all social life must be seen as potentially political where politics is the contestation of relations of power” and “a model of ‘cultural politics’ is necessary to deal with the politics of social relations and identities, especially in work on social movements.”

There is a growing tendency to create a “comprehensive and synthetic approach” to movement studies—an approach that draws on the strengths of different particular approaches (Meyer 2002). Tom Jordan et al. (2002) acknowledge the ongoing attempts of social movement theorists from distinct traditions—NSM theory and political-process theory—to overcome previous polarizations between these traditions. To this end, some researchers in the last ten years have drawn from various streams of thought. Jordan et. al. (2002, p. 6) suggest that there should be dialogue with a third school of thought, apart from the NSM theories and the political-process model. They pointed out that this third cluster is more diffuse and pluralistic than the other two, and concerns the popular politics of protests. Relevant fields include feminist theory, anarchist studies, labour-movement history, sexuality studies, cultural studies, queer studies, postcolonial theory, dance and music studies, and race and ethnicity studies. David S. Meyer (2002, p. 3) stands out as a sociologist who has put a concerted effort into building bridges among people and

social movements and into advocating the construction of comprehensive and synthetic approaches to the study of social movements.

Nevertheless, in exploring the practices of ageing women in social movements, this study shifts away from the prevailing paradigm. This paradigm still comprises two components: a focus on social movements' explicit material characteristics and a focus on the rational-actor model discussed earlier. Of course, to shift away from one thing is to shift toward another thing. In this sense, my study begins by taking social movements to be *cultural practices* in a non-trivial sense.

In my efforts to treat ageing women's activism as a subject fit for a cultural-studies inquiry, I was informed by Meaghan Morris's (1997, p. 43) answer to her question "What does cultural studies do?" She argues that cultural studies is "an investigation of particular ways of using 'culture', of what is available as culture to people inhabiting particular social contexts, and of people's ways of making culture." Gray (2003, p. 12) notes that Morris's ideas help identify possible fields of inquiry for cultural studies and that these fields of inquiry point particularly to "cultures of everyday life." I aim to uncover ageing women's everyday-life culture and its relationship with these women's practices in social movements. Taking ageing women's activism as an object of cultural inquiry where the focus is on cultural practices, I will use Ien Ang's (2006)'s conceptualization of cultural

research⁶ to understand social movements as “a cultural practice that is situated within its distinct social, economic and institutional contexts and shaped by the outcomes of particular cultural negotiations involving multiple agents and interests” (Ang 2006, p. 187). More specifically, I ask questions that are important for cultural studies, such as, what meaning do ageing women’s social movement practices have for other people in the women’s everyday lives? Furthermore, as a cultural researcher myself, I explore how these practices might relate to identity formation, to a sense of self, and to social relations (Gray 2003, p. 26).

Again, to account for ageing women’s activism, I will argue that it is necessary for both social movement studies and cultural studies to explore the ageing women in terms of their everyday age-related experiences. Some scholars contend that the prevailing beliefs about ageing in society are based on myth. Hurd (1999, p. 423) argues that,

the aging process is framed by ageist stereotypes regarding physical decline, negative evaluations of the aging body, and social losses as well as the realities of declining health, physical changes, and widowhood, amongst other things.

Despite the diversity in the characteristics and the experiences of older individuals, many people assume that old age is “a homogeneous and uniformly negative life

stage” (Hurd 1999, p. 420). In view of the limitations of the prevailing gerontology theories, Simon Biggs, Ariela Lowenstein, and Jon Hendricks (2003) edited the book *The Need for Theory: Critical Approaches to Social Gerontology*. In it, the editors argue that a multidisciplinary approach drawing on critical theory, feminist theory, and cultural studies would yield a more penetrating analysis of assumptions about people’s later years. To this end, the editors brought together scholarship from different perspectives including critical theory, feminist theory, conflict theory, and cultural studies in formulating a critical approach to social policy and to ageing that would re-vitalize gerontology.

Building on these gerontology studies, I will advance Estes’s efforts to connect with cultural studies by highlighting ageing women’s experiences in everyday-life politics insofar as these experiences reflect the women’s bodies, the women’s identities, and the women’s communities. Scholars’ compiling of older adults’ life stories is particularly useful to my study’s investigation into ageing women’s activism relative to the women’s ageing. Also useful to my study is the work done in feminist gerontology or critical gerontology, to which I now turn.

Theorising both ageing and gender in ageing women’s activism

Gerontology literature is now paying greater attention to “narrative

gerontology,” which creates a space in which older adults can speak about and reflect on their experience of old age. In 1999, the *Journal of Aging Studies* published a special issue on narrative gerontology edited by Gary M. Kenyon and William L. Randall. This very first issue comprised eight articles whose focus was on either theory building or research-based studies and whose objective was to explore the “life as story” metaphor (Kenyon and Randall 1999). Narrative gerontology is best understood as “a lens through which to view the aging process, a unique way of seeing what aging involves” (Kenyon and Randall 1999, p. 1).

A few interesting publications further develop the new intellectual trend in gerontology. Ray (2002, p. 132) reviewed four new books published between 2000 and 2001.⁷ These books focus on older adults who tell their stories. Ray summarises the four new books by stating that they facilitate the development of an important and necessary “narrative movement” in gerontology and that the movement represents a rejection of uniquely paradigmatic (scientific) thinking and an embrace of metaphoric (narrative) thinking (2002, p. 135). This new trend in gerontology takes inquiry beyond behaviour (that is, what we do or cannot do in later life) and into meanings (what it means to be an ageing older adult) and maps meaning and meaning making in later life (Ray 2002, p. 132). Although promising, this trend is growing only gradually and remains marginal in gerontology; the scientific

paradigm continues to dominate knowledge making, and the vast majority of funded research in the field is quantitative, not qualitative (Ray 2002, p. 132).

Within gerontology, studies that subscribe to the bio-medical construct of ageing have faced criticism from some gerontologists who accuse these studies of narrowness of focus: namely, the focus on older people's "decline" (Katz, 1996). As early as 1980s, two distinguished sociologists, Peter Townsend (1981) and Allan Walker (1980, 1982, and 1991) drew attention to the effect of macro policy and social situation on one's age-related experiences, and contended that "poverty and dependency in old age" stem from "social construction or creation." Walker (1991, p. 46) states that rather than blame older persons for age-related problems, scholars in the field should consider the effect that three distinct sets of policies—retirement, pensions, and social security and social services—have on the economic and social dependency of elderly people in Britain.

Other researchers critically evaluated gerontology studies and its adopted approaches. For example, Kua (1986) argues that gerontology inquiries fail to extract from research data anything bearing on the meaning of ageing people's lives:

Gerontological research has proliferated and engendered a mass of information. The epidemiologist is interested in studying the prevalence of illness in the elderly, the sociologist is keen on the social implications of an ageing population and the politician is probably more eager to find out the economic consequences of caring

for the frail elderly. After being analysed and categorised, it is paradoxical that little is known about the lives of these elderly folks. (Introduction, np.)

Further, Kua (1998, p. 1) asserts that “It is a myth to identify old age with the three D’s—decrepitude, depression and dementia. International and local studies on gerontology have expunged this misconception.” Similar criticisms that were levelled by scholars within the discipline flourished in the nineties. Rowe and Khan, for example, argue that “Gerontologists, an important group of scholars which has become prominent during the past few decades, have been as much a part of the problem as the solution” (Rowe and Khan 1998, p. 12).

In rejecting the established approach of studying ageing in terms of “anticipated decline,” Rowe and Khan (1998) argue that life choices, in addition to genes, determine how well one ages and that therefore it is possible to explore ways to maintain optimum physical and mental strength throughout later life. In rejecting the depressive image of ageing, Rowe and Khan (1998) urge people to engage in “unlearning” the myths of ageing. The authors accuse gerontologists also of failing to integrate a multi-disciplinary approach into their field, an approach that encompasses ageing in its biological, psychological, and social aspects.

Ageist stereotypes emphasize physical decline, negative evaluations of the ageing body, and social losses (Hurd 1999, p. 423; Hazan 1994; Gibb and Holroyd

1996). Meanwhile, there is a growing body of literature called “critical gerontology” (Cole, Achenbaum, Jakobi, and Kastenbaum 1993), which treats, in general, “critical approaches to social gerontology” (Biggs, Lowenstein, and Hendricks 2003) and, in particular, feminist gerontology (Harrington and Kunkel 1996). Critical gerontology promises to enrich our knowledge of the construction “old age.”

Ginn and Arber (1993), for example, place the emphasis on women’s ageing and related images that have persisted in children’s literature, jokes, and other forms of media. The scholars argue that cultural stereotypes characterize elderly women in Britain as “slow, stupid, unhealthy, unattractive and dependent.” They cite the example of the witch images in the stereotype of the jealous, scheming mother-in-law and argue that “the cultural images of elderly women as evil, the cruel jokes at their expense, the patronising and dismissive attitudes, all play a part in legitimising and reinforcing their social and material disadvantage”(Ginn and Arber 1993, pp. 66 – 67).

Hurd (1999) states that particularly women are, as they age, subject to ageism and to the devaluation of their bodies, because many societies’ measure of physical attractiveness draws almost exclusively on the characteristics of youth. However, gerontology studies have neglected the gendered nature of growing old and the evident possibility that growing old as a female may differ significantly from

growing old as a male (Gee and Kimball 1987, p. 8). Ruth E. Ray (for example, 1996, 1999, 2004) also challenges gerontology's neglect of gender. As one of the leading feminist scholars in the United States, she proposes that scholars adopt a post-modern perspective to address the nexus between women and ageing. She argues that gerontology studies need to address the complexities of gender and gender relations, as well as the politics of research and theory-making regarding the lives of older persons.

For an example, Ray cites the gendered nature of the notion of caregiving in age-related studies and argues that feminist gerontology should aim to point out that the predominance of female caregivers therein is the result not of natural tendencies in women toward nurturing, but of socialisation processes and social policies that reify gendered patterns of caregiving (1996, p. 676). In raising the critical questions of "what counts as knowledge of aging" and of how this knowledge functions in the world, Ray (1996) concludes that feminist research with a post-modern perspective would challenge, in gerontology, the binary opposition that pits the caregiver opposite the care receiver. This opposition rests on the problematic assumption that the relationship separates along an active-passive distinction: that receivers are passive and that caregivers are active. This assumption does not account for the great deal of effort that so-called receivers may exert on their own behalf. Ray

encourages scholars:

[to] deconstruct the term “caregiving” to show that it includes at least two assumptions: that the activity involves intimacy and connection (“care”), in addition to the meeting of physical needs, and that this care is offered freely (“given”). (Ray 1996, p. 677)

Further, Ray declares that society should stop restricting—through stereotypes—older people’s positions (Ray 1996, p. 675). In this study, I draw inspiration from Ray, as I too explore the insights of feminist gerontology, which—perhaps above all else—help uncover the complexity of ageing, the multiple identities that ageing women formulate as a response to ageist stereotypes, and the corresponding relationships that exist between these women and their families or communities.

As I review these studies, I will highlight how they address issues of ageing women’s age-related experiences, their conceptualisation of care relations, and the roles that family and the local community play in ageing women in their later years. Throughout these reviews, I will relate my findings to the ageing women’s activism. In this regard, I hope to identify the nuanced meanings that attach themselves both to ageing women’s actual ageing and to the women’s social movement practices. Three supplementary tools will assist me in this project: the concept of mask, the

concept of masquerades, and the concept of collective identity, each of which may pertain to women's negotiations with the public gaze and with their families. This last point is critical because these women's environment—whether the family or the nation—often intend to govern the women's daily life.

Re-represent the complexities of ageing

In writing about the diversity of life experiences amongst older Americans, Ray (2000a, p. 10-11) formed and researched eight “Write Your Life Story” groups in six different urban senior centres located in and around the metropolitan area of Detroit, from the fall of 1994 to the winter of 1996. The groups met two hours per week to write on their life stories, and group members shared ideas amongst themselves group. The meetings normally lasted for ten weeks. Altogether there were 84 women and 7 men who joined in the writing groups. Ray's (2000a, 2000b) method diverged from the methods used by most gerontologists, who study reminiscences and life reviews as a kind of therapy. Ray (2000b, p. 57) views life stories as an “act of language”—as a form of expression deeply embedded in familial and socio-historical contexts. Rather than “analyzing life stories for recurring themes, evidence of developmental stages, or coping strategies”, Ray looks for “gendered strategies that older women employ in writing their lives; the

ways gender defines power relations in writing groups, and the ways gender interacts with other aspects of women's social positioning (race, class, ethnicity, 'ablebodiedness', sexual orientation) to influence their self expressions" (Ray 2000b, p. 57). And Ray emphasises how members interact, establish group norms, reinforce values and beliefs, and most important, sanction certain stories and ways of telling them (Ray 2000b, p.57). In my study, I document ageing women's life stories insofar as they concern both personal aspects and society-filtered self-representation. I believe that this latter topic is crucial to how ageing women answer the question, "Who are we?"

In 1995, the journal *Australian Cultural History* took a particular interest in topics that might enrich people's understanding of age groups. David Walker and Stephen Garton (1995, vi) cited the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures that its aged population will increase from 12 percent of the population in 1993 to 22 percent in 2041 and argued that, "the social, cultural, and policy implications of these projections deserve closer analysis and particularly so given the paucity of historical and cultural analysis of ageing in Australia". In a special issue on ageing, which was edited by David Walker with Stephen Garton, the authors Barbara Kamler and Susan Feldman (1995, p. 6) argue that "ageing is a continuum, not a single stage, characterised by diversity and difference" and did so on the basis of

data collected from a group of ageing women who wrote stories about their body.

Acknowledging that one's experience of life is mediated by one's body, Kamler and Feldman address the absence, in cultural representations, of the ageing woman, and they make her body visible through a published series of writing workshops, entitled *Writing Stories of Ageing*, organised for 18 women who ranged in age from 58 to 84.

The workshops took place over two six-week periods, from May to June and from August to September, 1994. The participants were predominately white, middle to lower-middle class, and of Eastern European or Anglo-Celtic origins. According to Kamler and Feldman, stories written by the participants not only challenge the stereotypes that characterize the ageing body as negative but also construct alternative ways of understanding ageing women's responses to the aged body.

In relation to these stories, Kamler and Feldman (1995, pp. 10-11) expand thus on the "mask of ageing" concept proposed by Featherstone and Hepworth (1991):

The face appears as a mask which cannot be removed, which is subject to the public gaze and cultural judgement; below the ageing surface, a sense of youthful identity is maintained, a continuous sense of the self that does not match the reflection in the mirror.... Unlike Snow White's stepmother, she does not accept the mirror as truth. While it saddens her, she takes control rather than [allow] herself to be victimised by it.

It should be noted that the writing-workshop women expressed a multiplicity of attitudes to ageing and that some of these attitudes were negative. Among them, fear of a future life dominated by physical deterioration and fear of losing their independence feature prominently. In looking for images that might encompass this multiplicity, Kamler and Feldman argue that masks of ageing seem limiting because they imply that underneath the mask is something more real, more authentic (1995, p. 21). According to Kamler and Feldman, ageing women who reject the young-old binary can thereby embrace a new understanding of ageing that allows, “the aged body to claim celebration and joy, music and sex, food and drink, a pleasuring of all senses of the body” (Kamler and Feldman 1995, p. 21). To accomplish this objective, ageing women need to see themselves in a new mirror (Kamler and Feldman 1995).

In a similar vein, Thane (2000) examines images of old women in England and concludes (1) that positive images of old women co-exist with negative images of old women and that (2) discourses and representations of old women compete with discourses and representations of old men. Taking the old-age pensions debate in 1908 Britain as an example, Thane (2000, p. 37) makes the following argument:

Though a minority of observers from higher classes condemned all of the aged poor as feckless failures who had not saved for the needs of old age, more frequent was sympathy, especially for old women who were seen to be the majority of the aged poor. It was recognised that greater female longevity left many of them in widowed poverty and

that the limited work and low pay available to women made it almost impossible for them to earn a living or to save at any age. As a group, they were treated with sympathy and respect; as individuals, with awareness of the variety of their characteristics; they were treated no more negatively, and often less so, than men.

Thane (2000) suggests that studies on ageing women need to address the “ongoing dialogue” between an individual woman’s self image and her perception of what is socially expected of an old person, a perception to which some may conform while others struggle for individual identity. I will argue that social movement studies have paid insufficient attention to how older women confront their poverty and to the misconceptions that characterise this issue. Older women may indeed refuse to be victimised by rejecting the reflection that they initially perceive in the mirror, and this rejection carries with it an air of resistance (Kamler and Feldman 1995; Bytheway and Johnson, 1998, p. 245).

A topic of considerable importance is the meaning of ageing from the perspective of ageing women. Laura C. Hurd (1999) observed participants at a senior centre that was located in central Canada. Most of the participants were women who ranged in age from 50 to 90. On the basis of her observations, Hurd argues that, “through activity and group membership, the centre members ... seek to distance themselves from the category of ‘old’ and the accompanying ageist stereotypes” (1999, p. 419). Hurd’s (1999) study illustrates older women’s efforts

to remain in the “not-old” category. To this end, the women are rejecting not their age but the very category of “old”—the ageist stereotypes that privilege appearance, health status, and ability to function over other attributes. To remain “happy, active and independent,” some older women in the study looked to each other and to the centre for inspiration. Hurd’s study is important as a review of how ageing women deal with ageing, particularly in senior centres, where ageing women come together to face their challenges in their later life. This combination of individual identity and community influence therein is useful for my analysis.

Masks, masquerades, and collective identity

J. Gamson (1995) argues that social movements require a more nuanced understanding of the way in which activists use different identities in specific protest contexts. He argues that only by connecting our analyses of activists’ frames of meaning to the larger structure of gender relations can we fully understand why social movements prioritize certain ideas over other ideas (Gamson 1995). On similar lines, Taylor (1999, p. 25) argues that, “recent research by social movement scholars points to the fact that people do not bring ‘ready-made identities’ (e.g. gendered, racial, sexual or national) to collective action. Rather, the collective identities that people deploy to make public claims are an accomplishment of a set

of collective actors that derives from their common interests, experiences, and solidarity”. Alcoff (1988, p. 433; cited in Darlington and Mulvaney 2002, p.148) earlier developed a concept of personality which not only recognised the importance of personal agency but argued for an alternative conception of this that “would not view a woman merely as a passive recipient of an identity” but also as actively engaging herself as part of the movement. In summarising women’s experiences with power, Darlington and Mulvaney (2002, p. 149) draw the following conclusion:

while people are certainly influenced by social structures, human agents also have the ability to effect change. We suggest that this could be done through discursive practices, and that these practices are filtered through the prism of power.

I agree with Darlington and Mulvaney that ageing women are not simply passive recipients of an identity and that women are, in fact, active contributors to their identity. My research into women and power compels me, furthermore, to support a gendered theory of power. According to this theory, the methods that women use to get what they want may differ from the methods that men use to get what they want. This theory states, in particular, that women rely on hidden-influence strategies because women exercise less power than men—a concept suggested Paula Johnson (1976). In this study, I focus on the tactical

identities that ageing women use in response to ageist stereotypes in society. On this subject, I was informed by the concept of the mask of ageing, which explains how the ageing body (including ageing signs such as grey hair, wrinkles) becomes “an iron cage” from which a younger self-identity cannot escape (Featherstone and Hepworth [1990], 1993, p. 313) whilst the concept of youthfulness functions as a “masquerade [which] with respect to the aging body is first and foremost a denial of age, an effort to erase or efface age and put on to youth” as developed by Kathleen Woodward (1991, p.148). Further, Woodward (1991) suggests that there is no single mask; instead, the masquerade varies depending upon who is in the audience. Thus, in what follows I will integrate the notion of performing into my study so that I can better understand ageing women’s practices in social movements.

Mary Bernstein (1997, p. 532) argues that, in the case of lesbian and gay movements, celebration or suppression of differences within political campaigns depends on the structure of social movement organisations, access to the polity, and the type of opposition they encounter. More precisely, in examining four lesbian and gay rights campaigns, Bernstein (1997) states that interactions between social movement organisations, state actors, and the opposition determine the types of identity deployed. Bernstein identifies three dimensions of identity: identity for empowerment, identity as goal, and identity as strategy. The first two dimensions

listed have been widely discussed in movement studies. Identity for empowerment means the creation of collective identity for a movement's emergence or for mobilisations therein, whilst identity as goal means activism that either challenges stigmatised identities or seeks recognition for new identities. Hence, the notion of identity as a strategy—which encompasses identity for deployment, identity for critique, and identity for education—intermingles with the concepts of mask or of masquerade and can enrich our understanding of the identity formulations in ageing women's activism by exposing related tactical aspects.

Networks, communities, and collectives

Important for social movement studies, the notion of community is a shifting one according to Mayo (1994), for whom it refers to the common people, as opposed to those of rank, to a state, or to organised society (see Raymond Williams 1976). And in the nineteenth century, use of the term contrasted “localities with large, more complex industrial societies” (Mayo 1994, p. 49). In relating women to community, Mayo summarises the ambivalence of the notion of community insofar as community “can be a prison as well as a source of mutual aid and collective solidarity” (1994, p. 56). Bulmer (1987), too, argues that communities can oppress women, particularly in relation to the notion of community care that reinforces

women's caring responsibilities for children or for elderly or for handicapped relatives. Hence, caring responsibilities "effectively bind women to particular localities and limit their search for work, their opportunities for education and training, their social and leisure activities, and their scope for wider political participation" (Mayo 1994, p. 56). My exploration of the relationships between community and social participation let me to Fred L. Chiu's (2003) ethnographic narrative about an industrial conflict that involved 300 women workers at Hong Kong's Japan Watch Multinational in 1986. The conflict illustrates the hidden layers of social connectedness that, although outside the industrial context, bound the 300 women together. On the basis of his ethnographic study, Chiu reviewed the non-existence of "industrial solidarity" and found that industrial workers who experienced worker-management conflict would re-discover existing ties to one another while forging new ones (2003, p. 360).

I will link Chiu's notion of "incipient, conscious collectivity" with ageing women's activism and, in the process, will take account of Frida Kerner Furman's (1997) study of Julie's International Salon, which reviews "ways in which society at large judges and mistreats older women" and at the same time, ageing women form into what she calls an "unintentional community" (meaning, that forming community is not their aim) that resists collectively to the wider society's control on

ageing women (Furman 1997, p. 168). Furman's study explores a beauty salon that is located in a residential neighbourhood of a large Midwestern city in the United States, and she targets the supportive relationships that exist among the salon's female patrons. This study of the Salon sheds light on networks of ageing women whose core comprises friendly, caring relations. The women communicate this friendliness and this care often by "using distinctively female modes of communication, humor, and bonding... [which are] important features of what feminist scholars call 'women's culture'" (Furman 1997, p. 30).

It is important to recall that the salon is a business establishment. Julie's International Salon provides certain services—hair and nail care—for the sake of profit. In my study, for-profit service centres that cater to elderly groups frequently function as an "unintentional" friendly community for its participants. By "unintentional," I mean "not by design." For example, people who form a club for single people "intentionally"—or "by design"—try to establish a community, but for-profit organisations often do not plan the communities that emerge there. Places like the salon provide many women with a sense of belonging and affirmation, often in contrast to the impersonal nature of the public space, which renders old people—especially older women—invisible and hence irrelevant.

Ageing women and social movements in Hong Kong

Locally based community development projects organised by social welfare organisations in the seventies and the eighties operated in a similar mode, emphasising social justice issues that included empowerment and targeting deprived groups that included boat people, old people on social security or low-income families and residents of dilapidated housing (Y. L. Wong 1988, p. 11; Yeung 1984, p. 180). However, this social justice, or empowerment, paradigm rarely treated older persons specifically (Kam 1996, 1997; Lam 1990), whilst the women's empowerment paradigm referred chiefly to married women with younger children or to women in their middle age (see, Tse, Yuen-hing, Mei-han Leung, and Wing-cheong Lai 1990). Social movement studies neglected the topic of older women as members of an ageing population that had been characterized as materially and emotionally depressed, and this scholastic neglect perhaps reflects the assumption that ageing people—especially, ageing women—are inactive in relation to social movement participation⁸. My extensive review of the literature on social movements in Hong Kong has revealed to me that female seniors' involvement in social movements is hardly a popular topic.

“Gender blind” in community organising refers to social workers' neglect of women's needs and their inability to work toward achieving gender equality. This

topic has been prevalent in the discourse on Hong Kong's community organising (Hung and Fung 1994; Tse, Leung and Lai 1990; Leung L. C. 1990). Choi (1995) and Tsang (1995) authored a few research publications that review the women's movement in Hong Kong as it was in the mid-1990s, and Lee (2000) authored a more recent publication regarding the same topic. These writings show that Hong Kong's recent women's movements were focusing largely on the concerns of "younger women," such as abortion rights and equal pay.⁹ The women's movements in Hong Kong have engaged with sexuality issues and social-class issues but have too often overlooked the ageing experiences of older women. Many feminists in Hong Kong either have paid scant attention to older women's participation in social movements or have completely excluded the topic from feminist discourse because the feminists believe that the topic does not constitute a direct challenge to male-dominance, which has been the main focus of feminist movements, in general.

The women's movement emerged in Hong Kong in the 1980s (Choi 1995; C. K. Lee 2000) and fell in the category of "identity movements"—namely, the category of "new social movements," which denotes a shift from political domains to social domains (Cohen 1985; Keane and Mier 1989; Melucci, 1989). Putting forth the concept of "politics of identity" in understanding women as a social category, Lee (2000) analyses the various major issues therein, such as the Marriage Law

forbidding polygamy in Hong Kong; women's right to abortion, equal pay for women and men, and tenancy rights for women in the New Territories. Her analysis focuses on the arguments used by women activists in these areas and examines whether the activists were addressing women as individuals or merely as necessary components of healthy families. Lee cites the tenancy-rights issue for women in the New Territories and states that there was a shift in focus among women activists: the initial focus was on the argument that women's role as caregiver supports the welfare of the family or of society; the later focus was on the argument that women are individuals who, as such, have rights. Hence, she concludes that, in the 1980s in Hong Kong, the concept of woman-as-individual grew into a social category and into a collective identity. She concludes, also, that women as a group of collective actors expressed their quest for individual identity, individual autonomy, and recognition of this identity and this autonomy, whereas women in the past sought to reaffirm their identity as mothers or as career women or as wives. However, these social movements largely ignored the different everyday social positions and the different everyday needs of older women. Regardless of older women's peripheral status, Lee's (2000) chapter on the women's movement has been essential in establishing women both as a category for analysis and as a force in social movements.

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, the women's movement in Hong Kong grounded its debates in the "identity and diversities" framework. Choi (1995) summarizes two particular challenges that diversity posed for the women's movement: class identity and sexual identity. In the discourses on reproductive rights, women's equality in the workplace, and sexual harassment in the workplace, older women occupied a marginal place or were absent altogether. Not until 1999, when the book *Crying and Laughing – Ah Poh Narrating History* appeared, did the leading feminist organization in Hong Kong, the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF), put age on their agenda. This milestone book contains ten stories that concern women in their late 60s and that review the women's life histories and the significant people and events that surfaced in these histories. Most of the women had been living in Hong Kong for over 40 years. In the introduction, Pun Ngan and C. H. Ng (1998) note that the ageing women seemed to recall their life histories as a way of "self-curing." Their life stories showed not only how the women had survived war, poverty, disasters, and forced relocations, but also how their love affairs, marriages, and families reflected society's expectations of a woman in the 1940s and the 1950s. Older women's histories—as "small history"—constituted a valuable source of social history in contrast to official or formal histories, known as "Big History," which has been male-centred (P. K. Choi

2000, p. 1). Both the readers of this book and the storytellers, themselves, have found that the women's "small histories" accomplish two objectives: (1) they embody a process of self empowerment and a process of self recognition; and (2) they challenge the authenticity of "Big Histories."

Older women in other countries have also criticised women's movements for their neglect or exclusion of ageing women. The American feminist Barbara Macdonald (1984, p. 66) challenges the "exploitation by compassion" trend (in which younger feminists refer to older feminists as "them") by declaring, "I don't want my problems solved *for* me, I don't want sympathy." This point is echoed in Betty Friedan's (1993) book *The Fountain of Age*. In it, the American feminist and co-founder of the National Organization for Women challenges society's denial of—and society's "problematic approach" to—understanding ageing. She discusses the "compassionate ageism" created by members of the medical community (namely, gerontology and geriatrics), which represents the aged-as-sick-and-dependent approach (Friedan 1993, pp. 50-51). This approach has come under fire for its "labelling and stigmatization" of age-related experiences (Katz 1999).

Macdonald recalls her unpleasant experience during a social protest march and describes how she was shocked and ashamed when a monitor of the march, a younger woman, came up to her and said, "If you can't keep up, go to the head of

the march” (Macdonald with Rich 1984, p. 30). She felt that she “was a problem and did not fit”, and she argues, “All my life in a man’s world, I was a problem because I was a woman; now I’m a problem in a woman’s world because I’m a sixty-five-year-old woman” (Macdonald with Rich 1984, p. 30). And she states that the monitor “picked me out because she believes that a sixty-five-year-old woman lacks judgement about what she can do” (Macdonald with Rich 1984, p. 33).

Moreover, the hurt that arises from ageist female-female relationships in the feminist movement can have unique ramifications for lesbians. Macdonald reviews her experiences as a lesbian and states that, as a lesbian, she encountered no novels, movies, radio programs, or television programs that lesbians existed or that it was possible for a female to be glad to be a lesbian (Macdonald with Rich 1984, p. 5). As she aged, “nothing told me that old women existed, or that it was possible to be glad to be an old woman. Again the silence held a powerful and repressive message.

Again I had to chart my own course, this time into growing old. This time with Cynthia, who chose to explore with me both the process and the politics of aging” (Macdonald with Rich 1984, p. 5).

Conclusion

In the past decade, social movement studies have become a real “growth

industry” (Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly 1999, p. xi). Jordan et al., the editors of the new journal *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, which was launched in 2002, opened its first collection with the statement that “there is a need to recognize the increasing key role that social movements play as the dynamic and oppositional forces within global-economics and we locate ourselves firmly on this ground” (Jordan et al., 2002, p. 5).

In this study, I attempt to fill the gap between social movement scholarship and social movement practices by integrating the lived experiences of aging women into my analysis of the women’s activism. In particular, I attempt to enrich social movement scholarship’s understanding of aging women’s solidarity, of their participation in struggles related with their everyday life, and of the effects that this participation has on the formation of older women’s age-related experiences in social movements. To this end, I draw insight from the NSMs and their cultural turn, as well as from feminist scholarship that focuses on ageing women.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the shifts and the turns that have characterised social movement studies. I have based my review on the broadly defined streams of NSM theories, RM theories, and political-process theories. I have also highlighted feminist scholars’ substantial works on women’s protests, in which

gender plays a critical role (Taylor 1999; Ferree and Merrill 2000; Kuumba 2001).

These feminist critics seek to build an alternative approach to understand social movements—an approach that would accord better with the experiences of women who have been neglected in social movement studies (Taylor and Whittier 1999, p. 5).

Nevertheless, scholars in the field have not paid sufficient attention to older women in women's movements. In this chapter, I have reviewed insights from feminist gerontology to enrich our understanding of older women as social actors in their everyday-life struggles, which interweave with ageist stereotypes in the wider society. I have proposed that we should try to understand ageing women's activism if we are to rigorously and fully review the complexity of ageing women's age-related experiences, whether they are negative or positive. Julie's International Salon provides a good illustration of how a setting for ageing women's daily-life activities turned into a community where sharing and caring was commonplace. Such fresh insights have enriched our traditional understanding of community as a source of oppression against women.

To understand the relations of power that underlie social actors' participation in social movements, I refer to the interesting observation of Gregor McLennan (2005 p. 277) regarding social-interest groups' use of the term "power." He points

out that “a range of familiar phrases encapsulates the influence of social movements and interest groups: black power, flower power, green power, gray power, pupil power, parent power, peasant power, ‘power to the people’, and so on.” This observation raises the following questions: Do social-interest groups, social activists, and social actors seek power as their goal when they organise for a single issue? What sort of power—whether it is political, economic, or social—do these groups and actors pursue, and how does the power relate to their everyday life? Before putting these questions to three case studies, in the next chapter I will highlight how the social environments in which ageing women engage both facilitate and limit the women’s participation.

NOTES

¹ Here I was informed by Michel de Certeau’s idea that—as summarised by Ben Highmore (2002, p. 37)—everyday-life practices occur in “a realm where we can access the remainders and resistances to the social regimes that dominate us.”

² See David S. Meyer (2002) and Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks (1995) for a discussion on the possible gap between academicians and activists.

³ The Townsend movement was one of the “first generation” of senior movements that emerged in the USA in the 1930s and 1940s. Led by Dr Francis Townsend, this movement in 1934-35 proposed a monthly pension for old aged people. See Wang (1999, p. 195- 200).

⁴ Nick Crossley (2002, p. 10, Figure 1.1) summarises four traditions of movement analysis and classified them into to trends, namely the USA and the Europe: In USA, the first concerns collective behaviour, the second concerns resource mobilisation/political process; whilst in Europe, the third concerns Marxism, and the

fourth concerns new social movements.

⁵ Buechler identifies a “political” version of “new social movement” theories and a “cultural” version of NSM theories. For details, see Buechler (1995, pp. 456-459). Buechler (1995) states that four major theorists (Castells, Touraine, Habermas and Melucci) have contributed to NSM theories, whose paradigm stands in contrast to that of the prevailing RM theory in the United States. Cohen (1985) describes the “old” social-movement paradigm as “strategy oriented” and describes the “new” social-movement paradigm as “identity-oriented.”

⁶ Ien Ang (2006) states that she prefers the term “cultural research” to the term “cultural studies” because the former term emphasises both interdisciplinary collaboration and community engagement.

⁷ The four books are, Tom Koch (2000); Gary Kenyon, Phillip Clark, and Brian De Vries (eds.) (2001); William L. Randall and Gary M. Kenyon (2001) and, James E. Birren and Kathryn N. Cochran (2001).

⁸ In their study on the images of old age in the Hong Kong print media, Gibb and Holroyd (1996) conducted a one-year (1992-1993) survey of two Hong Kong newspapers, *Sing Tao* (Chinese medium) and *South China Morning Post* (English medium). According to their findings, the 2 most popular category headings out of the 11 headings that they identified were “economic vulnerability” and “the pathos of ageing” (Gibb and Holroyd 1996, p. 166, Table 1).

⁹ Both Choi (1995) and Tsang (1995) review the women’s movement in Hong Kong, but neither of the reviews identifies older women as a target group.

Chapter Three.

The “deprived” group: Ageing women and their social environment

As life goes on and on everyday, we use and get used to routines and guidelines¹. The truth of this assertion seems hard to deny. However, if we ask such questions as “Why these practices, and not others?” and “Can everyday life proceed in other ways?”, we become aware that our lives (certainly in Hong Kong) are largely dominated by the ubiquity of policy, which regulates the life patterns of people in society. A broader context for understanding this ubiquity and for examining its particular effects on ageing women may be found in Foucault’s discussion of governmentality. Foucault (1982, pp. 220-221) argues that “government” generally refers to “the conduct of conduct” understood as “a form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons”; also, the term refers to “all those more or less calculated and systematic ways of thinking and acting that aim to shape, regulate, or manage the comportment of others, whether these be workers in a factory, inmates in a prison, wards in a mental hospital, the inhabitants of a territory, or members of a population” (Inda 2005, p. 1).

What happens in the case of ageing women? How are ageing women being “governed” in our society and in what areas of their lives? This study’s ageing

women came to Hong Kong when they were young women in the 1950s. The women hoped that they could make a living in Hong Kong and even start a new way of life for themselves. Similar to most of the refugees at that time, the women's families left their homeland in Mainland China and fled to the British colony of Hong Kong after the defeat of the Japanese in 1945 and the subsequent civil war. From then on, these groups of ageing women worked hard to earn a living there.

Most of them eventually got married and helped raise their own families.

These women are now entering their late sixties or their early seventies, and most of them are retired and rely mainly on their own savings, on old-age pensions, and on their children's supplements. In this chapter, I will review how the ageing women's social environment has shaped and "governed" the ageing women's ageing-related experiences. With regard to the concept of social environment, I pay particular attention to three main areas: the policy domain, the gerontology formation (the discipline and its social practices), and the media. As we will see, the three domains are actually connected with each other. However, I will begin with ageing-related policy and will treat it as the central factor influencing the women's experiences of ageing in Hong Kong.

Highlighting the close connection between old age and social policy, Walker and Phillipson (1986, p. 1) make the initial assertion that "elderly people have

always been one of the primary subject groups of social policy.” They then launch into a related argument:

Although the actual *experience* of old age on the part of individual elderly people is inextricably bound up with social policy, whether in the public or private sector, very little attention has been paid by policy analysts to the fundamental role of social policies in shaping the lives of older people and in effectively producing many of the characteristics associated with old age. (Walker and Phillipson 1986, p. 2)

With a particular reference to the feminization of the ageing population, Peace (1986, p. 61) terms ageing women the “forgotten female” in policy formulation and describes the situation succinctly:

Old women are all round us and yet “invisible”—invisible in that their existence is seldom acknowledged; their needs are seldom recognized and their voice seldom heard.

In reviewing ageing women’s experiences of health services and of financial security in Britain, Peace (1986, p. 82) argues that Britain treats its ageing population as “a homogenous male group” and that, thus, Britain recognizes few gender-based differences in ageing people’s life experiences such as women’s caring role and their predominately lower status and lower pay (1986, pp. 64-65). I will

argue that ageing women's silence and invisibility suggest that official policy neglects women. At the same time, policy affects ageing women's later life.

However, this is not to suggest that the policy context itself is a coherent, well-aligned, or stable entity. Chan and Phillips (2002, p. 23) argue that there is no central policy on ageing "if 'policy' is taken to mean a coherent conceptual framework linking different practices for the achievement of a goal or mission since services provided have not always been consistent with the policy." Nevertheless, I would argue that contradictions and ambivalence characterise policy measures in terms of the way they fulfil policy objectives. And policies vary amongst departments and units such as housing and welfare offices in Hong Kong. Society forgets that ageing women have a right to participate in policy formulation and to make choices as to how they would like to live in their later life.

In Hong Kong, social services for the elderly operate mainly under the Social Welfare Department, which is the executive arm of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, whose function is to carry out social-welfare policies. According to the Social Welfare Department, 80 percent of Hong Kong's social welfare services are provided by non-government organizations, and most of them received funding support from the government in 1999 (Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the Social Welfare Department 1999, p. 9). Services include

financial support, provision of residential care, and community-support services, all three of which help the ageing population remain in the community and out of institutional-care settings (Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the Social Welfare Department 1999). Though ageing women constituted the majority of the service users of the services listed above,² in Hong Kong there is no specific service primarily addressing the women's uniqueness such as their caregiver roles in the family, their higher rate of widowhood, their lower levels of formal education, their low labour-force participation rates, and their higher rates of living alone (Census and Statistics Department, 2001)³. However, gerontologists in Hong Kong are becoming more and more aware of the "feminization" of later life (Cheung 2000; Chow 2000, p.159; Law and Ho 1999; Lee 1999). Recent research and studies mainly focus on (1) ageing women's caregiver role both in formal care settings and in informal care settings and (2) poverty among ageing women in Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region⁴. Nevertheless, as we will see, ageing policy with the support of the "aging enterprise"—a term coined by Estes (1979) to describe the major expansion of the ageing services industry—has greatly strengthened the government's influence on ageing women's conduct.

Finally, the media play an important role in ageing women's experiences of ageing and in the women's social environment. Estes (1993, p. 292) argues that "the

way a society treats its elders (directly or indirectly) via social policies on employment, retirement, health care, income, and the family” is not the only means by which the society shapes the individual’s experience of ageing: other factors are “the perceptions, myths, and messages about aging that are communicated to old and young alike by media and opinion leaders, including gerontological researchers.”

Members of government, of the medical establishment, and of the media have actively represented ageing women as part of an alleged “aging problem,” which refers to the women’s “fragility and vulnerability” (see Gibb and Holroyd 1996, pp. 151-175). We will discover that the media has promoted government policy and has reinforced mainstream stereotypes about ageing women and about their experiences.

Ageing Policy: defining ageing women as a social problem

Older persons (over 65 years old) comprised 11.1 percent of the total Hong Kong population in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department 2001), and the figure was projected to reach 25 percent in 2031 (Census and Statistics Department 2002). This growing population will increase demand for healthcare and social services, old age pensions, and residential-care services, a point made in a policy address by the chief executive in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region⁵

However, over 40 years ago, in the very first white paper on social welfare,

published in 1965, the government had not yet defined older persons as a serious problem; rather, the government emphasised families' moral responsibility to care for the aged (Hong Kong Government 1965). In the early 1960s, only 5.7 percent of the total Hong Kong population was age 60 or above (Barnett 1966, p. 1), and most of this sub-population were living with their family (Barnett 1961, p. 10). Therefore, there was no strong demand at that time for government intervention. According to Chow (1990), the first government investigation into the needs of the aged in Hong Kong started in 1972 in response to the percentage growth of the ageing population, to 7.4 percent, and in response to project an increase to 10 percent of the total population by 1981. At the same time, Hong Kong was experiencing changes in family living arrangements. These changes included the rise of the nuclear family under industrialisation and the limitations of over-crowded living environments, all of which made it more difficult for the older persons to receive adequate care from their families (Chow 1986, pp. 11-12). The government created a working party⁶ that consisted of members of government departments and members of non-government organizations (formerly known as voluntary agencies), and the working party's responsibility was to "re-examine" the needs of the elderly (Chow 1986, p. 12).

In 1973, the Working Party on the Future Needs of the Elderly published a

summary report entitled “Care in the community: The right basis for service to the elderly?” which called upon society to redefine the needs and the service priorities of Hong Kong’s elderly (Working Party on the Future Needs of the Elderly 1973). The publication proposed five categories of services: welfare, medical and health service, community facilities, housing, and residential care⁷. The working party identified its priorities for the elderly: infirmity allowances, home-help service, meal service, community-nursing service, and public housing units designed for elderly, all of which were, together, supposed to reflect “care in the community” rather than “institutional care” (Working Party on the Future Needs of the Elderly 1973, p. 4). The working party suggested that the Social Welfare Department should be responsible for the overall planning, evaluation, and implementation of the services and for coordinating the services’ provisions (Working Party on the Future Needs of the Elderly 1973, p. 12).

Published in 1977, the Green Paper on services for the elderly thoroughly outlined the operational details for the development of elderly services in Hong Kong (Social Welfare Department 1977). Thereafter, the government as well as the public expected that the “aging problem” in Hong Kong would be dealt with by the formation of elderly services serviced by professionals (mainly social workers and nurses). Elderly policy and services reflected the “cared by the family” principle and

the “ageing in the community” principle. As for people who were unable to receive care from their families, the government classified them as the “most needy” for government-provided residential services. This two-fold principle has remained the blueprint for Hong Kong’s elderly services (Chow 1986, p. 12).

Seeing the ageing population as a social problem, namely “a challenge to the Hong Kong society”,⁸ was not merely a local issue but a global one, as well, because ageing populations were growing as percentages of populations around the globe. In 2006, the World Health Organization published an article entitled “The world is fast ageing - have we noticed?” featured on the organisation’s webpage on *Ageing and Life Course*. The article made this assertion:

Ageing is a privilege and a societal achievement. It is also a *challenge* [my emphasis], which will impact on all aspects of 21st century society. It is a *challenge* [my emphasis] that cannot be addressed by the public or private sectors in isolation: it requires joint approaches and strategies.

The article goes on to present “Facts about ageing” by listing and detailing ageing populations⁹. As cited in Harper’s (2000, p. 111) article, Andrej Wojczak, Director, World Health Organization Centre for Health Development, Japan declared, “Ageing of the population is ...one of the most important socioeconomic challenges...for the 21st Century”. Since the 1990s, the United Nations has

encouraged countries to undertake joint efforts that address the issue from a global perspective.¹⁰ These joint efforts resulted in the formation of the International Plan of Action, which is geared toward “an integrated response” to ageing populations and toward the creation of “a common knowledge base” amongst racially and ethnically diverse countries.

In 1999, the United Nations initiated the International Year of Older Persons. In conjunction with this event, the government in Hong Kong formed a central coordinating committee under the Elderly Commission in Hong Kong to promote related regional activities¹¹. This joint effort among countries facilitated the realization of a global perspective, and one example would be the Second World Assembly on Ageing, launched in Madrid, April 8-12, 2002, which led to a series of international conferences that promoted “active aging” in relation to the three pillars: health, participation, and security (The World Is Fast Ageing - Have We Noticed?, 2006). In this respect, the ageing issue is no longer a local issue; populations must tackle this social problem at a global level.

Best (2001, pp. 5-6) discusses how social scientists approach a social problem:

Is the problem widespread? How many people—and which people—does it affect? Is it getting worse? What does it cost society? What will it cost to deal with it? Convincing answers to

such questions demand evidence, and that usually means numbers, measurements, statistics.

For example, in their formulation of the ageing problem, policy-makers usually link a rapidly growing ageing group to an “elderly dependency ratio.” In Hong Kong, the Census and Statistics Department (2002) published a thematic report on older persons and highlighted the ratio of those aged 64 in relation to those in the work force (a much younger group). The report emphasized that the elderly dependency ratio increased from 50 in 1961 to 154 in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department 2002, p. 7). Furthermore, one Health, Welfare and Food Bureau discussion paper, entitled “Relevance of the Population Policy to Social Welfare” (2003b, p. 4), explained the major concerns and challenges arising from ageing populations’ demographic trends by highlighting the elderly dependency ratio: “By 2031, the overall dependency ratio is projected to reach 562, i.e. every 1,000 persons aged between 15 and 64 will have to shoulder 562 persons aged under 15 or aged 65 or above.” (Health, Welfare and Food Bureau 2003b)

This claim is misleading in two ways¹². First, this sort of calculation rests on the assumption that all those older persons over 64 are *dependent* on the working force in the society: the calculation does not account for persons over 65 who continue to work. In 2001, the Population Census illustrated the point that the labour

force participation rate of older persons was 7.2 percent that year (Census and Statistics Department 2002, p. 32). Although the “Working Group on the Care for the Elderly” also commented that the index was somewhat misleading, they claimed that the ratio does provide a useful means of comparison across years (1994, pp. 12-13). I would raise a second point, that Chinese translation of the term “dependency” is (撫養率), which literally means “to feed or to bring up.” The Chinese term is misleading in so far as it implies that the working force is under the age of 64 and is “feeding” those who have reached the age of 64. In exaggerating the dependency of those aged 64 or above, these publications and organizations have helped undermine older persons’ independence.

A growing ageing population has financial implications for the healthcare sector, however, and these implications constitute rather concrete terms that relate not only to the ageing population but to the rest of society as well. On October 12, 2005, Chief Executive Donald Tsang released the 2005-2006 policy address entitled “Strong Governance for the People,” which clarified the issue thus: “an aging population means more elderly people need health care and other forms of attention” (HKSAR 2005b, p. 46). This elaboration of the older persons’ healthcare needs had been outlined earlier (July 2005) in a consultation paper drafted by the Health, Welfare, and Food Bureau. This document, entitled “Building a Healthy Tomorrow:

Discussion Paper on the Future Service Delivery Model for Our Health Care System,” announced that, because of the ageing population, “health bills and demand for hospital service will increase exponentially” (Health, Welfare and Food Bureau, Health and Medical Development Advisory Committee 2005, pp. 8- 9). Herein, a number of figures established that the prevalence of chronic illness amongst people age 65 and above was five times higher than it was amongst people age 20, and that the number of “patient days” used by people age 65 and above was 46 percent of the total (Health, Welfare and Food Bureau, Health and Medical Development Advisory Committee 2005, pp. 8- 9). Thus, the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (2005, p. 8) stated that society should be “solving the aging problem” in order to avoid an enormous spike in government expenditures on health-related measures. The search for such a workable solution has become a primary concern for policy-makers, professionals, and the general public.

Loh (2005, p. 1) comments in her article, “What Is the ‘Problem’ of an Ageing Population”, that the discussion, to date, about demographic trends has focused on “the fear of getting old and the consequences of an ageing society. Apart from the personal concerns on one’s physical incapacity, policy-makers also query the difficulty in financing health care for the elderly, insufficient workforce to support social security payments.” Loh (2005, p. 2) builds on this point:

There is no reason why the capacity to live very long lives should not be seen as the crowning glory of human civilization rather than as a “problem” of having too many “old” people who are assumed to be unproductive and expensive to care for.

In her paper, Loh argues that, “Seeing ageing mainly in negative terms is short-sighted and will inhibit policy-makers from seeing longevity as a new phenomenon, with fundamental implications that must be addressed. What will become a ‘problem’ is if society cannot adopt its mindset, structures and organization to demographic realities soon enough.” (Loh 2005, pp. 1 – 2)

It is clear that the service sector also adopted a “problem-solving approach” to the issue of ageing. For example, Choi (1975, p. 6), the project assistant of the Hong Kong Council of Social Services issued a clear statement herein:

Hong Kong’s services for the elderly have greatly expanded during the short span of four years and have entered a new era. As the pioneer in this field, the seminar held four years ago was very successful in advocacy for a concern in the “*problem of the elderly*” [my emphasis].

The problematisation of ageing circulated in research circles, as well. Law and Lee (1999, p. 254) studied 51 surveys and research projects that social workers and elected councillors had conducted between 1968 and 1994. The two scholars found

that over two-thirds of the studies carried the message that ageing is a problem and that ageing people are dependent, lonely, poor, and ill.

In this way, policy-makers turned ageing into a problem in both government policy and research. Furthermore, this homogenising tendency extends to the way in which policy-makers identify ageing women as part of the social problem and as lacking gender-specific needs. In this regard, Cheung (2000, p. 6) argues that “a comprehensive policy on ageing requires the compilation of sex-disaggregated data and the use of gender analyses to provide a gender perspective in policy formulation and programme evaluation.”

The policy paper that I quoted earlier in this chapter addresses the ageing problem as though it were only a group problem. The paper does not probe the significance of the sex ratio of the ageing population when illustrating Hong Kong’s demographic age structure. There is hardly any policy or measure that addresses ageing women’s needs, nor can “genderless” services account for these same daily-life needs¹³. Ageing women comprise a large proportion of Hong Kong’s ageing population; however, they are under-represented in the policy formulation, as sex-disaggregated data is very limited, a fact that makes it difficult to compare the living conditions of older women with those of older men.

An example of sex-blind and gender-blind responses to older people in Hong

Kong concerns the common kitchen in all single elderly units in “Housing for Senior Citizens” (HSC). The Housing Authority specially designed this type of housing for group living of aged population¹⁴. In 1998, when I was conducting research (Phillips, Chan, and Luk 2000) on the living conditions in these housing units for single seniors, I visited one of the newly built blocks of HSC in Kowloon East. I found that, in comparison with HSC that I had visited, this HSC’s kitchen looked spacious and clean, and no one was complaining about overcrowding or kitchen-use conflicts. The residents there explained to me that the whole floor is for men residents, and they much prefer to dine at a nearby restaurant than to cook in the kitchen; hence, its clean, tidy appearance. In other HSCs that I visited, I found that almost all the people who were complaining to me about the kitchen were female—women, who made extensive use of that kitchen.

Shared facilities and crowded conditions were sources of conflict amongst roommates, and this ongoing problem has hindered the mutual care and the communication that has been promoted by “group living” advocates (Phillips, Chan, and Luk 2000). The Housing Authority assumes that units fit for males are fit for females. The only sex-based or gender-based distinction between the two groups manifests itself in the separation of all male flats from all female flats in HSCs. It is not surprising that the Housing Authority is unable to tailor their services to the

unique living styles of ageing women who would spent more time in their home and who would need more space or privacy in their everyday life. Cheung (2000) argues that “gender-neutrality” may lead to bias in policy outcomes such as the Mandatory Provident Fund System’s failure to ensure financial security for women who engaged in informal sectors or who worked as homemakers. Hence, she advocates the establishment of “gender-sensitive” policies for women, with a particular focus on ageing women in Hong Kong.

The government develops ageing-related policies and services to provide solutions to the problems that afflict ageing populations. Policymakers have, in some cases, narrowed down the ageing problem to statistical calculations of “service provisions,” which illustrate the supply of the services. For example, mainly hard statistics illustrate residential-care centres for older persons. In a 1998 policy address, Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa cited such statistics when issuing this statement:

There are currently about *13,000* [my emphasis] old people in need who are waiting for residential care places.... To help meet demand and reduce the waiting time for places, we plan to provide about *8,000* [my emphasis] new subsidized places in the period between 1998 and 2002, including *7,100* [my emphasis] pledged last year. (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government 1998, paragraph 133, p. 46)

Then, in a 1999 policy address, the chief executive again reported “an increase of

3,500 [my emphasis] subsidised residential care places for the elderly” (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 1999, paragraph 19). Further, in 2000, we learned that “in the past three years, an additional 6,400 [my emphasis] subsidised residential care places have been provided, reducing waiting time by eight months” (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government 2000, paragraph 21), and the chief executive declared that, the following year would see an additional HK\$100 million (my emphasis) and 1,600 additional places. A Policy Address in 2001 provides the relevant data: “By March next year, 26,000 places (my emphasis) will be available, a 70 percent increase over the 15,000 places in 1997” (HKSAR 2001, paragraph 118). Policy-makers often use data and particularly statistics to describe the problem at hand.

As for the quality of the private care homes, which has been a major concern for the public, the discussion has focused on (1) a calculation of the number of homes that have met licensing standards and (2) the progress in statistics: “since March this year, all private homes have met the licensing standard” (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2001, paragraph 118) Then, the Chief Executive concluded that “an enormous improvement compared to the less than 1 percent of facilities (residential homes) that met these standards in 1997” and that “comparatively speaking, services provided by private care homes are now much

better than before” (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2001, paragraph 118).

However, there are still complaints about the service quality of Hong Kong’s private elderly homes, in particular concerning accident-reporting procedures (*Oriental Daily*, 7 July 2002, A36), the misconduct of home owners in the use of medicine (*Apple Daily*, 4 September 2002; *Sing Pao Daily News*, 4 September 2002), and residents’ comparatively low body weight due to bad feeding and nutrition (*Ming Pao*, 1 August 2004, A1). Also, Rita Lam from the Association for the Rights of the Elderly urged private homes to adopt—apart from government-instituted licensing standards—accreditation systems that can provide the public with better information on private homes’ performance (*Oriental Daily*, 7 July 2002, A36).

One newspaper editorial used the phrase “a growing burden” to describe older (65 or older) persons’ receiving financial support from the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA) and from the Old Age Allowance Scheme (OAA) (*South China Morning Post*, 11 April 2002, Editorial). The editorial first outlined the financial responsibility that accompanies an ageing population, pointing out that the number of Old Age Allowance recipients was 457,000 in 2001 and that cost HK\$3.56 billion. Then, the editorial further projected that, because this demographic sector is growing, “the challenge for the government is to find the

money to meet the scheme's *ever-growing demand for cash* [my emphasis]"; the editorial went on to argue that the government should point out that "there is no such thing as a free lunch¹⁵" and that the allowance as it is can only be sustained by higher tax." Further, the editorial suggested that "payment from the public coffers could only go to the needy,...introducing a tougher means test to weed out most of the OAA recipients of the allowance so the money saved could be spent elsewhere" (*South China Morning Post*, 11 April 2002). The government regulated the expansion of the demand for services first by re-emphasizing the importance of family ties and second by emphasizing the need for instruments that yield "objective assessments" regarding who is entitled to which services (a topic that I will discuss shortly). Nelson Chow (1994a) points out that the core question in older persons' services lies in "Whose responsibility is it to care for the elderly?"

The government has stated cleared and repeatedly that "caring for the elderly is the responsibility of every family"¹⁶ and that older persons should remain in the community as long as possible. The first policy paper on services for the elderly was published in November 1997 under that same name (Hong Kong Government 1977, p. 3). It states,

A caring government on its own cannot be expected to provide an entirely satisfactory solution to the problems of old age. The community as a whole must be willing and able to preserve and

foster the caring role of the family despite existing pressures on traditional family ties. In broad terms, the most feasible approach both socially and financially, is to provide appropriate social services which will enable the elderly to remain in the community for as long as possible.

On the one hand, the government relies on traditional Chinese family ties to sustain the policy direction. On the other hand, the government has developed a range of community-support services such as home-care services and enhanced home-care services¹⁷ to support the efforts of ageing women and men to remain in the community.

Three related concepts are involved here: community care, ageing in place, and continuum of care. The notion of community care (that is, enabling the elderly to remain in the community for as long as possible) was first introduced in the Social Welfare White Paper “The Way Ahead,” published in 1973. In 1994, the Hong Kong government promoted the other two concepts—ageing in place and continuum of care. The three guiding principles surfaced together in the *Report of the Working Group on Care for the Elderly*, published in August 1994. In this report, the working group supplements the notion of community care by focusing on the home environment of the elderly and on the continuity of elderly services. In this 1994 report, the government stated that the objective of services for the elderly is to “allow old people to grow old in their home environment with minimal disruption”

so that they can receive “a continuum of residential care and integration of services” (Working Group on Care for the Elderly 1994, pp. vii-viii). Despite these fine sentiments, problems persist, and my case studies in the following chapters will outline how ageing women who remain in their own community face sex-specific and gender-specific difficulties that government policy has not adequately addressed.

In order to govern the provisions of the services, the policy-makers need to develop assessment tools that rigorously and justly determine seniors’ eligibility for services. These tools are essential if the government is going to avoid unnecessary costly services for the rapidly ageing population. At a Legislative Council meeting on October 12, 2005, Chief Executive Donald Tsang delivered the 2005-2006 policy address “Strong Governance for the People,” and in it, he outlined the need to avoid “the premature admission” of elderly to homes for the elderly (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government 2005b, paragraph 51). This emphasis on cost-cutting tools reflects both the governance of the services and also the government control on ageing women’s life. Older persons resist cost-cutting tools, and in later chapters, we will see how they accomplish this resistance.

In recent years, the media and the policy-makers portrayed CSSA recipients as “greedy,” “lazy,” and “liars” (Chan 2004). In 2000, the Alliance for the Concern

of the Review of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (關注綜援檢討聯盟) published a book, *Extremely Poor* (窮到極) (Alliance for the Concern of the Review of CSSA, 2000) and alleged in it that low income families lacked sufficient money for a decent living in Hong Kong while at the same time the government and the media portrayed these low income families as “lazy people” who relied on government grants rather than support themselves. The policy-makers stated that the society should not provide “free lunch” to freeloaders. Chan, Lee, and Ho (1999, p. 108) conducted a study in which they reviewed four policy areas: housing, gender, health, and retirement protection. Drawing from the debates in the Legislative Council, they argue that “economic rationality,” which pits welfare against both economic efficiency and economic growth, has been the guiding principle for policymaking and that according to most of the councillors, social welfare “should be residual” or limited to “those least able to help themselves” (Chan, Lee, and Ho 1999, p. 108). They further contend that the legislative council agenda seldom includes disadvantaged groups such as lone parents, women, and the unemployed (Chan, Lee and Ho 1999, p. 109). The scholars assert, also, that both the policy-makers and law-makers blame the low-income families for over-dependence on social welfare and for abuses against social resources (Chan, Lee, and Ho 1999, p. 109).

Referring back to Foucault's concept of governmentality, the "conduct of conduct" today surely includes the shaping of the ageing problem and, in particular, the ways in which guiding principles of economic rationality are integral world-wide to policymaking mechanisms and thus to government efforts to monitor and to regulate welfare-service delivery. Also, governments tend to rely on a mechanism involving methods-and-assessment tools in determining older persons' needs. Then, the government relies on professionals to operate "objective" assessments that distinguish those people who are "least able to help themselves" and those people who can help themselves. It appears that policymakers and professionals can measure, manage, and govern the life content of older persons.

The *managers* of Hong Kong's policy domain have made every effort to intervene in the daily-life patterns of ageing woman. Social security, healthcare services, rent, and housing are measurable. We will see that the government holds families responsible for meeting ageing women's needs, a strategy that reflects the traditional Chinese family and its fixed gender roles.

Formation of the ageing industry

The "aging enterprise" is a phrase that Estes (1979, p. 2) first coined in 1979 to represent the "programs, organizations, bureaucracies, interest groups, trade

associations, providers, industries, and professionals that served the aged in one capacity or another.” At the same time, Estes used the term in order:

[to] call particular attention how the aged are often processed and treated as a commodity in our society and to the fact that the age-segregated policies that fuel the ageing enterprise are socially divisive “solutions” that single out, stigmatize, and isolate the aged from the rest of the society.

The notion of ageing enterprises is useful for understanding (1) the dynamics of ageing-related policy formulations and (2) how professionals exclude ageing women from decision making in the ageing policy. However, in 1993, Estes (1993, p. 296) revisited her concept and updated it to take account of the growing industry of care-management products in the United States—an industry that requires professionals to coordinate efforts in the provision of care:

The daily lives of those needing assistance require continual negotiation with others—family members, voluntary workers, and formal care providers—all of which involve struggles and conflicting interests, but with the greatest personal stakes and consequences for the care recipients. Significantly, the present constructs of managed care contain virtually no provisions or mechanisms for elders or their informal caregivers to participate in or challenge the decisions of case managers, should there be serious or consequential disagreements with the assessments and decisions made by the case managers.

In the following discussion, I will use the term “aging industry” both to denote a domain that is distinct from Estes’s earlier formulation and to put the focus on Hong Kong’s development of (1) an “active aging” culture, (2) assessment procedures, and (3) centralized waiting lists. Hong Kong’s ageing industry comprises policymakers, researchers, and professionals who have interwoven profit-making with Chinese traditions regarding family responsibility.

Chow (2000, p. 15) notes that 98 percent of Hong Kong’s population are ethnic Chinese.¹⁸ Further, he defines Hong Kong as a Chinese society (Chow 2000, p. 170). This emphasis on the Chinese majority has a direct link to the difference between traditional Chinese conceptions of the family and non-Chinese conceptions of the family, especially in respect to elders and their household status. Traditional Chinese culture handles the ageing problem by promoting respect for older persons, also known as “filial piety” [孝道 *Xiao Tao*].¹⁹ It seems that this tradition fits well with the old saying that “rearing children is for protection in your old age” (養兒防老).

In this respect, Chow (2000) states that a majority of older people who are first-generation Hong Kongers and who come from traditional Chinese families have encountered difficulties while growing old in their highly industrialized city: they were unprepared for the changes that beset family structure and values. He argues

that this ageing population has remained ambivalent in relation to their unexpected retirement-based dependency on the government. Hence, in this argument, the problems of an ageing population stem primarily from (1) the weakening of the Chinese family's traditional role as caregiver to the elderly and (2) the resulting shift of responsibility from the family to the community or the government.

In 1975, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (Hong Kong Council of Social Service 1975) published a report that was a compendium of views from professionals such as social workers and religious leaders in answer to the question, "Whose responsibility is it to care for Hong Kong's elderly?" The findings can support an analysis of possible measures in three important domains of care for the elderly: the family, voluntary agencies, and the government. The report suggested that "the traditional Chinese value is disappearing" because of unfavourable factors that are preventing families from carrying out their caregiving responsibilities. These factors included the nuclear family (as stated earlier), the lack of space for housing, resistance from the younger generation, elderly who have no family, and the prohibitory cost of care for the elderly (Hong Kong Council of Social Service 1975, pp. 12-13).

The changing family structure witnessed the nuclear family substitute for the extended family in Hong Kong, a trend that received extensive treatment in

gerontology literature (Chow 1983, 1990, 1997; Chow and Kwan 1986; Phillips 1988, 1992). Increasing evidence suggests that the “care offered by family members for elderly people is diminishing” and that “the status of elderly people in society and family is relatively weak” (Kam 1997, p. 47). The obligation of Filial piety has deeply frustrated members of younger generations who cannot fulfil this duty (Kam 1997). As a result, elderly people and their family members feel ashamed to seek help, and their problems remain unsolved. A sense of powerlessness and of helplessness ensues. Yet, the Hong Kong government still stresses traditional Chinese family values as a solution to the population-ageing problem, as is evident in the policy address entitled *Building Hong Kong for a New Era*, which former Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa delivered in 1997 (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 1997). In the subsequent policy address, Tung pointed out that the government introduced tax incentives and public housing privileges in order to sustain this policy direction (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 1998, paragraph 130, p. 45) and that the Elderly Commission launched related activities to promote respect and care for the elderly (HKSAR, 1999, paragraph 19). However, there are voices among the elderly claiming that the problem is yet unresolved.

One example of outstanding problems concerns the Social Security Branch of the Social Welfare Department, which announced that elderly CSSA

applicants who lived with their children would need to submit their application with a signed letter from the children declaring that they were unable or not willing to take care of their elders. Ageing women with whom I worked on the “KC” Estate²⁰ in Tsuen Wan told me that they would not like to apply for CSSA because they did not want to ask their children to sign that kind of letter. The women felt that it is unacceptable for them to ask their own children to declare their rejection of traditional filial-piety obligations. The children of some of the women had resisted making that kind of declaration, as they would otherwise earn the label “unfilial” [不孝 *bu xiao*].

In 1999, the government ruled out the right of the elderly to apply for the CSSA as an independent applicant if they were living with children.²¹ Ageing women who challenged this practice only made themselves more dependent on their younger children and, at the same time, tended to create conflicts or even household rifts, quite in contrast to the “young and old as one family” (長幼一家) that the government advocates.²² The policy practice also neglected both the growing trend in which ageing women seek to live economically independent lives and the hardships that besieged the younger generation owing to an economic downturn in the late nineties (Luk 2000). Hence, the needs and the wants of ageing women were blurred and remain unrecognizable under Hong Kong policy-makers’ attempted

restoration of traditional Chinese family values. In brief, the formalization of this ageing policy and of related services identified ageing women as “service recipients” and reinforced the women’s dependency on family. At the same time, women sought to live in certain ways, whether the women wanted a different type of kitchen in their HSC or the women wanted both to live with their children and to receive government old-age benefits. Policy-formulation processes excluded these more or less sex-specific and gender-specific issues.

While formulating its ageing policy and its ageing practices, the government has heavily relied on professionals by appointing consultants to related research positions, policy-development positions, or to policy-review positions. In 1972, the Hong Kong government established its first working group, which was to explore the future needs of the ageing population; the chairperson and the secretary were officials from the Social Welfare Department. Of the eight members, four were from different government departments (the Medical and Health Department, the Urban Services Department, the Census and Statistics Department, and a City District Office) (Working Party on the Future Needs of the Elderly 1973, p. 15). The rest of the participants were representatives from non-government organizations (then, “voluntary agencies”) such as the Hong Kong Council of Social Services (which was the chief coordinating body for all social services in Hong Kong).²³

In a similar move, the Elderly Commission, formed in 1997, was to provide advice to the government in its formulation of a comprehensive policy for elder care. In the first policy address made by the chief executive in 1997 he adopted “Care for the Elderly” as a strategic policy objective. The Elderly Commission was established in the same year and their terms of reference states that the commission is “to monitor implementation of policies and programmes affecting the elderly and to make recommendations to Government to ensure that agreed objectives are met” (Elderly Commission 2006a). The web page of the commission specifies that commission members include “professionals from elder-related services and other sectors, academics, and community leaders.” Of the 13 newly appointed or reappointed members for the 2005 commission, six had medical backgrounds, there were professors in gerontology, medicine and therapeutics, or psychiatry, and two were from non-government organizations’ management level; others were engineer consultants, insurance company officers, and private-senior-home operators (Elderly Commission 2006b). Hence, it is clear that the government is relying on the experts and on professionals to formulate ageing policy whilst no ageing women had an opportunity to participate in the commission, an exclusion or omission which has been under criticism from seniors’ special-interest groups (The Association for the Rights of Elderly, 2004).

The emergence and the role of social gerontology

Policy-making and professionals on ageing have received backing from knowledge on ageing and from experiences formed in the discipline of social gerontology, which was started thirty years ago. The gerontologists' point of view has becoming an important reference for policy-makers, professionals, and the public in their efforts to understand ageing persons' needs and to interpret research on ageing-related experiences (Andrews and Clark 1999).

The establishment of gerontology as a distinct area of study started in the United States in 1945, when the American Club for Research on Aging decided to incorporate itself and to change its name to the Gerontological Society (Wallace, Williamson and Lung 1992). It published two journals including the *Journal of Gerontology* and *Gerontologist* to discuss the issues of ageing. Immediately, gerontology research mushroomed in the United States. As for the British Society of Gerontology, which was established in 1973 in Britain, its aim was to create a multidisciplinary forum in which researchers in the field of ageing could work with professionals from other fields. In a similar way, in 1986, the Hong Kong Association of Gerontology was established by a group of professionals, including geriatricians, nurses, social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists,

clinical psychologists, and academicians whose objective was to promote better elderly services. In 2000, many of these same persons formed the Hong Kong Institute of Gerontology as a response to “the call of the community for knowledge and skill in elderly care” and with a particular focus in areas of “multi-disciplinary training, public education, and research.” (The Hong Kong Association of Gerontology webpage)

To date, there are three institutes in Hong Kong whose focus is on the ageing population there and on the study of gerontology. Both the Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies, set up at Lingnan University, and the Centre for Gerontology and Geriatrics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong were founded in 1998, whilst the Centre on Ageing was formally officiated at the University of Hong Kong in 1999 and was renamed the Sau Po Centre on Ageing in 2002. These institutes have taken part in consultancy studies that concern mainly older persons invited by the government or independent funding foundations and that, hence, actively engage in knowledge formation regarding Hong Kong’s ageing population.

For example, the Sau Po Centre on Ageing has listed 35 research studies that it has overseen since its establishment. Amongst them, in the year 2000 alone, there were three consultancy studies that, for the government, reviewed Hong Kong’s current social services, housing provisions, and mechanisms for service allocation. A

total of HK\$1,910,000 was received from the Health and Welfare Bureau, the Social Welfare Department, and the Housing Authority.²⁴ Andrews and Hermalin (2000, p. 54) note their observation of the inter-dependency among this triplet: ageing policies, gerontology research, and practitioners:

Many of the surveys undertaken in the (Asia-Pacific) region have been prompted by the awareness of the policy-makers of the importance of population ageing...and in turn the results of the surveys provide policy-makers, planners and practitioners with information and insight important to the execution of sound policies and programme.

In Hong Kong, researchers expended much energy in developing the previously mentioned assessment tools that would distinguish people “least able to help themselves” from people who, although members of the rapidly growing ageing population, presumably require neither services nor benefits. One example herein concerns a centralised mechanism: the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services, which the government developed in 2000. In the Annual Report of the Social Welfare Department entitled “We Care and Share: 2003 & 2004 Review” (Social Welfare Department 2005, p. 32), the department outlined the introduction of the new services-allocation mechanism:

The Central Waiting List for subsidised long term care services

was brought into implementation on 28 November 2003. Underpinning the Central Waiting List is a centralised registration system whereby the Standardised Care Need Assessment Management Offices serve as focal points of contact for elders to register their needs and make applications for subsidised long term care services under the welfare system, [and the service] which are matched in accordance with elders' care needs as ascertained by the Standardised Care Need Assessment tool.

The Social Welfare Department adopted an internationally recognised assessment tool, the Minimum Data Set-Home Care (MDS-HC), to ascertain the care needs of elders and to match them with appropriate services. Assessors under the mechanism are professionals such as social workers, nurses, occupational therapists, and physiotherapist. They are required to go through training and accreditation on the use of MDS-HC. The assessment areas include self-care ability, impairment level, health condition, environmental condition, and coping condition. On the basis of the results, social workers and social-service agencies can work out a suitable care plan for the older persons and can carry out regular reviews. And to monitor the mechanism's operations, (WHO?) has established five multi-disciplinary Standardised Care Need Assessment Management Offices (Elderly Services) [SCNAMO(ES)s] in the cluster of Hong Kong, East Kowloon, West Kowloon, New Territories East, and New Territories West.²⁵

Under this assessment mechanism, older women not only have lost their

voices in choices but also have had to rely on both the assessors who come from professional groups and indicators to determine whether they have to stay in the community or in institutions. Residential settings serve as a telling example: an older woman who needs to go through the mechanism of assessment typically cannot make her own choice. She can make her preferences manifest only in a few areas. According to the guidelines listed in the assessment form, older women can indicate their choices for location, (in a district sense, but not a neighbourhood sense), the religious affiliations of the home (but not in terms of its mission or staff), and diet arrangement (there seems to be a pre-set menu before they enter their home). They have to indicate whether they are willing to accept a subsidized place under the Enhanced Bought-place Scheme,²⁶ which was operated by the private sector under specific spacing standards and staffing requirements. However, the form does not specify these standards and requirements, and there is no supplementary information on the effects that the women's choices will have on the women's lives. What is more, professionals—rather than the women—make the final decision regarding these matters.

There are altogether 1,790 accredited assessors as of May 31, 2006, with 59.1 percent from the Social Welfare Department, 31.3 percent from non-government organizations, 9.6 percent from the Hospital Authority (Social

Welfare Department 2006b). As control over “assessment” normally falls to professional staff such as nurses, doctors, and physiotherapists, it is the case that the system refuses to integrate the choices and the views of ageing women on the grounds that the women lack professional knowledge or qualifications in these fields. Thus, service-target groups can make their voices heard only by going outside the established mechanisms or by asking for assistance from organizations and councillors who have inside and direct access to policy-makers, as we will see in later chapters. As a result, ageing women share control over their body, their home, and their daily life with the ageing industry.

Ageing-related policies and measures that derive from gerontology studies normally describe or define the current status of older people so as to facilitate care professionals’ ability to manage situations: “Care managerialism constitutes a move away from direct social care towards ‘monitoring’ and ‘assessment’.” (SSI 1991 cited in Powell and Biggs 2000, p. 4). Stephen Katz (2000, p. 14) points out that researchers extensively used one of the assessment tools, the Activities of Daily Living (ADL) tool, as a standardized framework through which the researchers could measure special physical competencies necessary for independent life. Specifically, the tool enables researchers to “articulate and to operationalise a variety of local concepts and problems that determine successful aging.” Katz states that

ADL indicators provide information not only on an individual's activity capacity, but that professionals have used the measurement more extensively. Fillenbaum (1995) illustrated this in *The Encyclopaedia of Aging*, describing thus the extensive use of ADL activity capacity:

It [ADL] has been used to indicate individual social, mental, and physical functioning, as well as for diagnosis; to determine service requirement and impact; to guide service inception and cessation; to estimate the level of qualification needed in a provider; to assess need for structural environmental support; to justify residential location; to provide a basis for personal employment decisions; to determine service change and provide arguments for reimbursement; and to estimate categorical eligibility for specific services (e.g. attendant allowances). (Fillenbaum 1995, p.9)

Hence, Katz (2000, p. 142) points out that the influence of ADL reaches “beyond individual assessment to encompass housing, financial, and service provisions.” and he argues that “activity is not simply something people do, but is a measurable behaviour whose significance connects the worlds of elderly people to the largesse of expertise.” (Katz 2000, p. 142) Indicators and measurements relative to Hong Kong's elderly services also touch on level of depression or happiness, quality of life, living standards, living arrangements, and living environment. In terms of international exchanges, the ageing industry produces important information exchanges amongst countries and helps formulate the United Nations' approach to

ageing-related policy (Andrews and Clark 1999). As Powell and Biggs (2000, p. 3) have argued, the medico-technical and care-management discourses represent an increase in the control that medical and social service professionals can exert on older persons' lifestyles.

Apart from assessment problems and control problems in the ageing industry, the care and support mechanisms are problematic. Harper (2000, p. 116) summarizes the ageing-related research in Britain and comments that the work on the care and support of older adults has focused on the perspective of the provider. She argues that "research is needed to further our understanding of the personal strategies adopted by older adults and their families as they negotiate the range of care strategies open to them" (Harper 2000, p. 116). She further points out that the current emphases in social policy—on "user involvement" and on "empowerment"—need further development for the context of older adults in gerontology studies and practices (Harper 2000, p. 117). Similar to the British case, the Hong Kong case suffers from limited discussions on the social and the political participation of the ageing population and, in particular, of ageing women (Cheung 2000). Concerning service provision, the study launched by Cheng, Chan, and Lee (1999) is the first of its kind to review the attitudes of gerontology workers and the effects that these attitudes have on the workers' work. The study's findings derived

from a survey of distinctive groups including the general public, social workers, students, and older persons of senior centres. These findings suggest that ageism prevails amongst gerontological social workers, many of whom did not seem to believe that elderly people were psychologically adjusted (Cheng, Chan, and Lee 1999). On the basis of the social workers' negative attitudes, Cheng, Chan, and Lee (1999) contend that Hong Kong's social-work education provides students with inadequate training on ageism.

Despite the aforementioned limitations in ageing-related research and studies, gerontology policy and gerontology studies successfully raised awareness of both the growth of the ageing population and the problems therein, not only at the local level but at a political level, which in turn influences ageing policy at the global level (Andrews and Clark 1999, p. P7). The United Nations has promoted research that is shifting the focus from demographic-growth patterns to policy formulation at national and international levels (Andrews and Clark 1999, p. P7). I will argue in the following section that policy concerns and that research studies in the gerontology context are shaping the Hong Kong media's representation of ageing women.

Nevertheless, ageing women have a wider awareness of the ageing problem, of the ways in which the feminization of the aging population is perceived by others as a "problem", and of the kinds of solutions that would suit them. Also, ageing women

are also taking part in shaping their representations in complex ways that range from individual action to group activism.

Ageing women in the media domain

According to Gilleard and Higgs (2000, p. ix), “[It] no doubt is true that the extremes of life are more interesting to portray than the modes.” In Hong Kong, the images of older women correspond to “the extremes in life.” Chan, Leung and Luk (2002) demonstrated that selected TV advertisements about ageing women portray the women as “weak” and as needing “others to take care of them”. Also, elder women in TV advertising are commonly portrayed as stubborn and ignorant (Chan, Leung, and Luk, 2003).

Gibb and Holroyd (1996) conducted a comparative study of Hong Kong’s and Australia’s print-media images of the aged and they, too, found these negative images of ageing. Their study not only confirms the so-called negative meanings (such as pathology and vulnerability) that attach themselves to the aged in print media in Hong Kong, but at the same time points out that, “in general old people have little or no role in modern Hong Kong public life and have even less opportunity to participate socially” than have old people in Australia (Gibb and Holroyd 1996, p. 173). Gibb and Holroyd (1996) argue that Hong Kong newspaper

stories presented information about old people for the benefit of the younger public's awareness rather than present related information that would be directly useful or relevant to old people themselves. They also suggested that news stories habitually associate older persons with crime victimization or travel accidents or simply with trouble-proneness.

In my observations of the literature, the studies on ageing-related issues that have received notice from the Hong Kong government are those which have gained wide coverage in the media and have helped to shape the "aging problem." One example of this trend concerns a research report on elderly suicide and depression that was released by the Elderly Commission in 2000. This news received coverage in the "Sunday Focus" section of *South China Morning Post* (Ella Lee 2000). The column featured a big photo of an older woman's face, and she was using her white handkerchief to wipe away tears. The column was entitled "On the brink" and a caption explained the illustration: "Chu Pui-ying, 88, hates living with her relatives. She spends her days out of the flat and has attempted suicide once." The inside story detailed the alleged mistreatment of Madam Chu by her son and daughter-in-law, who refused to eat with her at the same table or even to talk to her. The story granted considerable front-and-centre space to the first study, launched by the government at a cost of one million Hong Kong dollars, wherein psychiatrists, statisticians, and

social welfare professionals from the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University jointly investigated the issue.

Yeung and Szeto wrote an earlier article for the Focus section of the *South China Morning Post* on May 4, 2000, and the article's bold headline read "Used, Abused, and Discarded," and the subheading read "The Lives of Some Elderly People Are a Cruel Torment Created by Their Own Flesh and Blood" (2000, p.21). Photos occupied half of the pages and carried the caption "Some elderly are forced to move out of their homes." The large photo was of an elderly bare-footed man squatting in a back corridor, and the two smaller photos showed the crowded living condition of the elders and carried the caption "Wong Man-fook and his wife live in a tiny room, shunned by their family, while others endure squalid conditions in the homes for the aged." In a similar type of presentation, the journalist uncovers the stories of ageing women in detail. One of these women, Yeung Kam, was in her eighties and had been kicked out of her flat by her daughter and son-in-law. She was surviving on the HK\$20 that she made daily from supplying recycling companies with used cardboard boxes. The journalist also reported on the number of reported elderly abuse cases that the Social Welfare Department had received, and on the views held by a senior-rights advocate and by professors in gerontology, including Professor Iris Chi and Professor Chan C. M. The whole story ended with a note

made by a spokesman from the Social Welfare Department: its staff would look into the “problem.” In this respect, we can see how the ageing industry is involved in the media-based discursive production of the so-called ageing problem.

Scholars in media and cultural studies argue that media and television news, in particular, has become the public’s most important source of information (Bower 1985, Iyengar and Kinder 1987 cited in Hilt 1997, p. 3), and Atchley (1991) and Hilt (1997) highlight the fact that there has been limited research on television news’ portrayals of older adults. In more general terms, critical gerontologists have charged the media with failing to capture the reality of being old in America and with creating and reinforcing negative stereotypes about old people despite the fact that they are the fastest growing segment of the population in the country (Schramm 1969; Gantz, Gartenberg, and Rainbow 1980; Bramlett-Soloman and Wilson 1989; Markson, Pratt, and Taylor 1989, as quoted in Hilt 1997, p. 4). Powell and Williamson (1985, p. 5) assert that various studies’ bias against elderly people resulted in the studies’ failure to report important information about ageing, an outcome that left some elderly feeling socially insignificant and powerless (Hilt 1997).

In Hong Kong, apart from the demographic inquiry, there is a growing concern over the images that policymakers and researchers attach to ageing. A recent

survey on “Image of Ageing” completed by the Elderly Commission and the Health, Welfare, and Food Bureau in 2005 showed that misconceptions about ageing were prevalent in Hong Kong amongst the elderly, as well as the non-elderly (Elderly Commission and the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau 2005). The survey stated that “two-thirds of the elderly believed erroneously that most ‘older people were senile’, ‘did not have the ability to learn’, or ‘did not have enough money for basic needs’” (Elderly Commission and the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau 2005, p. 8). These negative images sharply contrast with the old Chinese saying, “Having aged people in a family is just like having a treasure” (家有一老如有一寶).

The study to which I referred just above was part of a three-year Healthy Ageing Campaign launched by the Elderly Commission in 2001. As set forth in a 2000 policy address (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2000, p. 21), this campaign was to promote “Active Ageing” and “Healthy Ageing”, and aimed at combating ageing-related stereotypes and at improving ageing-related images. The survey brief admitted that, in Hong Kong, there were many stereotypes that concerned the elderly and that contributed to negative biases about aged people but that, despite this phenomenon, the perception of ageing was changing rapidly in some ways (Elderly Commission and the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau 2005, p. 1).²⁷ However, it is important to note that the survey also suggested that, “while old

people in general were described in more negative terms, particularly as being sickly and stubborn, non-elders personally found their acquainted elders to be mature, independent, sociable and happy” (Elderly Commission and the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau 2005, p. 6). The interplay of the negative and the positive images of ageing support Atchley’s (1991) argument that it is difficult to generalize about television portrayals of ageing because television is such a varied and complex medium.

In order to test these findings, I asked some university students who were in their early twenties and who were enrolled in a course called “Narrating Hong Kong”²⁸ to reflect on what they associate with the term “aging women” (年長婦女) (in the course of a lecture I gave on ageing women at Lingnan University on November 19, 2003). The students responded randomly, and their answers were listed on the white board. The responses in the beginning were very much similar to those so-called negative characterizations, such as physical deterioration (wrinkles, loss of teeth, and liver spots). Other responses concerned personality traits of older persons that suggested unpleasantness, such as “troublesome,” “forgetful,” “stupid,” “foolish,” “verbally incoherent,” “purposeless,” “resented,” “dependent,” “overly nostalgic,” and “socially excluded.” However, as we were approaching the end of the discussion, a few students came up with attributes that were reminiscent of

so-called positive ones: “warm emotions” and “home-cooked and delicious meals,” for example.

This quick experiment suggests that negative images of ageing women may mask positive ones; hence, researchers should avoid jumping too quickly to the conclusion that the younger generation possesses generally negative feelings or attitudes toward older persons. Gibb and Holroyd (1996, p. 151) point out that Hong Kong’s print media publishes positive stories portraying the life of older people, though the researchers point out, also, that these “positive stories carried a sense of exceptional rather than ordinary life.” In my observations, there is news coverage of those “extraordinary cases” involving older persons—stories about, for example, a band of amateur musicians who, in their sixties, played their music on Saturday nights in Tsuen Wan and who attracted hundreds of elderly residents to join in the party: indeed, the gatherings were named Tsuen Wan’s Very Own Benevolent Social Club in a story published in the *Post Magazine* (Golden Oldies 2003). Other examples concern elderly people who are learning about computers (Cheung, P. S. 2001; Yeung, S. 2001), elderly people studying in formal education settings as university students (Ng, H. Y. 1999), or elderly people busily and positively occupied with informal classes and social activities (Tsang, K. M. 2003). On the basis of the evidence above, it is possible for us to say, with reason, that a

combination of negative images and positive images—of negative stereotypes and positive stereotypes—underlies representations of ageing women.

In 2003, a social service centre created a special series of programs²⁹ that include Let Beautiful Clothes Add Colour to Your Life, which included the Best Hong Kong Elder Images Awards. The series has placed older persons in Hong Kong on centre stage and aims at using fashion and design to boost the images of older persons. The organiser of the series was the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, a non-government organization in Hong Kong. According to the church, the programs were the very first that addressed the older persons' sense of clothing style. The series would counter the low self esteem and poor images of older persons in the society as a whole. The organisers declared that better images or better dressing habits would increase the self confidence and the happiness of older persons (Ho, B. W. 2003). Also, the organiser criticized the limited options available to older persons in relation to clothing (ELCHK 2003b). Of particular concern to older person were the unfashionable, drab, or poorly designed clothes and accessories for older persons. In contrast to the negative images and widely reported vulnerability of older persons commonly found in the print media (Gibb & Holroyd 1996), these new images of modernized older persons suggested a “more positive” understanding of later life. In 2003, the *Economic Daily* devoted a whole page to the

series. And in 2005, Radio Television Hong Kong produced a special documentary on the Elder Beauty Contest.³⁰

The other examples also targeted the ageing population as consumers. One distinct example would be the “purpose-built” housing, namely the Residence for Senior Citizens (namely the SEN scheme)³¹ for middle income retirees in their fifties. The Hong Kong Housing Society initiated the scheme on the basis of a survey, “Market and Marketing Research for Senior Citizen Residences,” commissioned by Townland Consultants Ltd between 1995 and 1996. The final report concluded that the demand for self-contained units with specialized facilities and services that fulfill seniors’ recreation needs and their care-receiving needs would likely be attractive to newly retired persons who have high levels of education or to retired persons who previously worked for the government or to persons who are civil servants nearing their retirement (Hong Kong Housing Society, 1996). Promoting this SEN scheme were project slogans such as “With SEN, life begins in the 60s!” and “Home Alone. Not Anymore!” which appeared on website created by the Hong Kong Housing Society. Apart from the website, there is a booklet entitled “Live Better Than the Young Ones,” which promotes a “different life style for aging women and men.” (Hong Kong Housing Society 2003).

The large photos next to the inside text portray ageing women and men

who are reading books or elegantly seated on a big sofa or relaxing in the outdoor garden or swimming in the pool. Medical professionals take good care of the residents, and nurses and doctors engage a smiling resident in his wheelchair. Attached to each scene are similar captions that resemble the dialogue between the older generation and the younger one. One caption reads, “Grandma, you are so privileged (你好野)! Sea views.... My home did not have them!” The inside page shows the grandma who, wearing a proud face, replies, “Here the environment is good, so near to the Mass Transit Railway, you can’t begrudge me for it.” Other sections of the booklet show similar situations, but with distinct features of the SEN project such as state-of-the-art technology, a club house with sauna, swimming pools, a spa, and plenty of private space. The Housing Society at a press conference held in 2004 declared that the SEN scheme used the aforementioned promotional strategies to spread both the notion of “Quality with choice” and the basic principles of “dignity, aging in place, continuum of care, convenient lodging, and community environment, as well as social inclusion.”³²

According to Lee (1999) from the Department of Journalism at the Hong Kong Baptist University, the ageing group was a “rarely visible” group in mass media in Hong Kong and pointed out that “power” and status in the society will affect their opportunity to engage in media coverage of the ageing population. She

gave examples of elderly celebrities such as Ho Hung Sun, the casino owner in Macau; Lee Ka Shing (李嘉誠), a well known business man in Hong Kong; elder politicians such as Jiang Zemin (江澤民), the prime minister of the People's Republic of China; and Tung Chee Hwa, former Chief Executive in Hong Kong. They have easier access to media reporting than do the vast majority of members of the ageing population, especially ageing women. However, Lee (1999) suggested that the elderly and elderly-oriented organizations need to participate in social movement modes of action in order to influence the media and educators in media studies. In this way, some ageing groups had engaged in social action to successfully gain media coverage.

Social activists in this field rely on the media to uncover the “desperate” situation of older persons to the general public. Media is one of the recognized targets in social action in Hong Kong, as suggested in the *Organisers' Manual* published in 1994 by the Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union. In practice, social activists planned creative and media-attractive programmes in order to attract newspaper and TV coverage. During these years, there were other reports on older women who engaged in action, but in association with social-service organizations. One example is of the 1998 newspaper article entitled “Though Children Live Together, They Are Denied Tenancy: Single Elderly Challenge the Housing

Department,” which appeared in the *Oriental Daily* (June 18, 1998, A 11). Another article was “Elderly in Lower Nga Tau Kok Estate Demonstrate: Crying Out Slogans to the Housing Authority for Relocation to the Original Estate,” which appeared in *Kwan Tong Star Newspaper* (August 6, 2001 p. 4). The photo showed older women and men who were in a mixed group and who were petitioning for their rights, all of which occurred in a public housing estate. The photo suggested that the group was calm. They were holding papers and signboards to declare their needs.

On other occasions, ageing women joined other parties such as Legislative Councillors to appeal for their rights. On March 8, 2000, *Ming Pao* reported on two old ladies who complained about the over-crowdedness of their small flats (‘Two Elderly Couple families’ 2000). The headline is “Elderly Sisters Crowd in a 170 sq ft flat.” The two old ladies stressed that the over-crowdedness of their flats had made it difficult for them to invite friends over. The lack of space brought to light the two ladies’ limited space for mobility: they could walk only to and from the kitchen and the living room as exercise. The photo on the left-hand side showed the flat over-crowded with reporters and the council members. The caption read, “The chair of the Equal Opportunity Committee, Wu Hung Yuk, and Mr. Lee Chuek Yan, the councillor, visited the Chan sisters to understand their living situation, and the photographers found it difficult to find a place to take photos.”

There were TV programmes that often reported on older persons who joined in social action and who organised with each other to voice their discontent toward government policy. One such segment was “Gentle Petitions,”³³ broadcast on March 17, 2003, on the programme *Hong Kong Connection*, produced by Radio Television Hong Kong.³⁴ The programme interviewed older women and men who organised social actions to fight for their own rights. The interviewees expressed their discontent and explained how they had organised. In 2004 and 2005, there were programmes that, again, targeted ageing-related activism.

Individual women also were represented as active. There are cases of an ageing woman who, on her own and on behalf of herself, chose to take action. *Apple Daily*, for example, ran a story on September 23, 2001, concerning Ms. Cheung, a woman who was in her seventies and who was complaining about inappropriate advertising messages by the corporation Tai Pan Bread & Cakes Co., Ltd.³⁵ The advertisement was about a grandchild about five years old who catches his grandmother eating moon cake and who complains to his mother, alleging, “Mother! Grandma is stealing moon cake!” Ms. Cheung proclaimed that the message is inappropriate since it would have an unfortunate “role-model” effect on younger children; she was all the more convinced of this in that her grandson had similarly forbidden her to eat biscuits and had complained to his mother that Ms. Cheung was

stealing food when she tried to get two biscuits before taking her medicine. Ms. Cheung issued her complaint with the *Apple Daily* and urged the company to apologize to all older persons for harming the relationship between these two generations.

The examples discussed above suggest that there is indeed growing media coverage of ageing women's social participation rather than primarily on the "powerlessness" of ageing women. I will argue that these emerging images of organised ageing women will strengthen social movements in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

The above discussion has showed how the policy-makers, and gerontologist research and practices, at both the local level and the international level, describe the ageing population as a social problem. Policy-makers have a general awareness of "aging as a challenge" to the world—as a challenge that needs to be "governed" or "managed." This awareness has no doubt prompted policy-makers to form ageing-related policies—hence, the mushrooming of ageing-related research. However, in this context, both policy and research blurs ageing women's needs and wants by confining them to a homogeneous group of aged. Moreover, in contrast to expectations, policy and service measurements have not helped to build a better

environment; instead, they have further deprived ageing women of everyday-life choices including those related to housing and health issues. The launching of the Active Ageing Campaign and the Healthy Ageing Campaign in Hong Kong reflects that population's growing awareness of the negative images of the ageing population and of ageing women, in particular. The examples of the 2002-2003 Senior Contest and of the SEN housing scheme for middle-income retirees concern a social push to renew images of the ageing population that society had once represented with almost uniquely negative images. All of a sudden, segments of society that serve older persons are shifting the focus onto the construction of positive images of older persons. The images of ageing in Hong Kong are, today, an increasingly popular topic for policy-makers, gerontologists, and service organizations. However, it is not difficult to find that images, as such, are often interpreted as a kind of fixed entity that comprises two poles: negative characteristics and positive characteristics. And negative ones can be changed and replaced by newly defined positive ones, with the assumption that a rise in older persons' confidence will follow (see, for example, Ho 2003; Mak 2005).

Amongst these new images of Hong Kong's ageing population, I focus on the social participation of ageing women. Some examples from the media suggest that ageing women who participate in social movements range, in terms of their

approaches, from individual complainants to organised groups. These women have expressed themselves, used their voices, and have gained some coverage in the public realm. In the following chapters, I will focus on three cases that concern ageing women who function as actors in social movements, as objects of media attention, and as people of interest for social workers, policy-makers, and the wider public. As we will see, their social movement practices have particular resonance in the social environment as defined in this chapter, that is, in policy, in the ageing industry, and in the media domain. It is these three environmental factors that the ageing women activists have woven together into a web of *supporting* factors.

NOTES

¹ For classic studies of everyday life that have been influential in cultural studies, see, Michel de Certeau (1984); Henri Lefebvre (1984, 1992), and Agnes Heller (1984).

² According to Cheung (2000), elderly people in 1999 constituted almost 60 percent of Hong Kong's social security assistance scheme, and amongst the recipients age 80 or older, 70 percent were female. Statistics of the Social Work Information Kit, produced by the Hong Kong Council of Social Services, show that amongst the total number of older person joining the multi-service centre for the elderly and the social services centre for the elderly, 71.39 percent were women in April 2000 and 75.24 percent were women in March 2001. And ageing women outnumbered their male counterparts in all years listed. [Online] available at <http://swik.org.hk>, retrieved on July 26, 2006.

³ In 2002, the Census and Statistics Department (2002) published a thematic report on older persons. The report provides a comprehensive range of statistics concerning older persons in Hong Kong. The data derive mainly from the results of the 2001 Population Census, which the Hong Kong government conducted to understand the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the population there. The report covers demographic characteristics, education, the labour force, and the living arrangements of older persons, and analysed these characteristics according to sex.

⁴ Lam's (2003) paper, entitled "Older Women as Carers" was presented at the 5th Asia Women's Forum, the Special Caucus on Older Women, held in Hong Kong December 19-22, 2003. In the paper, Lam analyses aging women who take care of their spouse or family members. Lam pays particular attention to these women's needs; William, Lee (1999) published a paper entitled "The Feminisation-of-poverty in an Aged Population in Singapore" in 1999 as part of Working Paper Series, No. 6 (6/99), by the Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies, Lingnan University.

⁵ I did a search of the past policy addresses (from 1997 to 2006) made by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and found that the addresses between 1997 and 2001 discussed aging people's issues, though at various lengths.

⁶ The working party was chaired by the Assistant Director (General) of the Social Welfare Department and the party's members included representatives from the Medical and Health Department; the Urban Services Department, and the Census and Statistics Department. Representatives from the Hong Kong Council of Social Services and non-government organizations were involved (see the summary of the report by Working Party on the Future Needs of the Elderly 1973, p. 15).

⁷ To elaborate these five main categories: 1) Welfare services covers social security's infirmity allowances, social security's funeral expenses, home help service, meals service, daycare centres, home visits, and counselling service; 2) Medical and health services include community-nursing service; 3) Medical-care community services include recreation facilities, transport, and employment services; 4) Housing includes public-housing units and improvement grants; 5) Residential care includes hostels, homes for the aged, care-and-attention homes, infirmaries, and geriatric hospital care.

⁸ For examples, see, Tam Yiu Chung, former chairman of the Elderly Commission in Hong Kong, in his welcoming speech for the 2002 Population Ageing: Opportunities and Challenges" Symposium, held on June 8, 2002. Tam asked the participants to participate actively and to understand how one and the society can adequately prepare for the challenge of an aging population (*Takungpao*, June 8, 2002, A17); Ho Wing Him (2004) argued that, "The Old Age Issue Is Urgent". In 2005, the Consultation Paper "Building a Healthy Tomorrow: Discussion Paper on the Future Service Delivery Model for Our Health Care System" highlighted the aging population: "1 in 5 would be over 65 by 2030"—as one of the challenges to Hong Kong's existing healthcare system.

⁹ "In 2000, there were 600 million people aged 60 and over; there will be 1.2 billion by 2025 and 2 billion by 2050. Today, about two thirds of all older people are living in the developing world; by 2050 it will be 75 percent. In the developing world, the very old (aged 80+) is the fastest growing population group" (The World is Fast Ageing? 2006)

¹⁰ In 1996, the United States Department of Commerce published a wallchart entitled "Global Aging into the 21st Century." The wallchart shows the changing

global age structure and also compares the percentage of population age 60 and over in 1996 to that in 2025.

¹¹ For activity details, see the Elderly-resources page produced by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (n.d.); also see the special issue on the International Year of Older Persons, *Wen Wei Po* published on January 23 1999 (Mok, 1999).

¹² See Walker (1990) for another discussion of the fallacy of the elderly dependence ratio.

¹³ According to the services listed by the Social Welfare Department regarding elderly services, there is no specific programme targeting aging women. The service targets are identified in gender-neutral terms such as “older persons,” “elderly,” and “caregivers.” The service targets mention no special situation of aging women. For a detailed list of the services, see Hong Kong Council of Social Service and Social Welfare Department (1999, pp. 14-15).

¹⁴ The Housing Department operated housing for senior citizens in order to build units that featured shared bathrooms, shared kitchens, and shared living rooms—all shared by a group of three to four unrelated single elderly persons or couples on public housing estates (Hong Kong Housing Authority 2003).

¹⁵ “Free lunch” is a term that describes welfare or benefits that goes to people who did not contribute to the fund. Opponents of welfare use the term to describe people who urge government to support social services.

¹⁶ The 1997 policy address “Building Hong Kong for a New Era,” delivered by the Chief Executive of HKSAR, Tung Chee-hwa, at a Legislative Council Meeting on October 8, 1997, paragraph 114.

¹⁷ In April 2001, the Social Welfare Department established enhanced home and community care-giving services to enable older people to age in place. The services include basic and special nursing care, personal care, transport and escort services, home making, and meal services. See, Social Welfare Department (2005).

¹⁸ It is noteworthy that a special feature on the Saturday Night Live programme was initiated by a group of elderly amateur musicians from Indonesia (Golden Oldies 2003). Although there is a growing population of non-Chinese groups in Hong Kong, the discussions on aging for older persons are very much confined to the Hong Kong Chinese.

¹⁹ Kam (1996) defines the Chinese traditions for aging in this way: Chinese perceive older persons as “respectable” and as symbolic of seniority in the family.

²⁰ The KC Estate is not the real name of the public housing estate. The KC Estate was built in the 1960s, and many aging women moved there after the younger generations moved out of the old estates. The ageing women lived there on their own. I worked there as a social worker from 1988 to 1996.

²¹ The government set up an inter-departmental steering group chaired by the Director of Social Welfare and comprising representatives from the Health and Welfare Bureau (HWB), the Finance Bureau, the Education and Manpower Bureau, the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Census and Statistics Department, the Labour Department (LD), and the Employees Retraining Board (ERB). The group started reviewing the relevant aspects of the CSSA Scheme in October 1997. One of their suggestions for the prevention of fraud and abuse was to “strictly require all CSSA applicants to apply on a household basis if they are living with other income-bearing family members under the same roof and enjoying the benefit of shared household facilities. Such a requirement will encourage family support and prevent people from abusing the system by singling out individual elderly or unemployed family members who have no financial means to apply for assistance on their own” (Social Welfare Department 1998, p. 33).

²² Madam Ng was an older woman who openly criticized the government for depriving aging people of their right to apply for CSSA if they lived with their children. An interview with her is available on the CD-ROM entitled “Ageing in Hong Kong” (2000) produced by the Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies, Lingnan University, in 2000.

²³ For the full membership list, see Working Party on the Future Needs of the Elderly (1973, Appendix, p. 15).

²⁴ The list of research on the web page of the Sau Po Centre on Ageing, was published on the webpage of the centre.

²⁵ See the leaflet “Standardised Care Need Assessment: Mechanism for Elderly Services” put out by the Social Welfare Department (Chinese text).

²⁶ Since 1998, the Social Welfare Department has purchased places in the private homes for the elderly under the “Enhanced Bought-place Scheme.” The goal is to upgrade the homes’ staffing and space standards by enhancing service requirements. The details of the requirements on space standards and staffing are listed in the webpage of the Social Welfare Department (2006)

²⁷ Information is extracted from the survey brief “Provision of Services for Conducting a Survey on Images of Aging” appendix 1, p. 1. In April 2005, the Health, Welfare, and Food Bureau sent this survey brief to territory institutions and research centres to invite tender bidding.

²⁸ Lingnan University’s Department of Cultural Studies offers the course CUS 317 Narrating Hong Kong as part of the undergraduate programme. In this course, the students study Hong Kong as a represented community by focusing on a variety of stories that have been told about Hong Kong. The course covers several topics, including that of aging women. For details, see CUS 317 (n.d.).

²⁹ Between May and October 2003, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong launched a programme called (美服添神采)(Let beautiful clothes add colour to your

life). The programme held a competition for Best Hong Kong Elder Images. The programme's main theme was to advocate beautiful dress and an attentiveness to physical beauty on the part of seniors. Professional fashion designers from hair salons helped the participants to re-package their images, and participants had access, also, to educational and training sessions on beauty and cat walks. In the final competition, a team of elderly people performed African music in order to show images of older persons that may vary from the prominent images of older persons in the public space. The media widely covered the programme, which the public received well. The following year (2005), the organiser launched another beauty contest for older persons, this time named "The New Generation Attractive Seniors Contest," as reported in the Newsletter of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong: Tuen Mun Integrated Elderly Service (屯門長者綜合服務), No. 38, June 2005, p. 5.

³⁰ The TV programme on "The Elder Beauty Contest," was produced by Yuen Siu Ching and directed by Yung Jin, *Sunday Profile*, TVB Limited, April 24, 2005.

³¹ The Hong Kong Housing Society developed the SEN scheme, whose purpose is to meet the strong demand for purpose-built housing for middle-income elderly, who have the means to live an independent life. All SEN units are self-contained, incorporating special "software" and "hardware" elements to meet the changing needs of the elderly as they grow frail (Hong Kong Housing Society 2004).

³² The Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) launched a press conference on the New Direction of Elderly Housing: the "Quality with Choice" press conference on August 6, 2004. In the press conference, the Senior Citizen Residences (SEN) Scheme developed by the Housing Society introduced the concepts of "Housing with Care" and "Aging in Place" in Hong Kong. The Housing Society argued that the SEN scheme has met the long-term housing needs of the elderly. "In view of the housing demand brought about by the increasing elderly population, the Housing Society will map out suitable plans to cope with the short-term, medium-term and long-term situations," remarked HKHS Chairman David C Lee. "There is a lack of variety of housing products for the elderly of different income groups on the market. The concept of 'Housing with Care' integrates accommodation, health services and social support services. A tripartite partnership among the Government, non-government housing organizations and private developers is required to drive the work," said Dr. Ernest Chui, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong. For details, see Lai, Chloe (2004).

³³ "The Gentle Petition", *Hong Kong Connection*, March 17, 2003, produced by Chan C H and Yip W M, Hong Kong: TV Section, Radio Television Hong Kong. The Programme is about a group of older persons who participate in social actions in order to advocate their rights concerning pension systems, healthcare costs, and the reduction of hospital beds. The reporter interviewed two elderly women and an elderly man, all in their seventies, who alleged that the government had not lived up to its promise to take care of older persons. Programme brief in Chinese: 財政預算公佈前夕，一班老人家走上街頭，示威請願，爭取應有權益。削減綜援，開增醫療收費，減少政府醫院病床床位，一浪接一浪，老人生活備受衝擊。回歸前，

特首董建華還是候任時，曾親自拜會老人家，承諾保障老人權益。回歸後，政策陳出不窮，弄至民怨沖天，只覺政府背向群眾，越行越遠。譚婆婆，梁婆婆，陳伯為我們說自己的故事，他們已是七、八十開外的老人。當官員和政客都只談數字，為財赤左支右絀時，我們把他們還原為人的故事，以人作為一個主體，去看我們的社會議題。(See, website of Radio Television Hong Kong, <http://www.rthk.org>. The video is available in the Lingnan University Library).

³⁴ The programme started in 1978 and was popular for “uncovering and delving into every local and international topic that concerns the people in Hong Kong, whether it be political, economic, educational, commercial, environmental or technological.” See *Hong Kong Connection* webpage (Radio and Television Hong Kong n.d.).

³⁵ Tai Pan Bread & Cakes Co. Ltd. is a bakery formed in 1984 with 27 shops selling bread, cookies, and cakes in Hong Kong. In 1989, the corporation introduced a new white stretchy pastry for their moon cake, which is called “Snowy moon cake” and which is very different from the traditional baked, slightly crumbly pastry. The public welcomed the pastry, and in 1993, the corporation won the silver prize for “Outstanding Marketing Strategies” offered by the Hong Kong Management Professional Association and Television Broadcast Ltd. See, the company webpage (Tai Pan Bread & Cakes Co. Ltd., 2006).

Chapter Four.

Turning vulnerability into power

In exploring how older adults define, interpret, and negotiate their realities and identities, Hurd (1999) points out that older women are particularly subject to ageism and to the devaluation of their bodies because society judges older women's physical attractiveness in terms of youthful standards (see also Susan Sontag 1972). Hurd further suggests, however, that ageing adults do not simply accept "ageist depictions of later life" and that they may "use activity and group affiliation to construct new meanings for and expectations of later life" (Hurd 1999, p. 423). In Hong Kong, there is now a growing awareness amongst service providers and also policy-makers of the effect that negative images and rhetorical constructions of ageing as a social problem have on the ageing experience¹. How do ageing women in Hong Kong react to the negative meanings that attach themselves to ageing and that concern the economic burden or the service burden that, it is assumed, older persons cost the society? The three case studies at the heart of this thesis explore how older women who have situated themselves in Hong Kong's social movements have responded to these connotations of frailty and uselessness, so widely attached to the attribute "old".

On the basis of participant-observation research conducted at a senior centre in central Canada, Hurd's study argues that, in general, ageing women distance themselves from the attribute "old" by presenting themselves as 'not old' while defining the other as "old," as a way of rejecting the label and the stereotypes associated with "oldness." In the previous chapter, I reviewed the specific social environment of ageing women in Hong Kong and focused on ageing policy, gerontology studies and practices, and finally the media's intense emphasis on family and on Chinese traditions; hence, the primary meanings of "oldness" in Hong Kong may not be the same as those that Hurd discusses in the Canadian context. Nevertheless, it is useful to ask whether ageing women in Hong Kong have reacted in a similar or in a different way to the stereotypes they encounter? How have the women responded to—and thus dealt with—the boundaries and the stereotypes attached to their "oldness"?

My three case studies here suggest that some ageing women in Hong Kong who seek independent living have indeed reacted to the ageist depiction of "later life as a social problem" in subtle but diversified ways when negotiating with policy-makers, with family, and with the local community. These groups of ageing women have taken the anticipated physical decline and the anticipated social isolation as references that inform the women about their later life. And yet, far from

remaining passive, they make every effort to secure an independent life that would help them avoid being singled out as a social problem.

Each of the three cases that I discuss centres on one of three ageing women: Ms. Choi, Ms. Wan, and Ms. Ho. These three women have resided in their present public-housing estates for over thirty years and have applied differing strategies to their ageing-related activism. Each of them has been the core or active member of her respective concern group. Each concern group is organised around specific issues, such as health costs, redevelopment, and rent. For her concern group, the core member in question calls meetings or acts as the group's representative at meetings with related organisations or takes on the role of spokeswoman when addressing related issues to the press.

In this chapter and the next two chapters, I will draw on these three cases to show that the three ageing women in Hong Kong have crafted their ageing-related arguments on the basis of their life histories in Hong Kong, histories that date back to the 1940s. Yet, each woman, as I will illustrate in individual chapters, has a distinctive practice that unfolds in her social movement and that constitutes her response to (1) ageing women's physical powerlessness, (2) ageing women's care-giving roles as mothers and grandmothers, and (3) ageing women's social isolation due to limited mobility. I hope to show that these three ageing women,

together with their concern groups, have initiated a new politics of ageing that emerges from their effort to define, interpret, and negotiate their realities and their identities. In what follows, I will focus on Ms. Choi's practices that turn ageing women's physical vulnerability into power.

Ageing in the community: Ms. Choi

Ms. Choi has lived on the THT Estate for more than forty years. THT Estate is one of the earliest built public-housing estates, one of the so-called Mark I and Mark II estates, with no kitchen or toilet inside the flats; at one time, residents had to cook in the corridors and to share the public toilet and the bathrooms on each floor. Ms. Choi moved there after the huge fire that famously destroyed "the six villages" of the Shek Kip Mei squatter settlement of Kowloon West in 1953². Decades later, she and a group of other older women continued to reside in THT. Then, in 1995, the Housing Authority announced that the four blocks internally known as "the elderly estate"³ (in which the women had long resided) were to be put up for redevelopment and that the removal of residents from THT would be completed by 2001.⁴ So, in 1996 Ms. Choi joined an older person's concern group that dealt with seniors' housing rights (權益組) formed by the Ta Hoi Tun Social Service Centre (THTSSC)⁵ operating on the THT Estate.

When in 2003 I visited the core members of the ageing women's group on the THT Estate, I found that, far from distancing themselves from the notion of being old, they had in fact been actively representing themselves *as* old, in particular by emphasizing their frailty in the slogans that they had created and in the arguments that they had developed in relation to the women's housing struggle. In their negotiations with other groups, the older women of the THT Estate made use of the prevailing image of older women's frailty in order to negotiate with policy-makers, social workers, and the community at large. The women's oldness, their insistence on their physical disabilities with such phrases as "blind, deaf, and dumb," their admitted incapacity to handle a new and unfamiliar community: all these attributes served as masks of ageing that not only hid the women's energy, efficiency, and strong internal networks but also enabled these women to gain bargaining power with the policy-makers, councillors, and the wider public so that the women might have a familiar place to live as they grew old.

In conformity with the "*Same-district Re-allocation Policy*" (原區安置) practised by the Housing Authority, the redevelopment plan required the women to move to a nearby housing estate—in the Shamshuipo district. These older women demanded an alternative re-allocation within the THT Estate itself; they suggested that the playground (known as "No. 1 playground") adjacent to their old buildings

could serve as the site for new blocks of flats and that, after the women's proposed re-allocation, a new playground could be built on the site that the women would have just vacated. Because this proposal needed endorsement not only from the Housing Authority but from other government departments as well, the women started a campaign that they called "*Same-estate Re-allocation*" (原邨安置) and that would facilitate the women's efforts to secure assistance from the social workers at a Neighbourhood Level Community Development Project (NLCDP) of the THTSSC that started in 1995.

Objecting to the women's proposal was a coalition of seven schools, including headmasters, teachers, parents, and students who claimed that they were using the "No. 1 playground" for classes. The Mutual Aid Committees (MACs) of three other blocks adjacent to the playground also objected, arguing that new buildings on the playground site would spoil their views, their environment, and their use of recreational facilities. The older women undertook a series of actions to lobby support from councillors and government departments; crucially, the women negotiated with other parties to secure the space that they wanted and, in the process, constructed their own unique representations of "Old Hong Kong" and "Old THT residents" and used these representations strategically to gain—as older women—more control over their lives.

I visited Ms. Choi's new home in the afternoon on June 30, 2003, after we had participated in a group discussion with two older women who were also core supporters of the petition. Her flat was indeed located in a building on the former "No. 1 playground", where—the women had urged—the Authority should build new blocks for the women's re-allocation. Ms. Choi told me that she moved in to one of two new blocks in 2002. The two buildings are twenty-one storeys high and have four wings, with four units in each wing. All are single-person units except for two couple units on each floor, in one of which Ms. Choi was living with her husband. She was very proud of her flat, which faced south—the direction widely preferred by Chinese people because it is cool during the summer and warm in the winter. During my visit, several of Ms. Choi's neighbours gathered in her flat, talking freely; all the older women had known each other a long time and were closely bonded. They said that they were very happy to be in their old neighbourhood, a place where they expected to stay for the rest of their lives. Showing me pictures of their group and activities, they tried to identify those who had died before they could move into the new flats that they had fought for. They described this calmly but with signs of regret.

From Ms. Choi's window, we could see the replacement playground, which they had urged the Urban Council to rent to the schools as a temporary space for

physical education while the Housing Authority “borrowed” the “No. 1 playground” adjacent to the elderly estate for construction of the women’s new homes. Ms. Choi could watch as workers demolished the old blocks to make way for the indoor grass playground that was the women’s strongest bargaining card when they were gathering support for their proposed borrowing of the old playground. The women emphasized the “new playground” argument in their petitions, and the proposal enabled the women to strike a deal—in the form of a fair exchange—and to prove that they were not neglecting other community groups (i.e., the students and the nearby neighbourhood). To the women, the social workers, and other supporters (councillors, for example), the other-centred offering (the new playground) countered public accusations that the women were selfish and inconsiderate. Recalling this so-called community conflict, the older women of THT summed up their experiences therein as the “three years and eight months”—a phrase symbolically referring not to the duration of their campaign but to the “time of suffering,” when the Japanese occupied Hong Kong during World War Two.⁶ Nevertheless, it was evident to me that the women also enjoyed their success in negotiating control over their everyday lives and that their struggle and their subsequent victory were unforgettable memories for them.

In what follows, I outline the women’s self-representations and the women’s

narrative accounts of the conflict to show how they made *use* of the prevailing image of seniors' frailty to negotiate with policy-makers, social workers, and the hostile segments of the community. I show that far from being simple and univocal, the older women's representations of themselves have a fluidity that enables the women to figure as citizens who have contributed to the prosperity of Hong Kong and as senior members of a society who demand respect and care from that society. By negotiating for space, the women successfully resisted all their bad feelings of being *thought of* as useless.

For example, this group of older women showed persistence and passion when they skilfully tackled the issue of mobility (an important subject area in the study and care of older persons) in pursuit of their demands. In my first interview with Ms. Choi and two other women in 2003, I got a sense of how they could physically get around with a speed beyond my expectations. An hour into the interview, which took place in a councillor's office, one of the women suddenly announced that the interview was over and that they had to leave. To my astonishment, in an instant, I was left alone in the room, packing up my tape recorder and notes. The ambivalence of the moment rests on the fact that these women had just been representing *themselves* as frail, helpless, and immobile, while acting swiftly in a manner that was not so useless after all.

“We are old, blind, deaf, and dumb...”

As I maintained my contact with these older women at the THT Estate, I found that they were the core of the social movement on the estate. Far from being passive participants, ignorant, or manipulated by social workers, they were actively involved in their undertakings and knew very clearly what they needed and remembered the details of events (except for the exact year of an occurrence, or some of the councillors’ names). The primary role of the older women was to mobilize support from various parties—local residents, including other older people, Councillors, radio-news commentators, and talk-show hosts—in order to bring about desirable policy change.

It is no surprise to find that the individual older women’s identities were mixed and multi-dimensional. However, these women would always begin conversation with a *typifying* statement: “We are old, blind, frail...,” as Ms. Choi and her group declared loudly both when I first interviewed them and, earlier in 1999, when they visited Lingnan University as part of their outdoor activities. Entirely congruent with the predominant public image of older persons, this declaration of physical frailty reflected the older women’s beliefs about themselves and functioned as a major argument supporting their demands. Ms. Choi used the argument to support her assertion that the women were too old to move to a new

area:

We older persons are blind [i.e., we know nothing or cannot recognize what is before us], deaf, old, frail, and disabled...[老、弱、傷殘] we don't know how to take public transportation or even how to walk. We are all so foolish and stupid [懵閉閉]. Most of us are disabled, and on our four blocks, there are so many disabled, blind, handicapped, deaf, and dumb residents—whatever you want to call us.⁷

Prevalent in the THT group's rhetoric was the women's emphasis on old age as a group phenomenon rather than as a characteristic of individuals in their eighties and nineties. This subtle distinction enabled the group's members, on the one hand, to remain within the attribution of oldness (as did the women in Hurd's study) and, on the other hand, to identify which specific neighbours actually were blind, dumb, or suffering physical deterioration:

I am younger than the others, who are very old. We have some in their eighties, nineties, and even people a hundred years old.... The couple over there is dumb, the one next door is blind. [an older woman pointing to different residential units as she named the different group members]

Ms. Choi and other ageing women repeatedly complained during my contact with them that it is not right for the Housing Authority to force the older residents on the

elderly estate first to move to a place with which they were unfamiliar and, second, to adapt to the new environment:

In the very beginning, [the Housing Authority] wouldn't allow us to stay in the same estate. In the very beginning, the Housing Authority would send us to Sham Shui Po, when the new estate there was under construction. The estate should be the Yuen Cheong Estate...or the Nam Cheong Estate.... We have been there, but we don't like these places. Because we are old, we want to move within the same estate.... That's why [we] demand to live here.

We don't know how to catch bus, how to walk home...[we will] get lost. Most of us in these four blocks are physically handicapped. Blind, deaf, dumb.... If we have to move to another place [another estate], [we] won't adapt. The residents [in the new estate] won't know you. We used to live here—lived here for a long time. The residents know you. When you meet any of them, they know where you live. If [I] get lost, they [the neighbours] know where [I] live...that is, [we] have contact with each other.

Comments akin to these show that the women constructed themselves as a group of “poor” and “suffering” victims afflicted by a *policy* deficiency—by a policy that did not account for the large number of seniors on these four blocks and that stuck to the “*same-district allocation*” my emphasis argument applicable to all residents.

It is quite clear, then, that these older women put a great deal of stress on their frailty when they represented themselves in the context of the housing issue.

This stress may be perceived as evidence that the women were conforming to and

reinforcing the socially dominant images of older persons in general and of older women in particular. We could also say that this mode of self-representation was a strategy by which the women sought to justify their demands. Yet there is, as I have noted, a paradox involved in social movements organised by social workers and activists which claims to empower older person on the one hand. On the other hand, older women used the images of frailty and victimisation support from the public for mobilisation. However, a deeper analysis of the social petitions makes it quite explicit that the stressed characteristics of old age constituted both a critical premise in the women's argument and a practical, emotionally laden bargaining tool, aside from formally advanced arguments. Hence, the older women, rather than distance themselves from the old-person category, actively represented themselves as "frail" old people and particularly as "frail" old "women" for whom the Housing Authority should care.

In order to establish that it was wrong for the Authority to move them out of their familiar estate, the older women stressed concretely how they would suffer if they were forced to move. One of the situations they chose to highlight in their drama centred on the older women's propensity "to get lost" and "not know how to get home" if they moved to new areas. It is important to note that the women who repeatedly told me, as well as the public, that they were afraid of moving from their

familiar place were the same women who were travelling all around Hong Kong to meet with—and win the support of—councillors, officers from different departments, and representatives of diverse organizations:

We have been travelling all around Hong Kong...except for Chai Wan and Tsim Sha Tsui, those two places. We have been to the New Territories, Shatin, Tsuen Wan, Yau Ma Tei, and Jordan to meet with councillors. [We have also been to] Sai Wan [and] Sheung Wan.

It seems that, according to their own statements, the women could move about without difficulty and were able to identify, distinguish, and locate different government offices, even tracking down the then Governor of Hong Kong:

Once we knew where he [Chris Patten] was, we went there [to meet him].... We have made frequent visits to Cheung Sha Wan for meetings...[and] Cheung Sha Wan, the old District Council office, not the new office, the old one in Cheung Sha Wan.... We have been to the Education Department many times; the Health Department...we have also been to the Housing Authority many, many times.

We tried hard to meet with councillors, in spite of heavy rains, thunderstorms, and lightning; just three or two of us we went, even when we had to cook.... We went regardless of whether it was day or night.... We took the Mass Transit Railway [MTR] by ourselves, and it was already very late at night...around eight thirty.

Apart from making the rounds in search of support, the women undertook active organizing work:

We delivered leaflets—leaflets asking others to support us—to the markets, to an MTR station, to schools: we’d go anywhere to deliver the leaflets [and] kept on asking the others to support the aged.

We went up to the rooftop and carried chairs with us. At that time, I didn’t need a walking aid. We went with volunteers to the rooftops to hold meetings and to collect signatures.

These articulated recollections are of a group of very mobile, very energetic older women rather than of women who, because of their advanced age, are overwhelmingly frail, weak, passive victims. Because of the apparent gap between the women’s self-representations and the women’s actions, one might wonder whether or not the women strongly believe themselves to be frail and incapable. I believe that the women quite sincerely subscribed to their self-representations. Nevertheless, the representations were of significant strategic value. A good example of the extent to which the women were willing to use their “weakness” as a way of exercising power against those who appeared to have power over them centred on the women’s references to the poor health of elderly people. These references amounted to a threat against the Authority. The women recalled some related

comments that they had made at one of the many events that they had held:

[We said that] if Mr. Yuen [the housing manager] did not promise to meet with us, we would not leave [the Housing Authority office]. He should have been there. All of us filled up the office's doorway, about fifty of us, declaring, "We have to meet him! ...We will sleep here! All of us have to take medicine or pills.... If something goes wrong, we will need to go to the hospital, and you [the housing manager] must be responsible for that. The Housing Department will have to take responsibility for that.

This section of my transcript renders explicit the varied practical functions of the older women's self-representations of frailty. By promoting the view that they were helpless, the women generated not only sympathy among some people but also fear among other people who might be accused of violating the moral principle of "respecting one's elders." It would seem to be crucial, then, that social movement research take note of the conflicting identities adopted by older female activists. However, the women did not stop at playing up their vulnerability. They went further, insisting that their vulnerability translated into a legitimate request that "you must do something to assist us"—that councillors, social workers, government officials, radio talk-show hosts, and others whose exercise of power was evident should direct their surplus of power toward quarters where there was a purported deficit of power.

Ms. Choi is identified by organisers, by other older women, and by herself as the leader of the group fighting for housing rights on the THT Estate. However, she repeatedly expressed her powerlessness, both at the time of the debate, and in our conversations:

We are powerless, not like those councillors.

They [the councillors] are more powerful than we are. We are people who know nothing. (盲毛) We are really blind, so we need a kind of walking stick (盲公竹) that the social workers and the councillors can give us.

If they [the councillors] make just one statement [on our behalf], they will accomplish much more than all of us would by talking for an hour, wouldn't they? They have their identity, their status, don't they? What status do we have? Am I right?

These and similar comments make it clear that, by stressing the differences in power between themselves and officials (even social workers), the women hoped to persuade these officials to support the women's cause. However, this tactic was only part of the negotiation strategy, and Ms. Choi's story demonstrates that the women worked to identify themselves not simply as older women but more specifically as Old Hong Kong residents and as Old THT residents. These distinctions correspondingly suggest that social movement scholars should develop a richer understanding of the multiple identities of these older negotiating women.

Tactical Identification: “Who are we?”

The older women’s self-representations elude simple characterisation; indeed, they do not take static form. This group’s narratives of their actions are far more dynamic than, and are even inconsistent with, the women’s own self-directed constructions of frailty. This contrast is most evident in the women’s negotiations with their opponents, in particular the headmasters, the students’ parents, and MAC representatives. Throughout this very dynamic process, the women freely expressed themselves and never avoided the opponents’ objections that the women did not sufficiently care for the younger generation.

In the THT situation, it was essential that Ms. Choi and other women tackle not only the inter-generational conflict stemming from the charge that older persons were depriving neighbourhood schoolkids of their playground, but also the neighbourhood conflict stemming from the charge that construction noise would disturb nearby blocks’ residents. Some opponents questioned the women’s enthusiasm and accused them of “accepting payment for their participation in the petitions.” The older women complained that many residents were not supportive and said that what they were doing was useless. Ms. Choi and her group told me that some residents looked down on them and called them “bitches” [*ba po*](八婆), saying, “What can you few bitches (八婆)do?”

The term *ba po* has negative connotations for Chinese people. It usually describes women who pry into other people's private lives and who love to spread gossip; by extension, it is an abusive term that people use to scold someone else. The older women did not react to this term from a feminist perspective, but they did think it was unfair for the other older residents to criticize the activist residents' petitions. Once, as I accompanied Ms. Choi to the eye clinic, she recalled her 2004 presentation to a group of Australian visitors from the University of Western Sydney⁸. She told me that one fellow resident—an older man—had joined her during the presentation. She recalled that he had moved to the estate later than any of the women and that he had also joined in the petition only at a later stage. She reminded me that the core participants were older women, and she named a few of them who had actively engaged in the housing struggle in THT Estate. She declared that opponents' criticism of their activism had given them strength to keep insisting on their demands. She also proudly told me that one of the residents who had criticized the activist group and the petition had recently applied to move to the new blocks, and that it was "great" that the activists could help others and not just themselves.

It is important to note the way in which gender matters in this issue. Older persons generally are treated as a homogenous, genderless group, and indeed,

nobody—including the activists—ever explicitly raised the gender role of the older women involved in the THT dispute. However, the opponents definitely categorized these older women as *women* when the neighbourhood was not supportive of their demands. It is interesting to note that the neighbours' criticism targeted only the older women—not older men, who also participated in the issue. At the same time, the focus of this criticism is further evidence that women formed the core of active participants and were identified as such by other residents.

While countering all these criticisms, the older women carried on with their activist work. Indeed, they presented themselves as active contributors to Hong Kong society, negotiating further their image as old and useless. First, they tried to attract public attention through news reporting and radio talk shows, constructing a *self*-image that would be acceptable to the wider public. The older women discovered that much of society considered them to be nobodies. Thus, the older women *identified* themselves with red caps and white T-shirts adorned with red words: “Build blocks on the No. 1 playground” and “THT Estate.” They also created slogans to tell the public who they were and what they wanted. In my observation, Ms. Choi thought that the public should be able to identify them as movement actors who demand their rights. They constructed two identities, “Old Hong Kong” and “Old THT Estate Tenants”, which they used to support their activism in the

negotiation process.

1. *“We have worked hard and contributed to the prosperity of Hong Kong”*

It is not uncommon to find older persons who call themselves “Old Hong Kong”(老香港). This expression emphasizes the length of time (about fifty years) that has passed since they fled from Mainland China after the Communist takeover in 1949. This same notion was apparent in the slogan used by older persons who participated in a 2003 petition against increased charges for medical services: “We created the prosperity, but we cannot share in it through medical welfare for the elderly”(繁榮安定創造、長者醫藥福利卻全無). These activists also reminded officials and the public of their social contributions by presenting themselves as a “grandparent tree”(爺樹) that produced “golden fruit”(金果) (JAGFWRS 2003).

In a well-known argument, Norman J. Miners ([1975] 1998, p. 34) claims that the supposed political apathy of Hong Kong people stems from their refugee status in a colony where people dare not object to the authorities insofar as these people are, for the most part, “seeking safety and security” and holding the attitude “Don’t rock the boat.”⁹ However, if we contrast this argument with the arguments made by the older women, it is clear that Miners’ thesis is unsustainable as a generalization in two ways. First, it does not apply to those many refugees who have

now spent more than fifty years in Hong Kong and who firmly regard it as a home that they are not willing to leave. Second, it does not allow for the temporal accumulation of the Hong Kong people's contribution to Hong Kong's development.

The women whom I interviewed made some informative remarks in this regard:

Hai, we older persons have done the hard labour.... Was Hong Kong so very prosperous in the past? ... We have helped to build houses; [we] carried the bricks one by one.... [Life] was so difficult in Hong Kong at that time. If not for us, this very group of older persons, how could it be so prosperous? Aren't you enjoying it right now?

Some older persons with their refugee background argue that if they have contributed to the society, then society should help them enjoy a better life as they grow old. The social movements in which older Hong Kong residents widely participate have very largely adopted this belief, which is widespread amongst older people there, in general.¹⁰ I would argue, however, that this belief also reflects greater Hong Kong's embedded cultural demand for "rationality," a topic that Chan, Lee, and Ho discussed in their study on Hong Kong's conception of welfare-policy making. These scholars argue that "policy is regarded [in Hong Kong] as a scientific and rational decision in the distribution of social resources" and as a way to achieve

“the most effective use” and “the least abuse of social resources” (1999, p. 4).

According to them, in Hong Kong the term “fairness” means that no one shall be “over-dependent on social welfare,” a principle that widely circulates in the policy debates amongst councillors and professionals (Chan, Lee, and Ho 1999, p. 110). In avoiding the accusation that they were “over-dependent” in this way, Ms. Choi, for example, emphasized simultaneously her frailty and her selflessness in relation to the THT Estate. Also, she told me that the new blocks house elderly residents who only recently moved there from other areas such as Chai Wan, Tsuen Wan, and Kwun Tong and that these new residents could enjoy the comfortable housing in the new blocks. As they appealed for public support, Ms. Choi and her group were careful to convince the general public that they “have made a reasonable demand” of the government and that they acted for the public good, as well as for themselves.

2. *“We have been living there for so many years...”*

“The cow who first ploughed the field” (開荒牛) is another popular term that Hong Kong people use to describe the older generations, who worked hard when Hong Kong’s situation was very poor (the 1950s and the 1960s). Applying this argument to the THT Estate, the older women emphasised that they had moved there when the estate was far from well established and that they should be able to stay in

the establishment as they grew old. The living history of their half-century-old estate repeatedly came up in our conversations and also figured on their banners. One banner read “We moved in here to be the cow that ploughs the field; now, in later life, we want to stay on the same estate” (搬來此處開荒牛、只求原邨享晚年). Another slogan, this time on a petition, read “We have spent half a lifetime at THT; we just want to settle nearby” (半生居於 THT、惟盼安置在毗鄰).

In their more detailed lists of grievances, the women described how badly they had suffered, in the early days, from overcrowding and a poor environment:

- A: When I first moved in, it was just like a prison: not even one window, nothing at all.
B: ...all empty, just one empty flat.
A: ...like a prison...
B: the walls, the walls were in poor condition...
C: two people [shared] one unit, a space for you and one for me..
A: ...just half of the flat...
A: We thirteen people lived in one unit.
B: My son was nine, not even ten years old when we moved in.
[The Housing Authority] counted him half a person. We lived near the door, so when the door was open, [we had] no more space, right? So poor...

The buildings were unsafe and needed supporting structures to prevent their collapse. When the women claimed that the blocks were widely recognized as unfit for human habitation, the implication was that the women had stayed there anyway and had

worked to create a decent place to live, so they should be able to enjoy this little slice of prosperity. The view that the people who built post-war Hong Kong should enjoy much-deserved compensation for their efforts is especially common among people who came to Hong Kong as refugees from Mainland China and from elsewhere. In other words, the compensation is for people who deserve it—not just for any member of society.

The colonial government also shaped the related view that Hong Kong people should always rely on themselves to secure a better life, rather than make demands on the government. While invoking the idea of “Old Hong Kong” and its “Old residents”, the ageing women in my study actively contested the idea that ageing women should not over-rely on the government. At the same time, they also challenged the public’s idea that ageing women should sacrifice themselves for the younger generation.

A continuum of care: self care, care by the family, and care by the community

My observation is that these older women reacted to criticism by avoiding direct arguments and by insisting on making their protests. They accept and have adapted to their physical deficiencies, but they resist being “caretakers” of younger generations and, in general, of sacrificing themselves for others. At the same time,

the women do not completely reject the caretaker role. By supporting each other, the older women in their capacity as *neighbours* take care of each other as they grow old.

The next chapter examines this question of caring in more detail.

In the process of getting new homes, the THT group had to negotiate and resist the demand that they be docile. As the print news and the TV coverage at the time made amply clear, society frowned upon older women who would make demands of society when those demands might impinge on the well-being of others, especially the young¹¹.

In some cases, the women faced challenges from their own family members (especially their children) over whether they should get involved in this type of social movement. However, to everyone's surprise, the women resisted the caring role and refused to sacrifice themselves this time. In response to the appeal of the headmasters that the ageing should care for the young, Ms. Choi declared: "Not only should the young be cared for. How about us older persons? We older persons should also be cared for!"¹². Further, she clearly perceived that the secondary students' objection to the elderly women's demands was a result of the misleading messages disseminated by the headmasters and the teachers who accused the women of depriving the younger children of their playground.

Throughout the negotiation process, then, the women actively construed old

age as a state of needing to be taken care of and as a position of *demanding* that their special needs should be addressed. At the same time, the women's actions amounted to a new model of caring roles. According to this model, the older woman takes care of *herself* and *other older women*. In doing so, these older women went beyond constructing themselves as contributing members of Hong Kong society and as long-term residents of the THT Estate by attaching a new self-oriented meaning to the traditional caregiver role assigned to older women. The women of this case study, by representing older women as capable of *self* care and as supported by *mutual* care, thus transcended their social status as merely older women who must die sooner or later; positioning themselves as caregivers in this way, they were no longer unproductive members of society who should not have a voice. This new model was (1) a powerful weapon that Ms. Choi and her group wielded to counter community objections and (2) a powerful source of care that the women used to sustain their movement. No longer at the periphery of social movements, older women emerged in this way as core actors in a type of social-petitioning process that social movement studies have largely ignored.

Vulnerability as mask of ageing

It is fruitful to compare the women's self-representations with other sectors'

representations of the women. For example, media such as social-work teaching materials and welfare organizations' pamphlets devote space and energy to characterizing older women. I would argue that these circuits of representation, though different from each other, are not easily distinguished. In their close ties to social movements, the media function as an important site for politics as well as for meaning construction, and the THT campaign was no exception. It is all the more important, then, to ask (1) how the older women themselves understood their images in the media, broadly defined; (2) how the women perceived the media audience (the public) whom they hoped to reach; and (3) how women's own theories of communication and persuasion shaped the women's actions.

The media have always formed a significant component of social action, as well as a means of representing social action, and this dual nature was not lost on Ms. Choi and her group in the THT Estate. When I asked the women why they would inform the press about a particular issue or action, unreservedly they voiced their simple and straightforward expectation of support from the media:

If [we did] not [inform the press], we would not succeed...[we] hope that the [TV or radio] stations will talk about it...we hope that they [the press] will make [our efforts] successful...and help us.

The women admitted that the press, although not part of policy-makers' circles, acts as a medium through which the women could transmit their message to the wider public, whom the women, by themselves, were incapable of reaching. The older women at THT told me that they would like the public to know how piteous their plight would be if the Housing Authority forced them to move to some other place or places. However, the women never voiced concern about possible media misrepresentations or distortions of them, nor did they ask in what ways the news coverage might facilitate a successful realization of their objectives. Rather, they considered the press to be supporters.

At one point, the women contacted one popular radio talk-show host, Mr. Albert Jinhan Cheng, and gained his support¹³. They recalled that,

whenever Cheng Jinhan came [to one of our events], he brought foreign reporters...[the event] was broadcast abroad. I have friends in other places who also saw the screening...they told me that they saw my photos...it was in an English newspaper... Canada...Singapore could see it...even Mainland China.

I could feel the women's excitement whenever they talked about these media-publicity plugs. They laughed and concluded that they had powerfully disseminated their message.

Another example that they recalled involved, once again, Cheng Jinhan, who

talked about the women's issue and who, in the process, countered their critics by saying, on the women's behalf, that both the estate and the playground were "public spaces," not private places reserved exclusively for the women's opponents, and that it was therefore inappropriate for the latter to object (on the grounds that it would disturb their Feng shui) to the construction of the proposed new blocks. Hence, the older women considered the news media a legitimate target for lobbying, as well as a means to wider access to the public.

Some researchers (for example, the Elderly Commission and the Health, Welfare, and Food Bureau 2005) have drawn the simple conclusion that the media contributes to a prevalence of negative stereotyping or under-representation regarding older women. But this conclusion leaves largely out of account the agency of older women as actors in relation to the media-sphere, and leaves untouched the question of how older women's "audience activity" may best be understood. In examining how Ms. Choi and her THT group interacted with the media during their campaign, it is crucial to grasp that a dimension of this interaction involved the older women's unique "audience activity"—that is, the women's unique way of interpreting the newscasts that concerned them.

Ms. Choi told me that she and her colleagues had kept no copy of either the TV newscast or of the newspapers reporting their campaign. Anxious to see this

documentation, I approached a social worker, Kok M. W., who once worked in the THTSSC but was transferred to another unit of the same NGO after the government terminated the project in THT Estate. However, she told me that because of the termination, the THTSSC kept none of the related video and clippings files. She did remember that one of the volunteers should have kept some of the video or newspapers. I also contacted the District Councillor office of Leung Kam To in relation to THT Estate. However, I finally had success not from them but from Tsang W. Y., another social worker at the THTSSC. She had been working with Ms. Choi's concern group, and she gave me a CD-ROM¹⁴ that she had compiled as a personal record. The CD-ROM contained a record of five news reports on the ageing women's petitions, video documentation by the THTSSC, and two special TV programmes: one that was entitled "Using the Playground for Redevelopment: The Dispute over the THT Estate" (1997) and that directly addressed Ms. Choi's case, and another that was entitled "Finding a Comfortable Home Again: The Issue of Emergency Removal of the THT Estate's Elderly" and that reported on the urgent removal of one of the blocks' residents. The two programmes were produced by Television Broadcasts Limited (commonly known as TVB)¹⁵. One point we need to take note of is that no comprehensive collections exist of the official reports (such as the documents or TV reports) related to this case; rather, the evidence remaining

comes mainly from the documentation on the CD-ROM compiled by Tsang, who had assisted the older women in their housing struggle on the THT Estate.

On April 17, 1997, the special TV programme “Using the Playground for Redevelopment: the THT dispute” was broadcast on Jade, the “News Magazine,” (新聞透視) which is a popular TV series on public affairs. The programme started with the following introduction that functioned as a summary of the THT older women’s group and their actions:

Theoretically, it is quite impossible for older persons and the younger students to argue over the use of the playground. However, on the Tai Hang Tung Estate, it happened and could affect over ten thousand people. Who is arguing with whom? And who will win? Who should get the playground?

The TV programme identified the community conflict and the inter-generational conflict (Who will win?) as the core focus of the THT case. “Using the Playground for Redevelopment” set out to draw the audience’s attention to the conflict between the younger people and the older people involved, and also to the conflict of interest between different sectors such as the local community organizations and schools. The programme positioned the playground, rather than the new housing blocks, as the major focus of the argument. The playground appears to be a place purposely built for the younger generations, regardless of whether

young people used it for physical-education classes or (as the representative of the seven school headmasters, Wong K. C., claimed) as an area to which students can escape to in case of fire. With the issue socially spatialised in this way, the prospect of a group of ageing women demanding to take the playground over for their new housing blocks could be seen as extra-ordinary.

In “Using the Playground for Redevelopment,” two elderly women who were living next door to each other participated in an interview. One of these women, Tsang Kan, age 86, was taking care of the other woman, Cheng Po Po, who was 97 years old.

Cheng Po Po recalled: Whenever I caught a cold...or suffered from diarrhea or vomiting...I called her [Tsang Kan]. She is willing to help...she also helped me to buy things...and any other help I asked for...we are next-door neighbors.

In another interview, 86-year-old Tang claimed that she was worried about getting lost after her move to the new flats near Pak Hoi Street in Kowloon. Tang told the audience how she had got lost when she was in the new area to which she would be re-allocated and how she needed the police to accompany her home because she did not know the way and also could not take the bus by herself. In addition, there was footage of older women relaxing in the outdoor areas of the THT Estate, sitting

around in small groups, under a tree, or using old-style fans to keep cool. The shooting placed attention on the fragility of the older women but, at the same time, captured something of the mutual linkage amongst the older women there. The programme did not contain one single interview with an older man from THT.

Right at the end of the TV programme, Ms. Choi finally appeared, murmuring in a weak voice that the women were in an extremely difficult and depressed situation because they were powerless to decide whether they could on THT Estate and that it was a pity that the ageing women there, including herself, could not live well through their later life (臨老唔過得世). She ended by saying that they were terribly uncertain about their future and where they would stay. This segment featuring Ms. Choi was the only one shot at night: all the other interviews had been recorded in the day-time. The television crew filmed Ms. Choi walking at night on the playground all by herself, with just a few youngsters playing in the playground. A close-up of Ms. Choi emphasizes her lost and typically “feminine” look, which gave the strong impression that she was utterly lonely and helpless. And it was in a voice-over format that she told the audience, soliloquy-style, about how uncertain she was regarding her future whereabouts.

These are representations of a Ms. Choi who is quite different from the woman with whom I became acquainted, the woman who was so active and full of

initiative in organizing and mobilizing others to participate in the campaign, and also in fighting for her own rights. “Using the Playground for Redevelopment” revealed Ms. Choi’s intimate emotions and her depressions and sadness when she faced the redevelopment of her THT home. This emphasis on the older women’s vulnerability was particularly obvious in that the reporter omitted any mention of their organizing activities, choosing to represent them instead as service recipients of activities such as lunch-time gatherings and physical check ups. There was little or no representation of their activist participation or of their mobility in seeking support.

In contrast to this emphasis on vulnerability, the producer of “Using the Playground for Redevelopers” attached masculine, formal, and official characteristics to District Councilors Leung Kam To., to the MAC chairman Sui C. T., and to an official of the Housing Authority, Tse C. K, whom the reporter properly interviewed in a by-the-book way that enabled the interviewees to articulate their views. The younger male councillor, as such, represented logic and knowledgeable-ness. He came across as someone who could provide accurate answers to whatever questions an audience or the media might pose. Therefore, it was this man who, from among the three men, framed and presented his group’s formal argument. Hong Kong society, like many others, recognizes the familiar masculine-feminine dichotomy and the youth-old age dichotomy. A particularly

forceful dichotomy arises when it comprises, on one end, masculine youth (or youthful masculinity) and, on the other end, feminine old age (or old-age femininity): The former represents a powerful strain of rationality and public authority whilst the latter represents an informal and domestic context.

Having interviewed Ms. Choi and her group before I saw “Using the Playground for Redevelopment,” I expected the programme to provide me with arguments and stories that mirrored those that the ageing women had told me. On the contrary, the TV programme presented me with new information about District Councilor Leung Kam To’s involvement in the THT campaign. The TV crew characterised him as the core member of the petition, but Ms. Choi and her group had mentioned him only once in our 2003 interview; furthermore, the women had mentioned other councillors, such as Leung Yiu-chun in the Kwai Tsing area and Fung Kim Kei in Sham Shui Po, neither of whom was on the programme. “Using the Playground for Redevelopment” emphasized how the MAC chairman and the school headmasters had penalised Leung Kam-to. However, it did not touch on the neighbourhood criticism that the ageing women faced in the process. The programme shifted the main focus of the community conflict to the suspiciousness of Leung’s involvement in the THT struggle. An MAC chairman expressed his doubts about the motivation of Leung’s support of the ageing women—doubts that

centred on whether or not Leung was seeking votes regardless of principle. Wong, the representative of the seven school headmasters, also declared that Leung failed to consult with the residents in THT Estate before proposing the plan for the older women. At the same time, the school headmasters defended himself against allegations that he was disrespecting his elders, saying that his objection to the new blocks stemmed primarily from his concern for the next generation.

A similar frame of analysis structures the information that appears in a student journal for social-work students at the City University of Hong Kong (Mok 1996). Moreover, the THT case received coverage in the course DSS2174 “Laboratory for Working with Communities.”¹⁶ Mok H. L., a lecturer teaching in the social-work programme, prepared these lecture notes in 1996 and related the case to the formulation of intervention strategies. The goal was to enable students to “learn how to develop strategies to deal with a community issue” (Mok 1996, p. 1). The THTSSC created a pamphlet entitled “THT Elderly Redevelopment Issues: Background Information and Map Illustrations.” It complemented the lecture notes and other materials from which the students drew when discussing “the case study on the THT Estate” during class. Tsang told me that she had compiled “THT Elderly Redevelopment Issues” in 1996 when she had first made contact with the older women on the estate. Tsang told me that the THTSSC had other pamphlets,

published at various time, that reported on and updated the housing struggle. In comparing the pamphlets' presentation of the ageing women's argument with the TV programme's presentation of the same topic, I could discern the THTSSC pamphlet's greater emphasis on the ageing women's views. The statistics provided in the pamphlet serve as the chief support for the ageing women's argument. These statistics did not appear in other sections of the pamphlets, which instead explored such categories as the adversaries' views, the supporting views, and the government's views and which examined how the community could resolve the problem.

The survey findings suggested that 90 percent of the elder respondents would like to stay in the same estate and that 70 percent of them would like the Housing Authority to carry out a redevelopment scheme as soon as possible. Rather than represent ageing women with their own views and sayings, the social worker preferred to provide this "objective" and "factual" information as representative of the ageing women's views. It appears that the ageing women could not speak for themselves or that policy-makers would not take the individual women seriously unless they presented themselves as a group—as a "high" percentage. The subjectivity and the agency of the older women's group are lost in these categories, which thereby alienate these two factors from the core of the issues.

The TV programme, “Using the Playground for Redevelopment” is similar to the THTSSC pamphlets insofar as both of them illustrate the ageing women’s suffering situation whilst leaving formal arguments to the councillors and to the ageing women’s opponents. The TV programme’s omission of older women’s involvement in the organizing and lobbying work further suggested that the older women were disorganised, powerless, informal, and incapable of handling their situation. Lacking formal or recognized political decision-making power (certainly as compared with formal organizations such as political parties or local community organizations), the older women’s group was marginalized; ownership of the issue devolved to the wider community and to other parties and groups within it, rather than remain with the elderly women, who were nevertheless most directly affected.

It was difficult for me to discuss with the older women how, in hindsight, they perceived the media representations, including the teaching materials. Ms. Choi told me that they had watched the newscasts and the TV programme “Using the Playground for Redevelopment.” Her concern was simply to know whether or not an item supported the women’s cause. Ms. Choi perceived the media coverage (except for the teaching materials, which she had not seen, had no inclination to see, and therefore could not comment on) chiefly as helpful to the women’s petitions in the sense that this media coverage made the issue public so that, now, “everybody

knows.”

At the time of my interviews with Ms. Choi, she was still actively involved in constructing the *experiences* of her THT petitions. She welcomed me and reviewed her own and her group’s activism in detail. She recalled that a few years earlier, on the referral of Tsang, she had accepted an invitation to speak at one of the lectures offered by Kam Ping Kwong, a lecturer in the social-work programme at the City University of Hong Kong. Tsang accompanied Ms. Choi, who hoped to “help” others by participating in the lecture. She was also willing to share her experiences with visitors, but refused an invitation from a public housing estate in Kowloon West whose residents wanted her to share her THT experiences with them. She refused simply because it was too difficult for her to go there, as she did not walk well and her eyesight was not good. She told me that she had needed someone from social welfare to accompany her to the eye clinic after an incident in which she had suddenly got lost and was nearly hit by a car while returning home from treatment in the clinic. Ms. Choi noted that she would be willing to help the Ngau Tau Kok residents if they could come over to her place.

Ms. Choi has in fact been actively involved in shaping the discourse of the campaign stories, as her group once attended—during their visit to Lingnan University in 1999—a screening of video clips from the video documentary titled

“Ageing in Hong Kong: An Interactive Approach to Teaching and Learning Issues of Ageing in Hong Kong” (Ageing in Hong Kong, 1999)¹⁷. Her group actively engaged in discussion with participants from the Kwai Chung district, passionately recounting the details of the THT case—particularly, how they had suffered. In this regard, Ms. Choi’s group once again described the ordeal as the “three years and eight months” experience. On one occasion with me, Ms. Choi shared with me her anger toward the school headmasters and toward one of the MAC chairmen, whom we met in a café where we were having afternoon tea together (this is a popular activity for the older women whom I met at THT Estate. All these experiences she had in the THT campaign became an unforgettable memory for Ms. Choi.

Ms. Choi has showed me her “tactical” use of the “vulnerability” of ageing woman. Ms. Choi and her group expected that their vulnerability would attract the councillors’ and social workers’ support of their participation and that, as a consequence, the policy-makers would concede to their demands. It appears that the media’s construction of frail, helpless, elderly, female victims satisfied the THT women’s wishes because these women firmly believed that this construction would strengthen their petitions. According to the newscasts documented in Tsang’s personal CD-ROM, the officials of the Housing Authority prohibited Ms. Choi and the THT Estates representatives from participating in formal meetings where the

councillors and the officials discussed possible re-arrangements of the ageing women's re-allocation. However, outside the meetings, Ms. Choi and her group made use of banners to tell their stories and to present their demands. In 2000, after numerous petitions and lobbying meetings, Ms. Choi and her group finally won approval from the Town Planning Board to redesignate "No. 1 Playground": it would be no longer a recreational site but a residential site where the women's hoped-for new blocks would be built. On January 3, 2003, they organised a dinner gathering in the open areas of the THT Estate to celebrate their progress.

The THT case sheds light on the multiple identities of older women, including the powerless older woman and the powerful older woman, which are seemingly contradictory. In order to approach these identities rigorously, however, it is vital to understand first that the multiple identities of older women in Hong Kong are much more fluid than the stereotypically thin, rigid identities allocated to older women, according to which these women are poor, disabled, and self-sacrificing.

The THT women shaped and affirmed the *multiple* identities, which stood in contrast to each other and which even contradicted each other at times. Indeed, these identities served as a basis for the THT's very public mode of social and political agency. By discovering and mobilising a positive side to being frail and vulnerable in old age, the women gained support from the councillors and the social workers

and the radio talk-show hosts and exercised power in the process. In drawing from Day's (1993) notions of the political effect that the "organised elderly" in the United States had on their environment(see Chapter One), I would argue that ageing women's activism is an interplay of the "powerless" (in my case study, their physical vulnerability and their dependence on social workers and councillors), the "perilous" (their transformation of their vulnerability into a bargaining chip with the policy-makers), and the "progressive" (their active engagement in intergenerational dialogue).

This interplay did not end when the older women witnessed the fulfilment of their demand for new blocks on their old estate; the women went on to negotiate with the Housing Authority over the design of their new flats. They suggested signposts that would help older women identify which wing of the building they were on, and handrails in the lifts, along the corridors, and on the specially designed fire-prevention doors. These older women could and did continue to voice their concerns and their wants regarding their new homes.

Conclusion

In examining the seniors' movement in the United States, which I reviewed in the first chapter, Wang (1999, p. 198) makes the following arguments:

The negative discourse of elderly as dependent and frail has been the major reason that the seniors' movement has gained public support for its claims, and some gerontologists see it as the primary source of legitimacy for the seniors' movement, distinguishing it from other social movements.

Nevertheless, the THT case enriches Wang's argument by uncovering the complexity of older women's tactical, multiple identities, which are gendered and are bound up with the women's history and their everyday lives. Further, these identities form into a mask of ageing.

Scholars have paid a great deal of attention in Hong Kong as elsewhere to practices of "masking" the signs of age, and as Eileen Fairhurst (1998, pp. 258-275) has remarked, the effort to keep on looking younger may be less about fears of losing physical attractiveness than about fears of the sad social destiny attached to old age. The fear of decline is prevalent, despite growing recognition and assertions, both in the literature and in the voices and the actions of older adults themselves, that being old is not analogous to being senile, tired, sickly, and frail. Nevertheless, the aged may also use ageing itself *as* a mask; my study suggests that women in

Hong Kong in fact use their ageing bodies to hide youthful characteristics such as high energy, high mobility, and ability to organise, which our society deems particularly incongruent with the expected appearance and behaviour of “old ladies.”¹⁸ My case study here suggests, further, that ageing—as a mask—can encompass the culturally shaped *politics* of Hong Kong’s ageing women insofar as these women use their age to hide their powerful abilities; Ms. Choi and her group used the mask to negotiate with government officials to obtain their independence in later life.

Certainly, the successful struggle waged by Ms. Choi and her group in THT seems to have been an exceptional case because policy-makers and service providers continue to rely heavily on research, studies, and professional assessment procedures to determine older women’s needs in every aspect of the women’s lives. However, the story of Ms. Choi and her group is a compelling example of the importance of representation for older women involved in housing movements. My case study’s subjects showed how older women, in general, can resist objections from the rest of the community, resist arrangements made by policy-makers, and harness older women’s group identity as a “social problem” to resist the unwelcome changes imposed on them; at the same time, the subjects negotiated for a public-space design that would account for the lessening mobility of ageing people. Apart from limited

mobility and physical decline, the notion of *care* bounds ageing women in their later life. The case study of Ms. Wan in the following chapter will focus on how ageing women interpret and realise their caregiver role in the context of their activism.

NOTES

¹ Recently, researchers have conducted studies to undercover the ageist stereotypes attached to “being old” in Hong Kong. For example, the Elderly Commission and the Health, Welfare, and Food Bureau, HKSAR (2005) and Chan, Hau-nung, and Ng, Y. S. (2003) undertook research on seniors’ self images.

² The 1953 Shek Kip Mei fire, which burnt the whole area of squatters’ settlements in Shek Kip Mei areas, marked the introduction of Hong Kong’s public housing scheme. Because of the fire, about 100,000 people became homeless overnight. According to the Housing Authority, the Public Works Department immediately constructed a series of two-storey bungalow houses to shelter the fire victims. Then, the government set up a fund for constructing multi-storey resettlement buildings. After that, the government set up a semi-independent organization, the Hong Kong Housing Authority, that would provide low-cost self-contained flats. Victims of the Shek Kip Mei fire resettled in eight permanent six-storey buildings—the Mark I. The government decided to implement the resettlement programme systematically (Leung M. Y 1999; Hong Kong Housing Authority 1988).

³ The four blocks housed mainly single elderly people or elderly couples; a total of 600 households, including over 1,000 older persons. These four blocks were called “refurnished” blocks because the Housing Authority ordered refurnishing work (repairs, building toilets inside the flats) to prolong the life of these old blocks.

⁴ By the end of the 1970s, the Housing Authority announced a redevelopment plan to improve the living environment of 1950s estates, which was poor. In reviewing this redevelopment programme in the mid 1980s, the Housing Authority decided to extend it to other public-housing estates. In 1988, the Housing Authority announced the Comprehensive Redevelopment Programme, for the improvement of the living standards of 1960s and 1970s public-housing estates. The plan called for the multi-phased evacuating and demolishing of about 500 blocks of old and sub-standard housing estates by 2001. A total of 42 estates and about 800,000 people (or 14 percent of the total population) would be affected. THT was one of the estates included in this plan. In May 1995, the Housing Authority announced that THT would undergo redevelopment in five years time and that residents would have to move to newly built housing blocks by 2001 (Mok 1996). For details on the comprehensive redevelopment programme, see Hong Kong Housing Authority (1988, p. 5).

⁵ This is not the real name of the centre, which I have altered so as to keep the case-study participants anonymous.

⁶ Ms. Choi and her fellow core members repeatedly used the term “three years and eight months” in our interview on June 30, 2003, and in the video documentary *Aging.Home* (2000).

⁷ I have taken this and all the following quotations from the transcript of an interview I conducted on June 30, 2003, with Ms. Choi, Ms. Chan, and Ms. Ho, representatives from the THT women’s concern group for elderly housing rights; and also from the video documentary *Aging.Home* (2000).

⁸ The visit to the THT estate on May 4, 2004, was part of the 2nd Joint Research Workshop between the Center for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney and the Department of Cultural Studies at Lingnan University. A group of Australian scholars joined Ms. Choi and her group’s visit to the THT estate. For background on the workshop and on the collaboration between the two universities, see Allon and Morris (2006); for the visit details, see Fiona Allon (2006).

⁹ Miners ([1975] 1998, pp. 33-35) highlights other factors that explain the political quietism in Hong Kong before the mid-1980s—that is, before the government started to promote political participation amongst the Hong Kong citizenry. These factors include the very rapid rate of Hong Kong’s economic growth between 1961 and 1981; the efficiency of the colonial government in the establishment of infrastructure; the middle class refugees such as civil servants, teachers, and professionals who did not identify with working class identity. He also suggests that the Confucian ideals of government (the analogy of the the father-children relationship explains why, in the relationship between the ruler and the people, the ruler as father will always act for the good of the people as the father’s children) are influential among older people but not among younger people who were born in Hong Kong (Miners [1975] 1998, p. 36).

¹⁰ For example, the concern group on Accident and Emergency (A&E) unit charges argued that all people who are reaching the age of sixty and who show their identity card should be entitled, without a means test, to a fifty percent rebate because older persons had already contributed greatly to the prosperity of Hong Kong. Another example comes from a 2003 controversy over cuts to the CSSA scheme, when more than 50 representatives from the elderly CSSA Concern Group petitioned outside the Legislative Council as members were discussing the introduction of an eleven percent cut in two stages. Hong Kong’s most widely circulating newspaper, *Ming Pao*, published a photo of three tired-looking older women sitting near the road, their mouths covered by signposts and one of the signposts says: “Old Tung [the Chief Executive] claims to respect his elders, but he fools and mistreats the elderly” [尊敬老人老董話、竟變玩弄老人家] (“Cut of CSSA starts today” 2003).

¹¹ For example, see television programme, “Using the Playground for Redevelopment: The THT Estate Dispute” (1997)

¹² Ms. Choi and other members of her group repeated these statements during our interview on June 30, 2003, and also in the video documentary, *Aging.Home* (2000).

¹³ The Honorable Albert Jinhan Cheng was elected as a legislative councillor in 2005. At the time of the THT actions, he was the presenter for the popular Cantonese talk-show programme “Teacup”(風波裏的茶杯), produced by Commercial Radio One Hong Kong, known as CR1 (FM 881). CRI features talk-based programming that places great emphasis on news, current affairs, traffic, and financial affairs—all within the format of talk and phone-in shows, analysis, and debate, as well as some drama. See, *Commercial Radio Hong Kong* (2006). The very popular morning show “Teacup” has been broadcast from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and has—what is for radio—a long history running back more than 10 years.

¹⁴ Tsang stated that she had compiled the CD-ROM as a record by which she, herself, might remember the THT case. The video clips in the CD-ROM did not show the dates of the broadcast date and year. To gather relevant information regarding the programme “Using the Playground for Redevelopment,” I searched through the library catalogue and finally retrieved the exact date of its broadcast but was unable to trace the exact date of broadcast for other similar programmes.

¹⁵ TVB is one of Hong Kong’s two free-to-air television stations. During the primetime viewing hours, TVB’s two channels, the Chinese-language channel Jade and the English-language channel Pearl, attracts a majority of Hong Kong’s audience share (an average of 80 percent and 72 percent respectively). (*TVB Annual Report*, 2003)

¹⁶ The City University of Hong Kong offered the course to second-year students studying for a social-work degree there. I accessed this information through a friend who was teaching the course there in 2000-2001. See Mok, H. L. (1996). Afterwards, I did an Internet search for the lecture notes on community work, and found that the case was also used in the course SWK 2230, Community Work, for social-work students who were studying in the Department of Social Work at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2003-2004 (Wong Hung 1996).

¹⁷ Lingnan University’s Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies organised the screening activity in 1999 for older persons coming to visit the university as part of their one day travel around Tuen Mun and the nearby area. I participated in this activity as a coordinator and, in this role, introduced the centre to the participants.

¹⁸ For a similar argument, see Bill Bytheway and Julia Johnson (1998, pp. 243-257); and Barbara Kamler and Susan Feldman (1995, pp.1-22).

Chapter Five.

Caring as source of power: From grandmother to public-housing hero(ine)¹

A cartoon illustrating Madam Wan's petition that the Housing Authority "pay back" the "overcharged" rent in the public housing estate was published in the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), July 12, 2003. After 2002, two public-housing tenants, Madam Wan and Lam Kin Sum, had taken legal action against the Housing Authority². They argued that the Authority failed to obey the rent-control mechanism (that is, to maintain the rent so that it would not exceed 10 percent of a tenant's median income), as stipulated by the Housing Ordinance amendment in 1997. The cartoon was first published when the Court of First Instance³ ruled in favour of the tenants because the Housing Authority had failed both to launch rent reduction (as distinct from merely freezing the rent) and to fulfil its statutory duty by keeping the rent-median-income ratio, as required in the face of income drops since the economic downturn in 1997. Thereafter, the media widely reported that Madam Wan urged the Housing Authority to pay back the "excessive charges" that had occurred from 1998 to 2002.

In this *SCMP* cartoon captioned "Hey, you've overcharged me," Wan was in a Superwoman costume, with one hand holding a walking stick that was knocking

against and cracking the building of the Housing Authority, with three Housing Authority officials scared and falling from the building. On her other side, Madam Wan is holding her granddaughter's hand. Some may suggest that as the public sees ageing women as powerless, only by turning her from a powerless ageing woman to a powerful superwoman can the media better explain Wan's unexpected legal challenge to the Housing Authority.

Nevertheless, to me, this *SCMP* cartoon of Madam Wan also demonstrates that it is possible for ageing women to turn a walking stick (which is often used to represent their physical frailty) into weapon that poses a critical challenge to the Housing Authority. This cartoon on the one hand, has clearly illustrated the possible dramatic shift of ageing women between the two polarized ends of power and powerlessness. On the other hand, this cartoon also hints at this study's focus on the complexity of ageing women's activism: whether ageing women constitute an emerging social force that wields destructive power (they may break down the authority) as they demand resources from the government, or whether they still remain powerless as their actions only reinforce the prevalent media representations of the women's helplessness. The core question remains: Do ageing women constitute a distinctive form of social force in social movements in Hong Kong?

In reviewing the figures and the facts highlighted as "the graying of

America” (20 percent of the total population will be made up of the elderly by 2030 in the United States), Furman (1997, p. 2) pointed out that, “while we have all these figures at our fingertips, as a culture we don’t know very much about the subjective, existential, or moral experiences of older people.” As I have argued in detail earlier in Chapter Two, feminist studies have largely overlooked age as part of the diversity amongst women apart from race and class. Furman commented that “older women have been absent from feminist scholarship, perhaps because the energies of younger feminists have been directed to issues that affect their own lives, like reproductive rights and equitable pay” (1997, p. 3).

In asserting that ageing women’s distinctive experiences are either misrepresented or undervalued in ageing studies (for example, Arber and Ginn 1994, 1995; Bernard and Meade 1993), Sharon Wray (2004, p. 23) argued that gerontology studies have also failed to understand the complexity of agency and of empowerment of ageing women in later life. In order to understand Madam Wan’s activism, I will borrow Wray’s notion that “conceptualizing agency as creative and generative and autonomy as relational allows for recognition of different strategies used by women to deal with constraint and potentially disempowering experiences” (Wray 2004, p. 26).

As we will see, Wan’s struggle well demonstrates the unequal power

relations between an ageing woman and the Housing Authority, relations similar to those between Ms. Choi and the THT estate discussed in the previous chapter. In addition to the tactical identities of “Old Hong Kong” and “Old THT residents” formed in Choi’s case, Madam Wan’s more greatly emphasized the identity of care as it concerned her sense of self as not only an ageing woman but also a mother and a grandmother. In this chapter, I will focus on Wan’s formation of the seemingly contesting identities of care in her activism—identities that go beyond the polarized ends of caregiver (being a mother and grandmother) or care receiver (being cared for by family and movement groups) in enriching the complexity of care in both feminist gerontology scholarship and movement studies.⁴

Madam Wan: From retired dim sum worker to activist

Ms. Wan, at 77, was of medium height and wore a pair of glasses and always carried a small bag in black or the one with the cartoon character Mickey Mouse⁵ on it. She told me the Mickey Mouse bag was a gift from one of her sons who was working in the transport business when, in 2003, I started my field work in Centre G.⁶ It was then and there that I focused on her case and her debate with the Housing Authority. Madam Wan had six children, two daughters and four sons with nine grandchildren including one great grandchild, but all except the youngest son had

moved out of the public housing estate after they had got married. She showed me that her bag contained a bottle of water, sometimes orange juice, a folded up overcoat, and even an umbrella. It appears as though she were ready to go anywhere and that she would survive any long journey.

Madam Wan joined Centre G in 2000, when she found she could no longer afford the rent in the new blocks of the Tai Kwai (TK) Estate,⁷ into which she and her youngest son, L, had moved in May 1998, under the Housing Authority's redevelopment plan for the TK Estate. According to Ms. Man,⁸ the organiser of Centre G, a few older persons in their elderly-concern group meetings raised similar complaints about the rent in the newly built public housing estates, arguing that the rent was excessive and that they could hardly afford the housing, especially since the economic downturn in 1997. With the assistance of the Centre G organisers, the Alliance for Defending Grassroots Housing Rights (ADGHR)⁹ was formed, and Madam Wan started to organise around the rent issue with other older persons, mainly women from other estates and private housing around Kwai Chung and Tsuen Wan in the year 2000.

Later on, Madam Wan volunteered to file a court case against the Housing Authority when the ADGHR finalized their decision to take legal action against the Housing Authority. The ADGHR argued that the Housing Authority had failed to

reduce the rent, having only frozen it since 1998, hence allowing the rent-to-median income ratio¹⁰ to exceed 10 percent from 1998 to 2002. As reported in *Ming Pao* on 13 May 2003, for example, Madam Wan's rent was 24 percent of her family income when she had to pay HK\$2,110 and her monthly income was HK\$8,705 (comprising her monthly old-age pension of HK\$705 and her son's monthly income of HK\$8,000). The ruling of the court case would affect not only Madam Wan but also approximately six hundred thousand public-housing tenants¹¹ out of the whole population of over two hundred million tenants in Hong Kong. They would have been eligible for rent cuts costing HK\$1.4 billion,¹² which could have damaged the financial situation of the Housing Authority. Their struggle also had the potential to force the Authority to review the Housing Ordinance and to seek the right to review and revise rents in accordance with changes in the economy.

In contrast with the common understanding of ageing women's invisibility in news media (Lee 1999), the rent protest of Madam Wan gained wide coverage in the media. In examining the newspaper clippings filed in Centre G, I found that the news covered not only the progress of the rent debate but also the personal story of Madam Wan, with a particular focus on the break up of her relationship with her children, who did not agree with her decision to take legal action. The rent-based legal debate lasted for three years and ended on 22 November 2005, when the Court

of Final Appeal ruled in favour of the Housing Authority and stated that there is no statutory requirement in times of deflation to lower public-housing rents.

Nevertheless, from then on, Madam Wan remained an active participant in demanding affordable housing with the ADGHR, recognition and implementation of ageing women's rights in welfare, and an ageing policy that improves ageing people's everyday lives.

Madam Wan's road to activism: "I have no choice...but..."

In my very first interview with Madam Wan on 2 September 2004, Wan told me that she had never participated in any social groups or elderly concern groups before her retirement in 1998. In 2000, she had turned to Centre G for help, since she faced economic hardship in making her living. I remember how she suddenly became tearful when she recalled the first time she had got involved in the rent debate and how she had gained assistance from the organisers and friends in Centre G, who delivered free daily-life products (rice, noodles, canned food, and cooking oil) to her:

Wan: Mr. Cheuk¹³ asked me, "They [Centre G] are having a meeting tonight, so are you free to go? If you are free, you can go and attend [the meeting]."

Kit-ling: Who is Mr. Cheuk?

Wan: I have known Mr. Cheuk for a long time, since [I was still living in] the old blocks... he lived upstairs and he had to pass by my flat [every time] if he went downstairs...Mr. Cheuk said, “Just go and listen: you can tell them your difficulties. They [Centre G] are smart and they can help.”

Kit-ling: So Mr. Cheuk introduced you to the organisers of Centre G?

Wan: Yes, later Ms. Man [the organiser of Centre G] helped me; if not for ... Ms. Man... Ms. Man and the concern group there, I don't know where I would be now.

Wan: [crying]...

Kit-ling: [giving her tissue]

Wan: That day, [I] did not know the way, and Mr. Cheuk brought me there and accompanied me back [home]...

Kit-ling: Relax, don't feel sad.

Wan: [I am] so old, I can't figure out [how to handle it]. [It is sad that I am] at this age where I need help from others. But Mr. Cheuk said, “It is good to have someone to help out.”¹⁴

To me, her tears contrasted with the newspapers that I read and that widely reported on Madam Wan's happy face and her excitement in her court victory on 12 July 2003 and on 13 August 2003.¹⁵ I was attracted to the media representations of Ms. Wan as I studied her news.

In 2004, I contacted Ms. Man, organiser of the ADGHR in Centre G, to ask for the group's consent regarding my fieldwork in their centre. Ms. Man welcomed me and my involvement in the elderly-rights group. She discussed with me passionately the current discussion of the elderly-rights group on ageing policy in Hong Kong. Ms. Man wanted me to ask, myself, for an interview with Madam Wan rather than have Ms. Man act as a coordinator for Wan.

On 29 August 2004, I attended the Election Forum on Legislative Councillors in the New Territories (West), organised by Centre G. Madam Wan was there. After the forum, I greeted Madam Wan and briefly introduced myself, a PhD student studying in the Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University. I explained that I was doing my study on social protest and invited her for an interview. Madam Wan could not recognize me, but she remembered the petition that her group had launched outside the Legislative Council in 2003, when we had first met. She promised to talk to me without any hesitation. A month later, I interviewed Madam Wan in an elderly centre, Centre E¹⁶ near her flat, on 2 September 2004. From then on, I was able to participate in activities and events in Centre G regarding Wan's petitions and movement activities such as ADGHR meetings, the elderly-concern group meetings in Centre G, and petitions about the rent debate and elderly rights. Wan had nothing unusual about her in relation to other ageing women whom I interviewed in this study. I could sense her determination in negotiating with the authorities such as the Secretary of Housing, Planning, and Land Bureau, who could regulate her later life via various housing and other welfare policies. Like Ms. Choi in the previous chapter, Wan was sincere, welcoming, and open in sharing her experiences—and was even more expressive in her emotions. I remember she gave me a big hug when I went to visit her again a year after our intensive interactions

during the year 2004.

In our first interview in September 2004, I asked Madam Wan how she felt about the wide 2003 press coverage of the rent debate. Madam Wan told me that she could never imagine that her legal challenge to the Housing Authority would gain such wide coverage in the media and that it would draw public attention. It seems that she was unprepared for the changes to her life after her activism.

[I] never thought that this is such a big issue. [I was] interviewed by the TV, the newspapers. [I] never thought of that.

In recalling her decision to first start her activism, Madam Wan claimed that she had “no choice” but to sue the Housing Authority in order to solve her financial difficulties caused by the “unaffordable rent.” Rather than say, “I have no choice” in a powerless way, Madam Wan thought that the insufficient support from the government for older women in poverty had pushed her to sue the Housing Authority.

Wan: I applied for rent reduction... they [the housing authority] said I am not eligible for it

Kit Ling: Why?

Wan: The others [older persons living alone and poor families] are applying for CSSA, and I also apply for that, but they [the Social Welfare Department] said I did not qualify...I said I was poor. I can't afford my living... I apply for rent reduction... they [the

Housing Authority] said I did not qualify... [so] I went to a lawyer and I had no money... so I started the legal action... it has taken years...

Wan: You think I like to take this road [action]. I cannot apply for CSSA, since my son is living with me...if not..., what else can I do? You think I like to take this road...Not going this way, what other paths can I take? Indeed, I am heading down a dead-end road.

Madam Wan repeatedly emphasised the spontaneity of her participation and her activism. Also, she could not agree with existing CSSA restrictions imposed on older persons who lived with their children. Madam Wan described her continuation of her struggle by saying that she had already got her head wet (洗濕咗個頭), which is a common saying in Hong Kong comparable to the saying “already got her hands dirty.” Madam Wan also commented that the road (which means taking the legal action) she had taken was a “dead-end road.” However, far from expressing her powerlessness, she showed her determination to carry on with her protests despite difficulties she faced. Apart from her unintended participation and her self-representation as so helpless and pessimistic, Madam Wan firmly told me that she never regretted what she had done in the past and, in particular, her joining in the rent debate and that she would continue her petition for rent reduction even though the Housing Authority refused to comply.

Starting from the tangible needs in everyday-life survival, Madam Wan entered

onto her road to activism. After 2000, she actively participated in the ADGHR and elderly-rights group activities, such as monthly Sunday meetings and the organisation of petitions. She started to get connected with the organisers, other elderly women in the group, and also supporters including legislative councillors. In my observations, Madam Wan enjoyed her involvement in her activism. With the support of the organisers, the volunteers, and councillors, she gradually became the core of the movement. By core, I mean that she attended nearly every meeting and also petitions, spoke on behalf of the group to the government officials such as Michael Suen, and also sat for interviews with the media. As an ageing woman activist, Madam Wan was familiarising herself with movement practices by organising mass meetings and petitions.

Mass meetings and petitions that enable organisers to protest to the concerned authorities are the most popular forms of social movement activities in Hong Kong. The meetings are normally composed of speeches by different organizations, councillors, or academics as supporters for the claims of the movement group. Then the mass meetings or petitions normally proceed to symbolic actions such as the delivering of letters or other “symbolic” props (道具) to the representatives of the responsible authority, and participants shout out slogans or sing songs in expressing the views of the social actors of the movement. In relation

to the petition outside the Legislative Council in 2003, when I first met Ms. Wan, it was raining heavily. About 200 participants from public-housing estates and councillors' offices joined in the mass meeting and urged the Housing Authority to reduce rent according to the ruling of the High Court. Political celebrities and activists and councillors came to support the event. Madam Wan got used to the ways in which participants represent themselves:

Wan: I carried different props, rent cards, the sheet [issued by the court], and I was carrying the banner.

Kit Ling: Yes, I saw it in the newspaper.

Wan: Yes, they told me [about my photos]. [I am] walking up front...bringing the banner ...Again, I was at the front of the crowd. We, a few people, hold it [the banner]...you hold here and I hold the other end...over ten of us marching [to the Legislative Council].

Madam Wan did not tell me whether she thought that these petitions were effective ways to push for rent reduction. Rather, she stated that she enjoyed learning all these new skills and taking part in movement activities with the ADGHR. Madam Wan and her group created big signboards that were simple and that clearly expressed their demands. The signboards read, for example, “rent reduction”, “paying back the money”, “The Housing Authority Should Refund Us”. She told me how she and her members had held those signboards that were supposed to communicate to the

public—through reporters and the media—what was happening and what the protestors’ were demanding.

Petitions organised in Hong Kong are commonly symbolized with props. Those props might be enlarged letters or other relevant material that the reporters can photograph or film for television. For example, a group of older persons who demanded an increase in the Old Age Allowance brought a sour orange to represent their poor situation and the bitterness they felt.¹⁷ In the legislative councillors’ mass meeting, the participants walked around the Legislative Council and then burst all their colourful balloons to symbolize their ability to uncover the lies and the wrongs of the Housing Authority. On 22 September 2003, *Apple Daily* printed an article entitled “200 people petitioned regarding the delay of the Housing Authority’s rent reduction,”(2003) which reported the petition in detail, including the balloons, their symbolic meanings, and how the group walked around the Legislative Council building.

Apart from organising the petitions, Wan enjoyed giving speeches in mass meetings. When I asked her about the petition to the Legislative Councillors in September 2004, she recalled how she made a very brief but firm statement that she would continue her protest and urged the Housing Authority to launch the rent reduction according to the Court ruling. In my observation, she was a bit shy and

told the organiser that she had nothing to say before she moved onto the stage. After her speech, the 200 participants showed their appreciation with a big hand after her speech. The crowd warmly welcomed Madam Wan and her promised allegiance to the court case, which was vital for the development of the movement organised by the ADGHR. Madam Wan recalled her participation:

They [the organisers of the ADGHR] asked me to speak; I said I did not know how to make a speech... I did not know how to speak; I told him that I would just say a few words. They said, “You had made Suen M. Y.¹⁸ speechless; you can’t say that you are not good at making speeches.” [Wan laughed and continued to recall her experiences.] So I just said a few words. [I found] that the others could speak clearly, but I didn’t know how [to do that]. I thought that I could say a lot, but when I was there, I didn’t know what I should say...

As Madam Wan talked to me about her experiences in her participation, she kept smiling happily and showed that she enjoyed all these experiences in her activism. Nevertheless, she still claimed that she did not know how to speak (this is often a common response of older women whom I contacted for an interview), but her facial expressions showed that she was happy to recall this memory. Wan told me that she was making this effort not just for herself but also for the other public-housing estate residents who were suffering from the high-rent policy of the Housing Authority. She thought that she was doing good deeds for the others.

I have argued elsewhere that social movement organisers in Hong Kong largely adopt a formalised petitioning routine that has clear guidelines and operational forms (such as putting on a performance for the media) (Luk, 1994b). Examining Hong Kong's style of social protest specifically in housing struggles, I argued that movement organisers need to review both movement practices and their outcomes in terms of immediate and direct pressure exerted on the responsible authorities (i.e. the concrete movement outcomes as they create policy changes that directly affect the everyday life of the movement actors) (Luk, 1994b).

As Wan's case illustrates, policy-makers found the formalized petitions not threatening but rather a show for the social actors. The representative of the Housing, Planning, and Land Bureau referred to the protests of ADGHR and declared that "they like to put on shows in order to attract the attention of the others. So let people watch their shows."¹⁹ They made this statement when the ADGHR went to petition in front of the official's house during the Chinese New Year on 24 January 2004. In order to strengthen the pressures on the authority, Ms. Wan and her group decided to launch a legal challenge to the authority, which they expected to push for fundamental change in rent policy affecting their daily life.

Rather than assume that the media is neutral, movement organisers in those new social actions are careful to consider whether news reporting constitutes an

effective means by which the ADGHR can put pressure on the authorities. For example, on some occasions, the petitioners examined in my earlier study (Luk, 1994b) might choose strategies such as blocking the entrance hall of the Housing Authority. But if they did not think that media reporting would facilitate their movement, they would choose not to inform the press. In Wan's case, in addition to the unexpected attention she drew from the media and the public, she found it difficult to determine whether the media's role supported her activism or not. However, in the process, she learnt to handle the media precisely as a medium through which she could speak to the public, and she would carefully choose how to represent herself therein. For example, she was able to let the media represent her determination to continue protesting the Housing Authority despite the Court of Final Appeal's ruling against her on 22 November 2005. In this regard, the article entitled "Tenants take heart from dissent ruling" (Albert Wong 2005, A11) in *Hong Kong Standard* quoted her statement:

I, [Wan], will not be disheartened with this judgement because of the support shown to me by Judge Bao Qingtan [Bokhary]. I will not be a turtle who hides her head in her shell; I will march on.

Meanwhile, the *China Daily* (Hong Kong version) reported her statement:

I'm not disappointed. Many of my friends still support me. I will keep on pushing the HA [the Housing Authority] to fulfill my demand of rent reduction. (Teddy Ng, 22 November 2005, P01)

The *South China Morning Post* also reported on her response in detail:

[Madam Wan], the tenant who filed for a judicial review of the rent policies three years ago, said she was disappointed by the judgement but would not lose hope. "I still feel good because there is at least one judge who supports me, I will not be defeated," Ms. [Wan] said, referring to Mr. Justice Kemal Bokhary, the only one of the five judges who supported her case. (Polly Hui and C.K. Lau 2005, EDT1)

As I talked with Madam Wan a few days after the ruling in 2005, Madam Wan re-affirmed to me that she had decided to carry on with her protest against the Housing Authority and that she was satisfied with the news reports of her statement. Nevertheless, Madam Wan still resented the Housing Authority, which had refused to reduce the rent, and she thought that the authority was not taking good care of ageing women. She had come to realise that she needed to defend her rights, since "people are inconsiderate and they bully the elderly." At the same time, Madam Wan expressed anger over the "disapproval" of her family, especially of her youngest daughter, in regard to her activism. Meanwhile, Madam Wan gradually developed a caring network in her activism, which extended her focus of family care to

community care. By “community”, I mean the community of ageing women, their activism.

Ms. Wan’s struggle for care-based rights

Asserting that “care is as essential as the air we breathe,” Deborah Stone (2000, p. 1) pointed out that “Now we need a Right to Care, and it’s going to take a movement to get it”.²⁰ She argued for a movement that demonstrates that “caring is not a free resource,” that “caring is hard and skilled work.” The notion of care giving is central both to feminist studies and gerontology studies. Exploring the feeling of isolation and powerlessness experienced by women in the 1950s and the 1960s in the United States, Friedan ([1963] 1983) in *The Feminine Mystique* famously highlighted how women naturally accepted motherhood and housewifery as their final destiny. Friedan argued for a path that women could follow out of domesticity. In Britain, Ann Oakley (1976, p. 5) pointed out, “Progress towards sex equality is hampered by women’s domestic responsibilities.” Oakley (1976, p. 157) took her argument further:

The myth of the division of labour by sex describes the relegation of women to a domestic role in the family group as natural, universal and necessary. It states that women are naturally housewives in all societies, and that women need to assume this role for society to survive.

In reviewing societies' failure to appreciate that housework is work in terms of the time and energy it involves, the women's movement has for decades requested that women have access to child care, a request that is central to feminist studies but one that refers chiefly to the needs and situations of younger women.

In understanding specifically an older women's care identity, Miriam Bernard and Kathy Meade (1993, pp. 15-16) made the following point:

Feminists have drawn links between the care of older people and the care of young children, challenging the assumptions underlying community care policies that, it is forcefully argued, rely on the willingness and availability of family members, i.e. women to provide such services for dependent relatives. Feminists have also successfully striven to make visible the sacrifices and hardships involved in caring; highlighting the emotional, psychological, social and economic costs entailed with such activity. A key aim has been to lift caring out of the privacy and obscurity of the domestic setting and to describe it as labour, worthy at least of recognition and, ideally, of financial remuneration.

However, Bernard and Meade pointed out that the early research on caring tended to concentrate very much on carers whilst "the experiences and reactions of those being cared for received minimum attention" and that "the overall result has been a very one-dimensional picture, in which elderly people are stereotyped as the passive recipients of care" (Bernard and Meade 1993, p. 16).

In Hong Kong, some gerontologists (for example, Ng, Phillips, and Lee 2002; Ngan and Wong 1995) have identified and examined the changing meaning of care in Hong Kong's Chinese families, particularly in relation to filial piety; however, in gerontology studies, the focus of these examinations has been on the duty of care attributable to children or women. As I have noted previously, the meaning of 'care' in Hong Kong is very much related to the meaning of "filial piety", according to which children take care of their parents as they are in need of care. Consequently, researchers have paid much attention to *carer* support (Chan, 2002). Ngan and Wong (1995) pointed out that the labour of love was found amongst daughters, spouses, or daughters in law as reflected in the two researchers' study on informal carers.

Here, I would point out that Madam Wan's case reflects ageing women's desire to continue caring for the family rather than only be cared for. This desire suggests that care is complex and that researchers should not polarise it by identifying only "caregivers" and "care receivers" but should rather allow for an interfacing of these two roles, particularly as they concern ageing women. Further, as we will see, this care-based desire was interfacing in the formation of ageing women's ageing-related experiences and in their activism. For Wan, the care-based desire of her family was both empowering and disempowering to her. Nevertheless, she was able to extend her care and support by engaging in her activism network.

Care by the family or care for the family?

After one of the ADGHR meetings held on 26 September 2004, I accompanied Wan home. We took a bus outside Centre G—a short journey of about five minutes—to arrive at the TK estate. I walked slowly with Madam Wan from the bus stop for a few minutes and finally arrived at her flat. On our way, Madam Wan met a few people in the community, and she stopped to talk with a lady who was in her thirties. They talked for a while causally and inquired whether the other had eaten and where the other was going. I sensed that Madam Wan felt relaxed and safe in this familiar environment, where she knew her neighbourhood.

Not until we arrived at the door of her flat did she tell me briefly that “my son’s girlfriend is here.” This was the first time that anyone had mentioned that her son’s girlfriend was living there in her flat. Her flat is about 350 square feet. As we entered the flat, she showed me that on the right-hand side was her son’s room. Then, we passed by the kitchen, the toilet on the left hand side. A young lady (I thought that she was the girlfriend of L) was combing her hair inside the bathroom with the door ajar. I managed to quickly greet her as Madam Wan and I passed by the bathroom, but I was not sure whether she had replied. However, Madam Wan did not notice, and she did not introduce us to each other even after our conversation.

The living room was decorated with a big sofa for watching television, and a

computer set was there. A cabinet next to the television set displayed some framed photos of family gatherings and Madam Wan's handicrafts, which she had made while participating in activities at the elderly centres. About 50 square feet, her own room was much smaller than her son's and was facing the living room. Madam Wan asked me whether I would prefer to talk in her room or to stay in the living room. In order to retain privacy, I stated that I preferred to talk with her in her tidy room, even though it is not common amongst Chinese to sit around a bedroom and chat with guests when a living room is available. This scenario reminded me of the ageing women whom, in 1998 and 1999, I had visited for my research in APIAS and who had shared living rooms: most of the women had preferred that our interview take place in their bedroom rather than in the living room because they had felt that they had greater control over—and thus greater comfort in—their bedrooms.²¹ Later on, I found the son's girlfriend was playing computer games in the living room whilst we were having a conversation in Ms. Wan's room.

Ms. Wan's own room in her flat is quite small and has space only for a medium-sized wardrobe and a cabinet next to her bunk bed. She asked me to sit on the lower bunk: the upper bunk was neatly covered with odds and ends. Her lower bunk also served as a storage place for well-organised clothes, thus allowing for more space in the bedroom. As we sat down on her bed, we were facing a small

television set and a video compact disc (VCD) recorder where she had all her Chaozhou Opera VCDs piled up. She turned on the fan, which was on the floor and offered me a cup of orange juice. Then, she explained that the canned foods, rice packs, and canned milk powder that were spread all over the floor were donations collected from the Caritas-Hong Kong located in Tsuen Wan. Mr. Cheuk, her old “*kaifong*” [街坊]²² assisted in the monthly delivery of these donations to her. She also showed me her sets of clothes, which were carefully folded one by one and were packed all around her bed. She stated that she found it convenient and also a space saver. The shopping bags were mainly for storage of her personal items such as photo albums and mementos, some of which hung from her bed like treasures. I asked if she had any photos that she would like to show me, and she carefully selected one of the bags and unpacked her photo albums, which she then shared with me. At the end of our conversation, when I was ready to go, she chose one of the bags again and showed me the 2003 *Next Magazine* that had reported her story. She had her own way of knowing the order of things well, but she could hardly explain it to me, instead declaring simply, “I just know.” I was terribly curious to know what else was inside the other bags and wished that she would show me the contents. But I was constrained by time, and of course, I did not want to appear impolite or to intrude on her privacy.

In my observation, her use of the flat's space catered to the needs of her son and of his girlfriend. Consequently, they occupied the larger bedroom and played the computer in the living room. Wan told me that she seldom stayed at home and that she liked to participate in activities or just to walk around the parks or open areas around her flat. As Madam Wan described her daily routines to me, I came to know that she prepared her own meals and that she would not eat together with her youngest son and his girlfriend. However, Madam Wan was the one who paid the monthly rent of HK\$2,110. Media coverage of Madam Wan's case in 2003 and 2004 widely reported on her financial difficulties and the unemployment of her youngest son who lived with her. In defending her activism, Madam Wan stated,

I understand it is difficult to make a living right now, so I just want to help my son... They [the authority] are saying that the Old Age pension is for buying fruits, but I am using the money to pay the rent... My [youngest] son is not able to earn much. He could not afford to pay me [for living expenses]...

And she declared that her son

...did intend to [contribute financially], but he could not afford to do so... He is having difficulties [financially]. With his girlfriend staying [here with Madam Wan] for so many years... He has no money to get married [and to establish his new family].

Madam Wan could solve her economic problem if she could apply for CSSA.

Madam Wan understood well that if she successfully applied to the Housing Authority to split the housing that she currently shared with her youngest son, L, then she could be eligible to apply for the CSSA.²³ But then her son would be obliged to take care of his new unit's rent. Madam Wan preferred to keep her son in her household so that she could take care of the rent for him, and she hoped that one day, he would be able to build up his own family.

Rather than being a dependent in the family, Madam Wan was actually the one who still took care of her family. She tried her best to continue her caring role when her children got into "troubles". For example, in 2003, she helped to take care of her granddaughter, the daughter of her second son, when his wife died in that year.

Madam Wan introduced me to her granddaughter when I visited her in Centre E in 2004. On that day, she was helping to arrange lunch for her granddaughter. She told me that she had helped to take care of this granddaughter of her second son and how they had established a close connection after that. At that time, her granddaughter had stayed in her flat for a short while when no one was able to take care of her.

As a mother, Madam Wan strove to create a better living environment for her family. She recalled how, about thirty years earlier, she had negotiated with the Housing Authority for an additional room to solve the problem of over-crowdedness.

A total of six children were crowded into a flat of about 100 square feet²⁴ back at the old blocks of the TK estate. According to Wan, when she first moved to Block 22 of the TK Estate, she already had one daughter (the oldest child) and two sons. But at that time, the Housing Authority counted two children as one adult when the agency allocated household size to a family. Many households face the same problem of overcrowding when their children gradually grow up and new babies are born (Leung Mei-yee 1999, p. 136). Madam Wan found that the overcrowding problems became increasingly unbearable as her children grew up and her other three children were born. She also mentioned how her children suffered as they had to sleep on the floor and crowded together before she successfully applied for an additional flat. So, she started her negotiation with the Housing official at that time and applied to the Housing Authority for an additional unit in 1976.

Madam Wan recalled her dialogue with the officer from the Housing Authority. These officers had to investigate these cases and to pay un-notified visits to the flats in question to review living conditions there. At that time, some residents took in homeless relatives and friends from Mainland China (Leung Mei-yee 1999, p. 163). However, the officer could not catch Wan doing so the few times that he checked her flat. Wan recalled how she had asked him, “What are you doing here?” And the officer had replied, “To come and visit you, to check whether you are living

here... and to check whether you rent the unit to the other tenants.” Wan then recalled how the officer checked her unit carefully and asked about the owner of clothes and even underwear. Then Wan pointed to one of the underwear and told him, “Those are mine.”, and trying to embarrass him. According to Wan, the officer said to her,

Officer: [Wan], I really don’t know how to handle you...I will go now...But I really found it difficult to meet up with you.

Wan: Yes, I went to work when you were not yet in your office. When I went home after work, you had already left. So how can you see me in my flat?! If you need to meet me, you have to arrange a time. I can take time off to meet you. Otherwise, you can’t meet me.

I could feel that Madam Wan was happy that she had both challenged the officer but not upset the situation. She felt a sense of success when she received one additional unit for her children shortly afterward. She told me that she had pursued this goal for her children. The motivation underlying her involvement in the overcharged-rent issue was similar in a sense: she was continuing her caring role for her youngest son.

Madam Wan’s negotiation for an active life

Madam Wan’s continuing caregiver role relative to her children and to their

family has received little attention in discussions concerning her legal action against the Housing Authority. Despite the prevalent understanding of older women as vulnerable and as dependent on their family, Madam Wan strove to take care of her children even in her later life. At the same time, Ms. Wan developed her own independent caring network within her community and got involved in ageing women's activism that resulted in mutual caring amongst ageing women, a topic that I will discuss shortly. As she recognised that she could not depend on her children to take care of her financially as most parents in Hong Kong might expect, she sought to create emotional support between herself and her children and especially her grand children.

As I asked about the media coverage of her "bad" relationship with her children, Madam Wan told me,

My elder daughter has not scolded me...My children did not scold me. Now, my sons, my daughter-in-laws, my [elder] daughter... except my younger daughter...only this one [her younger daughter] can't talk. Maybe she is rich and she looks down upon me.

Although Madam Wan posed evidence of support from her children, she was upset by the conflict that media coverage of her story had caused. As we will see, the

agency and the empowerment of ageing women is bounded by the women's family.

Madam Wan did not want to discuss with me the details of her children's disapproval of her activism, but she discussed the objections of her youngest daughter, K,²⁵ to her continuation of the legal action against the Housing Authority. According to the article "*Ah Po*" won, the Housing Authority in tears" published in *Next Magazine* in July 2003, Wan's youngest son was angry about the reporters coming around for interviews in his flat. According to Ms. Man, organiser of the Centre G, she made contact with Wan's youngest son, who voiced objections to the media's disturbing effect. Ms. Man further commented that his attitude changed gradually and that he got to know the organisers and other group members via home visits and causal contact with the ADGHR.

The details of her family and her children including their names, monthly income, marital status, and their relationship with Madam Wan were reported in 2002, when she first filed the court case.²⁶ The articles stated that "[Wan] insisted on her beliefs despite harming her relationships with her children" (Sun 2005, A02). According to the article, her children did not understand her and did not accept her taking legal action. Nevertheless, when I interviewed Madam Wan in 2004, she focused only on the disapproval of her younger daughter, K in regard to Wan's taking legal actions against the Housing Authority. K blamed Wan for letting the

reporter take photos in her home and for giving out details about her children.

Madam Wan recalled that K had declared, “If you carry on with the court case, I will stop paying you money” and, “she [K] said, ‘Mother, no matter where you go, do not mention my name’, and then I said, ‘Alright, I said something wrong, I am sorry’. From then on, I did not talk about her any more.”

Wan was upset and seemed to be unconvinced that her younger daughter should frighten her by stopping to pay her money for her continuation of her activism. In Hong Kong, it is common for children to give pocket money (either monthly or in festivals such as the mid-autumn festival) to their parents. The money is supposed to cover not living costs but leisure costs such as dining out [*Yin cha*]. In reviewing the practice of filial piety in Hong Kong, Chow (2001) argued that, despite the changing interpretation of filial piety, children are aware that to satisfy the material needs of their parents is to show the children’s care and concern for the parents.²⁷ Wan was upset not solely because the money was much-needed financial support but also because she felt that activism was no excuse to cut off payment.

Nearly two years had passed following K’s decision to stop paying pocket money when Madam Wan told me about their conflict. Nevertheless, Madam Wan was still puzzled as to why K would consider her mother’s protest problematic. For example, Madam Wan once asked me the following question:

Wan: [Do you think that I am] losing face²⁸?!]

Kit-ling: Do you think so?

Wan: No... I don't think so. [But] For example, if you were my son, would you feel ashamed? Would you?

Kit-ling: I don't think so.

Wan: But they [her children] feel like that.

Kit-ling: You have the right to do what you think is right.

Wan: I thought so, but they [her children] were not happy about that...

In defending her activism and the media coverage that seems to be unacceptable to K, Madam Wan stated that she sought to handle the media in a subtle way:

The reporter came into my flat to take photos, that's why it is troublesome... My younger daughter scolded my youngest son. She scolded her younger brother and blamed him for allowing reporters from the press to take photos... The reporter asked me what I eat and how long I kept my food in the refrigerator... They just took the camera out and took photos of my food in the refrigerator... What we can do? ...Should I scold them [the reporter]? Or should I hit them [the reporter]? It is useless. Indeed; they have taken the photos anyway."

Madam Wan told me that she did not see any problem in telling the reporters the details of her financial and living conditions. Though Madam Wan did not agree

with—and sometimes found it difficult to understand—her daughters’ objections, she became very guarded as I asked about the details of whether her other children objected to her participation. She repeatedly told me that she would not like to upset her family again and asked me not to mention her children’s names when I told her that I would need to write a thesis on her case.

Despite this seemingly disempowering experience, Madam Wan continued her activism and became a core member of the ADGHR in continuing the court case against the Housing Authority. She maintained contact with her children except her younger daughter, K. On the day I visited her home on 24 September 2004, she was waiting for their call to a family dinner gathering as the Mid-Autumn Festival was close. And she shared with me funny stories and detailed conversations about her granddaughter and recalled how her granddaughter cared about her. Madam Wan was happy to keep very close contact with her all her grandchildren and one great grandchild for care and attachment. As she repeatedly mentioned to the media and in her conversation with me, she emphasised that she had only one hope: if she could win the case and have the rent paid back, she could bring all her grandchildren to the restaurant for “dim sum” & “*yin cha*”, an activity that she had not engaged in for a long time.

Even though Madam Wan repeatedly told me that she had a bad memory, she

could easily tell me about the events in photos such as the wedding of her elder son and their family dinner gatherings. Of course, she could not remember the exact date, and sometimes there were other confusions. But I could feel her happiness in sharing her family life with me. As for me, I could hardly remember all the faces and their particular relation to Madam Wan, and I found it difficult to ask for such details or to show her how hard I tried to remember all those faces. As I told her that she looked different in those photos, she laughed happily and declared, “Yes, that is me.” She enjoyed telling me the details of those photos, and I could feel her happiness as she mentioned her great granddaughter, the granddaughter of her elder daughter:

She is pretty, this naughty girl... this one... she was much younger [at that time], so pretty. She could dance ballet well... [In her pose], she touched her dress... then she looked back and looked at us...Ha! Ha! [Madam Wan laughed]...so cute.

Nevertheless, she also told me firmly, “I rely on myself; actually it is difficult to rely on them [her children].” Here it is obvious that ageing women could be, on the one hand, dependent on the care from family members and, on the other, independently exercising their rights and empowering themselves through participation. Madam Wan however was supported by “her friends”.

Building a network of care

The caring network that formed in her activism was a source of power for Madam Wan. With me, she shared her related interactions during our conversation. She was also grateful to the organisers of Centre G for assisting her to launch the legal challenge to the Housing Authority.

I told them [organisers of Centre G] that they had helped me a lot. I was really happy. I really feel happy in my heart. They [organisers of Centre G] said, “you helped the others [the public housing tenants who are suffering the high rent], so the others help you.” But I told them, “[it is different,] as there is no need for me to spend a cent to help the others.” I don’t need the others doing anything for me. I just would like them to come forward [to join in the petitions] with their hearts.

Most of all, she enjoyed the caring relationship that they built around her activism.

They [members of the ADGHR] are good. They take care of me. They take care of me. For example, Kin²⁹ held my hands and asked me whether I needed to drink water...He also told me to watch out for the stairs, to be careful: “Don’t go to the wrong coach. You should go to this one.” I think they are good people. Don’t you think so? Though I am foolish, I know how to differentiate [good people from bad people]... “You old folks should be careful”...Long Hair³⁰ said the same. Ha! Ha!

Apart from councillors, Madam Wan recalled how she was taken good care of by the

volunteers (university students in social work and other social sciences) who accompanied her home after her meetings at the Centre G or who assisted in the delivery of canned food, cooking oil, and moon cakes from the community centre. She also recalled her happiness when she had received her first Christmas card from her lawyer who had represented her in her court case. Also, she built connections with strangers who were willing to support her financially.

Madam Wan was grateful to the reporter who had written an article entitled, “*Ah Po* [older woman] won, the Housing Authority in tears” published in *Next Magazine* in 2003, which attracted the attention of a factory owner who offered financial support to her after reading her story. She recalled how the owner of the factory in Shenzhen sent his staff to bring her money through the assistance of the reporter (Madam Wan could not remember her name, and the reporter’s name was not printed in the article):

The magazine [assisted the staff of the factory to] give me some money... [The staff of the factory-owner messenger said] “*Ah po*, I will help you overcome the [financial] difficulty”... I gratefully thanked them. They said, “... that’s enough, *ah po*. [Helping you to] overcome the difficulty, both you and we all feel good”... The boss [of the factory] read the press stating that “this *ah po* is brave”.

Madam Wan told me that the money had helped her clear all her debts, so she

felt relieved. And I could recall how she kept the magazine carefully in one of her treasured bags, even though she could not read but could only see the photos attached. I could feel that she considered me a supporter too. Her activism has enabled her to make friends, and I could feel how this friendship had enabled her to continue her protest against the Housing Authority.

More importantly, Wan and the other ageing women who participated in the elderly concern group and also in the ADGHR were forming into a care network that extended beyond her local neighbourhood. In my observation, for example, after one of the meetings of the ADGHR close to the Mid-Autumn Festival in September 2004, the organisers were delivering moon cakes to about 20 participants who had crowded together. As the organiser and a few older women realised that Madam Wan was not coming up for the moon cake, the deliverers stopped handing out the moon cakes and went to see where Madam Wan had gone. One of the older women said she knew that Madam Wan had gone to the restroom, where in fact she was. An older woman told the organiser that she would keep a moon cake for Wan anyway, so it would be no problem even if they could not find her. A little later, Madam Wan came up and clarified that she had already obtained her moon cake, which was at home where Mr. Cheuk had delivered it the day earlier.

On other occasions, ageing women in her group tried to keep left over foods

such as cakes for Madam Wan and to bring them home to her for dinner. Everybody in her group sympathised with her financial difficulty and was eager to help out. In this regard, the most impressive event that I observed occurred on July 1 2005. On that day, I met Madam Wan at the pro-democracy rally demanding the Hong Kong Government to introduce universal suffrage in the election of the Chief Executive and all members of the Legislative Council in Hong Kong as soon as possible. I saw that Madam Wan was holding hands with two other ageing women and that they were slowly moving in the march. One of her companions told me that Madam Wan was not feeling well and that they therefore had to be very careful. It was obvious that Madam Wan treasured this caring relationship with the organisers, volunteers, and older women in her group and that they had jointly formed a well-connected platform that supported not one person but every person in mutual and interdependent ways. This network transcended both the families to which they had once been confined and the local neighbourhoods.

This care network was a crucial support for Madam Wan's activism and also for her life as an ageing woman who accepted that she had to rely on her own kind and not on her children. The drive to support her children has motivated her to join in the protest and to seek out a caring network, both of which support ageing women's everyday life in Hong Kong. Madam Wan concluded that "people [policy

makers, her neighbours, and all those who do not support her] are inconsiderate and exploit the elderly,” and she made up her mind to continue protesting the authority and refused to become a “cowardly old lady” afraid of the authority (Ng 2004).

Formation of ageing-related experiences

Madam Wan’s activism sheds light on the formation of her own ageing-related experiences. Ms. Wan’s identification with her ageing-related identity gradually grew stronger. In summarizing her experiences, Ms. Wan made the following remarks cited in the article “Rent-cut battle set to go to Court of Final Appeal” written by Teddy Ng (2004) and published in *The Standard* on 23 November 2004:

“I have been waiting for a rent reduction for more than three years so I don’t mind spending more time taking the matter to a higher court,” Ho said.

“People are inconsiderate and exploit the elderly. I am fed up.”

“But I will continue taking steps forward to resolve this matter, and I will not be dubbed a cowardly old woman.”

Madam Wan came to realise that the policymakers, her local community, and also her family would not or could not provide her with a caring environment in her later life. So she made up her mind that she had to rely on herself. She took active control

over her life and represented herself as “an ageing woman” with pride, being tough and brave to defend what she believed. In supporting herself in this regard, she developed practices that reflect active ageing.

Active Ageing in Practice

Similar to Ms. Choi, Ms. Wan was a very active member of a few nearby elderly centres, and in this way, she sought to fulfil her recreational and social needs after her retirement in 1996. After moving in to her new home in 1998, she attended various activities organised by Centre E, which was an elderly centre located very near her flat. When I visited her home on 26 September 2004, she showed me all those photos of her activities, which included outings organised by the centres, involvement in a vegetarian-meals programme, and a tour to Beijing. She also served as a volunteer “flag seller” for charity organizations, an activity that the government approved for fund-raising in non-profit organizations.

On that September day, she happily pointed to a T-shirt hanging on the wall and told me about her recent experiences in joining the 30-Hour Famine programme³¹ for older persons. There were also photos of Wan in traditional costume, when she was practicing and performing the Lion Dance with a group of older adults including men and women in Centre E. Decorating her tiny room were

the certificates that non-government organizations had awarded her in honour of her participation. Madam Wan told me that she preferred going out for activities to staying in her room, which she described as very boring. She welcomed both the activities that the social-service centres organised for the elderly and the caring relationships that she had built with the centre members.

After she took legal action against the Housing Authority, the social workers, Wong and Tsui of Centre E, offered her part-time work in the centre at HK \$40 per day and provided her with lunch in the centre. Her main task was to serve tea, biscuits and breads to elderly who visited the centre. On 2 September 2004, I paid a visit to Madam Wan when she was working in Centre E. I got a chance to talk with the social worker Wong and explained my study on Wan. Wong warmly welcomed me and briefly described the work that Madam Wan performed in her centre. Whilst its members, about 15 people, were attending a health talk, Wong arranged a room in which Madam Wan and I could talk. After the health talk was over, Madam Wan started to prepare the table and arrange the lunch for the centre members. She told me that she was responsible for the washing up after meals. She expressed her deep gratitude to Wong and the centre, since the part time work here can help her make a living on her own. I could see that Wan was careful in doing her tasks and that she talked freely with the members in the Centre. Wan recalled how her husband had

taken good care of her before he died in 1998.

Madam Wan had married when she was twenty four and had stayed home as a housewife. Her relatives had introduced her to her future husband, who was ten years older than she. She recalled how her husband had worked hard to earn a living for their family. There was no need for her to worry about money. She emphasised that her husband had occupied a senior position in agricultural (mainly vegetable) transportation and showed me the identity card of his company that she kept with her. At the same time, Madam Wan told me that her husband had helped out in buying food and in cooking for the family. She recalled the happy days when her husband had taken good care of the family. She also expressed how she felt comfortable with him around and free from worry. After his retirement in the late 1980s, Ms. Wan worked as a dim sum worker in a nearby restaurant. At first, she did not tell her husband about that work, since she thought that her husband would object to her taking a job and would prefer that she stay at home.

1. "I am a foolish [OLD] woman?!"

In the process of our interactions in formal interviews or our casual conversations during lunch or at meetings, Madam Wan reflected openly on her worries, sadness, and happiness. She quite often asked questions, sometimes

rhetorically, about whether she was “useless” or “foolish”. She described herself in these terms:

[I am] just like *a blind fly*. I just go where [I] would like to go. Just like when my children ask me to go out for dinner, or to go *yin cha* [飲茶], I just go. I did not think much...I did not think much...

When we discussed her photos in the newspapers and I asked her whether she saw her photos, she laughed happily:

Wan: Yes.

Kit-ling: Yes. So how do you feel?

Wan: A foolish woman. Just like a foolish woman... [Ha! Ha!]

While we may think that these self-perceptions are “negative”, I would point out that they seem to hold a different meaning for her. For example, when she showed me her photos of her Beijing Tour with the other ageing women, Madam Wan called herself a “foolish woman” [傻婆] but, at the same time, laughed happily and busily recounted where they had toured. When we talked about some of her neighbours who expressed disapproval of her legal challenge to the Housing Authority, she again represented herself as a foolish woman:

I am very foolish. I just do what I can think of. I don't care a lot...Not until the others [her neighbours] scold me [do I realise my foolishness]. If they like to scold me [for the legal challenge to the Housing Authority], I just let it go...

I am foolish, so I do not fear people's scoldings. I am doing this for myself and for the others [old housing residents who could not afford the rent].

Basically I am a foolish woman. I knew nothing... I knew nothing. The old saying is "If your horse dies, you just walk." So I am not afraid to do anything.

In my observation, Madam Wan's self representation as a "foolish" woman was not negative, but an excuse for her to justify her legal challenge to the Housing Authority, which her neighbourhood considered inappropriate. To Madam Wan, recognising her own "ignorance" differentiated her from the wider public including her family and the neighbourhood, and consequently, she could justify her brand of activism, which may have appeared foolish in others' eyes.

Similarly, she sometimes commented on her uselessness. For example, when we talked about her making a speech at mass meetings, she told me that she found her related efforts insufficient. Then she asked me, "Am I useless?!" Madam Wan paused after her question to me but, without awaiting my answer, carried on with her account of other activities that she had enjoyed in the ADGHR. This pattern surfaced

quite often in our conversations, and I found it difficult to answer in the first place because I never would refer to people as useless. However, gradually, I could feel that she expected no answers from me and wanted only that I share her anger, disappointment, or happiness regarding a specific aspect of her activism. The questions about being “useless” or “foolish” were representative not really of her self-perceptions but of her perceptions of other people’s possible perceptions of her—especially regarding these people’s possible objections to her activism.

2. *“I am in poverty, but I respect people...”*

Madam Wan had her own understanding of being an older woman in poverty, particularly with regard to the media’s representation of her economic hardship. In her neighbourhood and in the wider local community where she had resided for such a long time, she faced an unexpected furious attack from her old neighbours whom she had known since moving onto the estate. She described their fierce scolding of her and emphasized the unexpectedness of it.

According to Madam Wan and Ms. Man, the neighbourhood was split over whether they should support Madam Wan’s protest against the Housing Authority. Some of the residents, although uncertain of the possibility that Wan would win the case, supported the protest insofar as it might ease their financial burden. However,

there were residents in the local community who expressed their disapproval of Madam Wan's organization of the rent struggle. Their views were mixed, and Madam Wan found it difficult to differentiate their core reasons for the objection. Madam Wan thought that one reason concerned their objection to her exposure of personal details to the media. But Madam Wan thought that this exposure was none of their business: "I am making demands of the government [the Housing Authority for rent reduction]. [I am] not asking you [the neighbours] for money. They have no right to stop me or scold me."

Madam Wan recalled one of the fights that she had had with a male *kaifong* whom she had known for a long time. The fight occurred while she was doing morning exercises in the open space near her block. When he saw her there, Mr. Chi [not his real name] approached Madam Wan and challenged her:

Chi: Are you [Wan] in poverty, huh? Are you?

[Ms. Wan told me that she felt his hostility by his tone and his facial expression. Madam Wan tried to keep calm and not to argue with him. So she did not respond. But Chi repeated his query to her.]

Chi: [He said in a strange tone that made Wan uncomfortable] Are you really in poverty, huh? Are you so poor?

[Again sensing his hostility and his unfriendly tone, Madam Wan decided that she had to respond and prepared to fight back.]

Wan: Yes, I am poor, Mr. Chi. Although I am poor, I have never asked you to lend me a cent or asked you to pay for my tea... How can you talk to me like that? Even my children do not dare scold me, so how can you scold me? I have never owed you a cent. You have to reconsider your attitude [to me].

Wan told me that Mr. Chi did not know how to respond to her bold retort and that he then left immediately. She considered this conversation a victory over the “negative feedback” from her neighbourhood. She recalled that there was another older woman around who had heard their conversation. The old lady had voiced her appreciation of Wan’s response: “You are great... [he] couldn’t answer you, so he left.”

Madam Wan admitted that in the very beginning, she was upset by some of the residents who did not support her activism and who, in particular, refused to participate in the social actions or refused to lend their signature to petitions. Some of these opponents simply made discouraging comments, noting for example that Wan could never win the case. Madam Wan felt frustrated with and disrespected by, her *kaifong*, whom she had known for over twenty years. She considered these attacks serious both to her and to her activism. She told me that, though she was illiterate, she knew how to respect people. Madam Wan and other women in this study exhibited no hesitation in revealing their illiteracy in our conversation. In my observations, ageing women on the one hand expressed their illiteracy as a deficiency that was associated with ignorance or uselessness or being foolish. On the other hand, the women frequently argued that their illiteracy was not grounds for

other people's disrespect of them. In Madam Wan's case, she displayed her boldness because she believed that her unsupportive *kaifong* who were well educated failed to respect her right to launch her protest. In this way, Madam Wan re-represented her illiteracy and poverty as characteristics that, far from revealing ignorance or suffering, underscored her reasonableness and her respectability toward other people.

Madam Wan overcame the emotional disturbance by making up her mind "to simply ignore others' comments to her." At the same time she chose to carry on with the court case and her protest for rent reduction. In this way, these seemingly disempowering experiences failed to discourage Madam Wan or to undermine her activism. Indeed, in reviewing and rethinking her participation, Madam Wan realised that she had to continue with her protests and treat a wider range of housing issues concerning her living environments.

Media Representations and Negotiations

"Media do not present reality; they 're-present' it" (Stewart, Lavelle, and Kowaltzke 2001, p. 35). In the rent-debate struggle, the media characterized Madam Wan as the centre of the story. Rather than name her a 'nobody' as was the case in Ms. Choi's activism (reviewed in Chapter 3), the media named Madam Wan the

“‘Public housing hero’ servicing other tenants” (see the *Oriental Daily*, 12 July 2003) or the “representative of the rental tenants” (see *Ming Pao*, 22 April 2004, A16). On other occasions, published photos showed Madam Wan smiling happily and reported on the victory of the protests. For example, on 13 August 2003, newspapers widely circulated a front-and-centre photo of Wan smiling happily, making the “V” (victory) sign, and surrounded by members of ADHRG and their supporters.³²

At this point, it would be useful for us to consider the following point made by Stewart, Lavelle, and Kowaltzke (2001, p. 38):

Media make categories of people, events or ideas. Categories include labels such as “the unemployed”, “the aged” or “businessman”. Representations are generalisations about categories and why events, ideas or people belong in them. These categories then become part of our thinking processes. The meaning of a representation is selected and constructed, containing value judgements already in-built. All representations contain the point of view of the people who made them.

In examining the media coverage of Madam Wan in the three-year rent debate with the Housing Authority, I would argue that far from being a passive figure acting in the represented protests, Madam Wan and the ADGHR actively forged representations therein. Madam Wan has been active in negotiating her distinct representation of an ageing woman, and this representation does not reflect public

perceptions of ageing women as cowardly old ladies who easily given up, particularly under objection from family or neighbours. Thus, apart from her economic hardship and her fight with her younger daughter, Madam Wan represented herself as “powerful” and “persistent” in her activism.

The media first reviewed Madam Wan’s story in 2002 and focused on her economic hardship. News reports described in detail the “frugal life” of Ms. Wan, noting in particular that she had pawned her gold ornaments and borrowed money to pay rent and that she bought meals costing HK\$9 each day only to bring the leftovers home for her dinner.³³ These details of Madam Wan served as an explanation for her protest against unaffordable rent in public-housing estates. As mentioned earlier, there was another housing tenant who acted as an appellant—Lam. Lam received less media attention than Wan. Some print media covered his story only when the Court of First Instance ruled in favour of the appellants on 12 July 2003.³⁴ Some newspapers³⁵ simply mentioned his name or stated only that there was another housing tenant also active.

Focusing on Madam Wan, the media covered widely her family history, the family’s composition, and Madam Wan’s role as a mother of six children and as a grandmother. The details include her family’s monthly incomes, names, residential

locations, occupations, the children's sporadic contributions to Madam Wan, and her co-habitants. Photos indeed showed how she kept her leftover food in her nearly empty refrigerator. The news stories of Madam Wan focused on her domestic life and on her status as an older woman, a "Wan *po po*", but without emphasizing her gender. For example, stories were more likely to identify her as a public-housing tenant than as an elderly woman. Indeed, stories identified her first as a "public-housing tenant" (公屋居民) and, second, as an older person. The descriptions gave no further indication of her gender in the headlines or in the summaries. "Tenant, 73, seeks funds for rent fight" was the headline in *The Standard*, 26 November 2004 (Ng 2004). The focus on gender was therefore less pronounced: for example, the *Oriental Daily*, published on 12 July 2003, named Wan the "public-housing hero" but not "heroine".

Similarly, one of the English-language newspapers named Ms. Wan a "retired dim sum worker" (Chow, M. 2003) without addressing her gender or the context of her work. Arguing that "newspapers make news values salient by *personifying* events," Hall ([1973] 1981, p. 237) went on to argue that "photos play a crucial role in this form of personification, for people—human subjects—are *par excellence* the content of news and feature photographs." Hall defines "personification" as "the isolation of the person from his relevant social and

institutional context, or the constitution of a personal subject as exclusively the motor force of history, which is under consideration here.” I would argue that the Hong Kong media was constructing the “pathos of old age” (Gibb and Holroyd, 1996) by emphasising Madam Wan’s poverty, her conflict with her children, and the dissolution of her family relations.

Focusing on the story of Ms. Wan, the media symbolised the conflict as a “rent-cut battle” and a “rent fight” between a “poor old lady” and the authority. Media further elaborated on the unequal relations between the Housing Authority and Madam Wan in reporting the victory of Madam Wan in the Court of First Instance. In “Retired dim sum worker savours a sweet victory” (Chow, M. 2003), the *South China Morning Post* states,

It was probably one of the proudest moments in Ms. Wan’s life as she and Lam Kin-sum, a security guard, won the legal action on behalf of more than two million public housing tenants.

“Public-housing tenants” is one of the popular categories of participants identified by movement studies that treat the housing movement or housing protests in Hong Kong. Research and studies have focused on understanding the process of the construction of a collective identity that comprises public-housing tenants (for example, Leung C. Y. 2000), and the rent debate asks, “Should the government keep

public housing affordable to public housing tenants?” However, as in many other housing protests, the movement actors assert the “housing rights” in general terms (The People’s Council on Public Housing Policy 1995, p. 298), but do not inquire into the housing rights of older women in the society.

Wan was neither a frequent viewer of television news, as she rarely stayed home, nor a reader of newspapers, as she was illiterate. She learned about the media’s coverage of her by listening to related accounts from fellow organisers or at monthly meetings held at Centre G. When Madam Wan shared family details with reporters, she was unaware that her actions would draw the attention of her family and her neighbourhood. She was happy that the newspaper called her a “housing hero [ine]” and took it as a sign of appreciation for her activism. Nevertheless, Madam Wan exhibited her caution when she handled the press and me as a stranger. She stated assertively to the media that she was not disappointed, not upset, by the final ruling of the court, and she managed to shape her own representation of an ageing woman who would continue her protests. As I remember, once when I attended Ms. Wan’s elderly rights’ group meeting in 2004, the participants were discussing whether they would accept an invitation from Radio Television Hong Kong to do a documentary on their activities. Some stated that they could not understand why the news reporters were so interested in going to their flats for

interviews. Some were uncomfortable with the scenario because they considered their flats too small for a proper interview. Others were uncomfortable with the idea of inviting strangers to their home, while some were afraid to disturb the neighbourhood. Therefore, the participants decided to do the interviews in Centre G.

Madam Wan's activism for affordable rent continued even after the final ruling in favour of the Housing Authority in November 2005. In particular, she still attended the regular monthly meetings of the elderly-rights concern group organised by Centre G.—maintaining her caring network.

Conclusion

Wray (2004) conducted a study on British women from different ethnic backgrounds and aimed to identify the women's diverse experiences of agency, empowerment, and disempowerment. According to Wray (2004, p. 32), "power is an aspect of interdependency and reciprocity rather than independence and self-sufficiency." In her study, Wray (2004, p. 32) argued that older women from a diversified cultural background understand their "agency and empowerment" as *interdependency* rather than as *independence*, regarding particularly their family and friendship networks. For example, Wray (2004) pointed out that older women living with the family and taking care of their children or grandchildren may prolong their

sense of being in control. In examining the experiences and perceptions of 170

British women who hailed from different ethnic backgrounds and who were between

the ages of 60 and 80, Wray argued that:

Having a continuing role to play in the lives of their children contributed to the feelings of authority, self-worth, and power. Here, power is an aspect of interdependency and reciprocity rather than in-dependence and self-sufficiency.

Hence, older women who lived alone and who were freed from caring

responsibilities in later life might experience disempowerment, not

empowerment—they might feel a lack of achievement and control (Wray 2004, p.

33). The notion that *interdependency* rather than *independence* is a route to

empowerment is therefore important in understanding empowerment and agency

amongst ageing women (Wray 2004).

I have reviewed Madam Wan's understanding of her agency and

empowerment as a process. In particular, I focused on the changing meaning of care

in Madam Wan's activism. Gerontologist literature has widely discussed the notion

of care, but has neglected the "*interdependency*" and reciprocity of the caring

relations amongst ageing women and their families. The linear understanding of care

in the dichotomy of caregiver and care receiver significantly neglects ageing

women's desire to continue their caring roles in their family and to be cared for by their family during their later life. Madam Wan's story suggests that her caring network extended from the family to the community and that the network formed the source of power in Madam Wan's activism. In constructing herself as a "foolish and poor" old lady, Madam Wan was able to construct her own ageing experiences and identity in a way that was somewhat free from the boundaries set by society. In the following chapter, then, I will focus on "collectives" as a distinctive feature in ageing women's activism.

NOTES

¹ I adapt my title from the news article, "'Public-housing hero' servicing other tenants," *Oriental Daily* 12 July 2003, A32.

² There were four residents who submitted to the Legal Aid Department applications regarding the legal challenge that the residents planned to put to the Housing Authority in conjunction with Ms. Man of Centre G. The Legal Aid Department provides legal representation to eligible applicants by relying on a solicitor, or if necessary, a barrister in civic or criminal proceedings. The aim is to ensure that lack of means does not prevent any person who has reasonable grounds for a legal action from acting on those grounds. (For details, see Legal Aid Department (n.d.). Finally, the Legal Aid Department approved the application of Madam Wan and Lam Kin Sum. Lam was also a public housing resident and a security guard. His story was not widely covered. It seems that Madam Wan did not know him well. Ms. Man of Centre G told me that Lam was facing problems in his workplace, since his supervisor would not like him to get involved. Disturbances might arise if reporters went to his workplace and uncovered his details.

³ In Hong Kong, the High Court is made up of the Court of Appeal and the Court of First Instance. It has both appellate and original jurisdiction, that is, it can both hear appeals sent to it and try cases first taken to it. The Court of First Instance has unlimited jurisdiction over all civil matters (Judiciary, Hong Kong 2006)

⁴ For classic feminist studies on motherhood, housework, and unpaid home-based work, see Friedan, Betty ([1963] 1983) and Oakley, Ann (1976). For a discussion on ageing women and care, see Dalley, Gillian (1993).

⁵ The bag she carried is visible in the photos of Ms. Wan, *Oriental Daily* 12 July 2003.

⁶ Formed in 1997 as a self-financed centre for organizing grassroot people, Centre G (not its real name) is a local organization supported by social-movement activists and some university students. (Normally used in the singular in Hong Kong, the word 'grassroot' here ordinarily refers to a low-income group, such as the unemployed, retirees, or older persons). I knew the chief coordinators of the centre when I was working on community-development projects from 1988 to 1996. Moreover, the founders of the centre are my former colleagues at the TWESSC. (See Chapter One, note 17, above). One concern group relating to the over-charged-rent issues was formed at Centre G in 1999 and comprised older persons. The other concern group on elderly rights was formed earlier, in 1997, and focused on elderly people's housing and welfare rights. The members of Centre G came mainly from the Tsuen Wan and the Kwai Tsing districts.

⁷ The Tai Kwai (TK) Estate (not its real name) was a Mark III estate built in 1964. The estate was composed of 42 eight-storey blocks. Each room had a balcony and shared facilities such as a water tap outside the household rooms and a lavatory shared amongst two or three families. Room size ranged from 129 square feet to 171 square feet (Leung Mei-yee 1999, p. 86). In 1988, the Housing Authority announced a plan of redevelopment of the TK Estate that divided into six phases. In this plan, Madam Wan's block was due to be redeveloped in 1997 or 1998.

⁸ This is not a real name, since I would like to keep the case-study participants anonymous. I knew Ms. Man when she was working as a social worker in an NGO to organise residents in the squatter areas in Tsuen Wan. In 1999, she and her elderly concern group accepted my request, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies, Lingnan University, for an interview in the VCD, "Ageing in Hong Kong" (2000).

⁹ The Alliance was formed under Centre G earlier in 1998 and aimed to protect the housing rights of a wide range of lower-class tenants not only from public-housing estates but also who were living in poor housing conditions. The Alliance started to concentrate on the rent debate with the Housing Authority in 2000. All told, there were about 15 organisations, ranging from self-help groups to NGOs that support housing-concern groups.

¹⁰ The Housing Ordinance (CAP 283) identified the responsibilities of the Housing Authority, which were introduced in June 1997. They stipulated that the median rent-to-median-income ratio for all public housing should not exceed 10 percent. Rent levels were to be reviewed every three years. For the rent details, see *Hong Kong Standard* 12 July 2003, *South China Morning Post*, 12 July 2003, 16 July 2003.

¹¹ “ ‘Public-housing hero’ servicing other tenants,” (2003).

¹² “Ruling may force HK\$1.4 b rent refunds,” (2003).

¹³ Mr. Chuek (not his real name) was active in the housing-rights movement and was, at the time of this writing, a chairman of the Mutual Aid Committee of the block where Ms. Wan resided. Mr. Cheuk had known Ms. Wan since they had moved into the Tai Kwai Estate about forty years earlier.

¹⁴ This and all the following quotations are taken from the transcripts of two interviews that I conducted on 2 September 2004 and 26 September 2004.

¹⁵ ‘Public housing hero’ servicing other tenants’ (2003); “High Court demands the Housing Authority to conduct a rent review immediately” (2003).

¹⁶ Centre E (not its real name) was a social centre for the Elderly (S/Es) targeting elderly people over 60 located in the old blocks of TK Estate since 1979. According to the Social Welfare Department, S/Es mainly organise social and recreational activities for elders in the community to help them make constructive use of their leisure time, develop their potentials through learning and build social networks. In 2001, Centre E moved to a new place after the redevelopment of the TK Estate. However, the Centre continues to serve the elders in the TK Estate with the support of the Social Welfare Department in lending out an office opposite to the new blocks of TK Estate. For details, see [Online] available at: http://www.elchk.org.hk/service/elder_kc.html, retrieved on 15 January 2007.

¹⁷ “Legislative Council advocates increase of the Old Age pension,” (2001).

¹⁸ Suen M. Y., Michael, is the secretary for the Housing, Planning, and Land Bureau, which is responsible for handling the rent debate and also other matters concerning public-housing estates. For the rent debate, the ADGHR has organised petitions urging Suen to launch rent reduction since the Court of First Instance ruled that the Housing Authority failed to keep the rent-median-income ratio within 10 percent.

¹⁹ “Public-housing tenants protest outside the flat of Suen M. Y.,” (2004).

²⁰ Stone (2000) outlines three rights of care: (1) families are permitted and help to care for their members, (2) the right of paid caregivers to give humane, high-quality care without compromising their own well-being, and (3) people who need care can get it.

²¹ The research aims to understand the attitude of the older residents who lived in shared accommodations in Hong Kong public housing estates. I launched 10 focus groups in 10 estates with 7 – 8 elderly residents in each group in 1998 – 1999. For details, see Phillips, Chan, and Luk (2000).

²² *Kaifong* [街坊] are residents who live in the same community.

²³ For details of the policy of Housing Splitting, please refer to the following web

page of the Housing Authority,
<http://www.housingauthority.gov.hk/en/residential/prh/householdsplit/0,,00.html>
retrieved on 30 December 2006.

²⁴ The average living space per adult in early resettlement estates was only 24 square feet. A child was considered only half a person. Leung Mei-yee (1999, p. 163) reviewed the overcrowding problems that plagued tenants as their children gradually grew up and new babies were born in the absence of additional living space. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the Housing Authority started to initiate policy that would help relieve overcrowded households by relocating the household in new estates (Hong Kong Housing Authority 1977, pp. 34-35). The average area of the living space per adult was 5.5 square meters in 2006.

²⁵ K is not a real name, as I promised Ms. Wan that I would not mention her children's name.

²⁶ "First housing resident sues the Housing Authority for charging high rent" (2002); "Old lady first to file court case," (2002); "Female public-housing tenant sues the Housing Authority for its high rent," (2002).

²⁷ Chow (2001, pp. 127-128) reviewed the Confucian meaning of *xiao*, which identifies three levels: "The first level of practising *xiao* includes providing parents with the necessary materials for the satisfaction of their physical needs and comforts, such as attending to them when they are ill. The second level of practising *xiao* includes paying attention to parents' wishes and obeying their preferences. The third level of practising *xiao* includes behaving in such a way as to make parents happy to bring them honour and the respect of the community." Chow's study, based on interviews with 1,027 individuals, suggested that 82.5 percent of the respondents regularly gave money to their parents.

²⁸ 'Lose face' refers to a person who, by committing a perceived mistake, appears less respectable or less intelligent.

²⁹ Mr. Kin (whose name has been changed to preserve his anonymity) was an organiser at Centre G and was either working or affiliated there since the Centre's establishment.

³⁰ Long Hair is the nickname of a legislative councillor, Leung Kwong-hung, who was directly elected on 1 October 2004 for a four-year term of office and whose geographical constituency is New Territories East. He participated in the protests against the Housing Authority and in support of the ADGHR.

³¹ 30-hour Famine is an annual campaign organised by World Vision Hong Kong to educate the public on famine issues and to raise funds. Apart from the annual 30-hour Famine, World Vision Hong Kong supports people who are interested in organising individual famine-awareness activities, such as School Famine. Through these activities, participants can experience what it is like to be hungry and so can learn to treasure what they have (World Vision, Hong Kong 2006). The

famine-awareness project that Ms. Wan joined was organised for the elderly, and the activity lasted eight hours.

³² The news are covered by *Sun Daily*, *Apple Daily*, *Hong Kong Economic Times*, *Sing Tao Daily*, 13 August 2003.

³³ “Eating five-day-old leftover food” (2002).

³⁴ For example, ‘Public housing hero servicing other tenants’ (2003).

³⁵ For example, ‘High Court order the Housing Authority for rent review’ (2003); ‘High Court order Housing Authority immediate rent review [of public housing]’ (2003)

Chapter Six.

Composing collectives, organising a network

Insisting that all social movements enact a cultural politics, Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar (1998) argue that social-movement scholarship should address the question of how social movements operate at the interface of culture and politics. In reviewing contemporary social movements in Latin America, Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar further interpret cultural politics as “the process enacted when sets of actors shaped by, and embodying, different cultural meanings and practices come into conflict with each other” (1998, p. 7). Their proposed definition of cultural politics posits that:

meanings and practices—particularly those theorized as marginal, oppositional, minority, residual, emergent, alternative, dissident, and the like, all of them conceived in relation to a given dominant cultural order—can be the source of processes that must be accepted as political.... Culture is political because meanings are constitutive of processes that, implicitly or explicitly, seek to refine social power. That is, when movements deploy alternative conceptions of women, nature, race, economy, democracy, or citizenship that unsettle dominant cultural meanings, they enact a cultural politics. (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, 1998, p.7)

In the previous two chapters, I have showed how two older women, Choi and Wan,

intervened in policy debates (concerning housing policy and, in particular, redevelopment and rent policy) that affected the women's everyday life. Their activism posed specific challenges to housing and rent policy that allowed ageing women neither to stay in their familiar environment nor to enjoy affordable housing. We can consider their activism to be political insofar as they tended to have a voice in policy decisions. Nevertheless, I would argue that their struggle also enacted a cultural politics when they were also re-shaping and redefining the prevailing notion of "being old" in Hong Kong. For example, in the case of Choi, she and her ageing-women concern group re-represented their oldness and vulnerability as power for negotiation with policy-makers. Also, they linked their struggle with their contribution to the shared memory of the economic development and the resulting prosperity of Hong Kong in the 1960s and the 1970s. In the case of Wan, I demonstrate how Wan's desire to care for her family (her youngest son and her grandchildren when necessary) strongly supported her continuation of her three-year rent battle with the Housing Authority. At the same time, her practices in the social movement both re-represented an older woman as an individual who would not be defeated and rejected the assumed dependence of ageing women on their family. I have reviewed these women's cultural practices of independence, and indeed, ageing women can achieve *interdependence* in their local community or the

movement-based organizations.

In this chapter, I will first focus on reviewing the cultural politics of Madam Ho's activism in terms of the collectives she formed with the Joint Action Group in the Fight for the Welfare Rights of Seniors (JAGFWRS). The JAGFWRS served as a platform that united older persons from local communities and elderly concern groups, a unity that comprised coalitions in which older persons—mainly women—resisted the welfare cuts launched by the government after 2002. As we will see, composing collectives and networks is a distinct strategy that ageing women employ in their activism as a response to their limited mobility in later life. Mobility is a popular issue in gerontology studies. For example, Hogue (1995, p. 645) highlights the need for “interventions to enhance mobility” in later life. Also, gerontologists have discussed mobility in connection with “impairments, functional limitations and disability” in later life (Hogue, 1995, p. 645). Roy and Russell (1992, p. 161) discuss specifically the issue of home mobility and suggest that “height adjustments of home furniture and the installation of grab bars and of non-slip surfaces could help older persons move around their homes more easily”. I would argue that, apart from physical mobility discussed above, ageing women's struggle for maintaining their mobility in their later life is not physical only. They increase their mobility for information and social connections via the interwoven networks

and collectives not only in their local community but across communities and age categories, as well. Local communities are important sites for information circulation and mobilisation in ageing women's activism. Similarly, Melucci has argued that there is a centrality of the "networks submerged in everyday life" in social-movement mobilisations (1988b, p. 248).

In the second part of the chapter, I will review Madam Ho's struggle for extra facilities that the Housing Authority had not implemented in the new estate where the residents expect to stay until they die. As we will see, their struggle is community-based and is bounded up largely by their everyday-life concerns (such as daily shopping, cooking, and social activities) and by their neighbourhood. Madam Ho's resistance to her possible status as a "burden to society" guided her involvement in her housing struggle, in her volunteering, and in her management of her daily activities. She demonstrates that ageing women's efforts to stay active and healthy could derive sustenance from a mutual-care community that would enable the women to move around freely, not only physically but also communicatively, as their health deteriorates.

Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia suggests the following explanation of "collective", interesting for the wide circulation among an interested public assured by its place of publication:

A collective is a group of people who share or are motivated by at least one common issue or interest, or work together on a specific project(s) to achieve a common objective. Collectives are also characterised by attempts to share and exercise political and social power and to make decisions on a consensus-driven and egalitarian basis. Collectives differ from cooperatives in that they are not necessarily focused upon an economic benefit or saving (but can be that as well).¹

In this chapter, I build on this definition and suggest that ageing women's collectives can be extremely dynamic and fluid; and I focus on reviewing the practices of ageing women's efforts to form these collectives not only at a territory-wide level but also at their local-neighborhood level with the old and the not old. Rubin (1998) argues that the cultural practices and the interpersonal networks of everyday life are crucial in sustaining a movement's power and infuse new cultural meanings into political practices and collective action. In examining the radical grassroots movement of the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) in Juchitan, Mexico, Jeffery Rubin (1998) showed how Juchiteca women turned those seemingly apolitical physical and social locations such as family courtyards, the central market, and streets into important places for discussions and for mobilization of their housing activism—an activism that tended to include all community residents in political participation and economic survival. In the

following section, I will give an account on the JAGFWRS and Madam Ho's participation in their protest regarding the welfare rights of older persons.

The Campaign against Increased Healthcare Charges

Madam Ho, at 76, was living alone on the LGB Estate² when I visited her in 2004. She told me about her eye surgery and also her sore leg, which she thought would affect her later life in the absence of housemates. She had resided on the estate for over thirty years with her family. Her husband had died in 1994 and her children had all moved out when they had married. Living alone on her own encouraged her to start to plan ahead for her later life, in terms of both a living environment and a healthcare policy that would affect her daily living. In securing a healthcare policy and related measures that support older persons as frequent users of hospital services, Madam Ho and ageing women living in different local communities were organised under the JAGFWRS from December 2002.

The Health, Welfare, and Food Bureau (HWFB) introduced a rise in the public-hospital fees in two phases: November 2002 and April 2003. The changes in the fee included daily charges for in-patient service (rising from HK\$68 to HK\$100) and an additional admission fee of HK\$50; the specialist out-patient service would rise from HK\$44 to HK\$60 per attendance, plus HK\$10 per drug item; and a charge

of HK\$100 would accompany each attendance of the Accident and Emergency Service. The HWFB (2003a, p.1) introduced this “revamping of the fee structure of our [the] public health care sector” after their public consultation on Health Care Reform in 2000. The paper prepared by the HWFB for the meeting of the Legislative Council [LegCo] Panel on Health Services, scheduled for 24 February 2003, explained the rise in fees as a strategic direction for healthcare financing and as a way to ensure that “the public subsidies could be targeted to areas of most needs and [that] inappropriate use and misuse of services could be minimised” (HWFB 2003a, pp. 1-2).

From November 2002 to April 2003, the JAGFWRS organised a series of petitions, namely the Campaign against Increased Healthcare Charges. The JAGFWRS organised different senior advocacy groups that demanded fee exemptions or fee concessions for all older persons aged 65 or over and that rejected the government’s special arrangement in which the government would support older persons of low income and in which medical social workers would determine the older persons’ eligibility according to a set of assessment criteria. The JAGFWRS was composed of sixteen concern groups of older persons that were affiliated with social-services organizations. Social workers organised most of the groups in the JAGFWRS around a specific geographical location where the participants resided.³

Madam Ho's advocacy group exemplifies this trend, as the social worker organised older women around the LGB Estate. The JAGFWRS' (2003) press release characterized the organisation's uniqueness, which took the form of wide participation among older persons. For example, the JAGFWRS organised a Fighting for Senior Welfare Rights Signature-collection Campaign which was a territory-wide mobilisation effort. They also emphasised that older persons' concern groups in the JAGFWRS came from all three main districts in Hong Kong, namely, Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories. The strong territory-wide organising base that targeted the whole population of older persons in Hong Kong is significant in understanding social movements relating to the rights of the seniors in Hong Kong.

In 2003, as I started conducting fieldwork on the THT Estate, I approached Mr. Fu,⁴ a social worker working on the LGB Estate. The elderly concern group that he had formed had been participating in the JAGFWRS. After a brief conversation in which I explained my study to him, he agreed to provide me with information about the JAGFWRS. So I visited his centre on the LGB Estate and read through both his files regarding the JAGFWRS meeting minutes and his collections of newspaper clippings on the organisation's protests, mainly on the Campaign against Increased Healthcare Charges. I also borrowed both a VCD that, produced by the JAGFWRS,⁵

summarised the protest activities and a videotape recording of a TV program, *Financial Secretary's Budget Proposal*, (2003) broadcast on 8 March 2003 on the ATV Chinese channel.⁶ Mr. Fu suggested that I could talk with Madam Ho, who was upset by her neighbours' queries on the effectiveness of the protests after her attending the corresponding Legislative Council meeting, which had received wide coverage in the media. According to Mr. Fu, Madam Ho was discouraged and had shared with Mr. Fu her feeling that she might want to terminate or cut down her participation in the JAGFWRS.

Ageing women's solidarity: Madam Ho and her collectives

On 29 June 2004, Mr. Fu arranged for me to meet with Madam Ho in his centre, LC,⁷ located in one of the old blocks on the LGB Estate. The centre was near a bus terminal and was opposite a public restroom and some playground facilities, where older persons (mainly male, according to my observation) were seated at some stone tables and benches. Mr. Fu told me that the outside space of the centre was very useful for organising banner writings, such as big promotional cardboard signs that announced their activities, including residents' mass meetings and residents' movement activities. The main entrance of the centre was open and looked open to anyone who wanted to drop in. There were newspaper racks, as well as a

small seating area for anyone who stopped by to stay for a while. Windows surrounded the office, and I could see a few social workers there seated in their office chairs and busy with making telephone calls or doing paper work. On the left-hand side were the activity rooms, and the corridor was decorated with display boards introducing various current centre-operated programmes (such as furniture-donation collections and electric products for elderly single-person households and for two-person households on the estate). Mr. Fu arranged for Madam Ho and me to meet in one of activity rooms in his centre, and he left for his other work in the centre after he briefly introduced me to Madam Ho. Before he left, he told me to get back to him if Madam Ho could not remember the exact date, time, or location of the event that she described. And he reminded me that Madam Ho had to leave before six for her dinner.

Madam Ho was wearing short hair and looked healthy and friendly. This was my first meeting with Madam Ho apart from seeing her photos in the newspaper clippings of the JAGFWRS. After briefly introducing myself, I invited Madam Ho to tell me about her move onto the LGB Estate and about the details of her life there. Through this line of questioning, I hoped that we could familiarise ourselves with each other. Madam Ho responded quickly and showed no hesitation to talk about the personal details of her family, including how she and her husband had moved onto

the estate from the nearby squatter areas, where they had resided for seventeen years.

In our conversation, Madam Ho initiated conversation about her activism on the Campaign against Increased Health-care Charges in 2003 and also about her earlier involvement in objecting to the government's 2002 proposal for cuts in old-age pensions. The mobilisation had been territory-wide.

From a local to a territory-wide collective

According to Ho, ageing women on her estate were first organised together by Mr. Fu and his centre, LC, which started to operate on the LGB Estate after 2000.

In 2000, the Housing Authority had formally announced that the LGB Estate would undergo a 2005-2006 redevelopment scheme (Hong Kong Housing Authority 2000).

Madam Ho was one of the members of the "single-person and two-person senior households" group that organised a fight for their housing rights when they faced the consequent uprooting of households. They met regularly on Wednesdays and also monthly to discuss the above issues and organised activities such as outings to visit the Governor's House. At other monthly meetings and mass meetings, members worked to update the estate's wider population on relocation arrangements and on the organised movement activities. As a supplement to these meetings, a monthly LC-published newsletter arrived, thanks to volunteers and social workers, at every

household on the LGB Estate. In December 2002, their senior-advocacy group became part of the JAGFWRS and participated actively in the defence of senior welfare rights, particularly in connection to healthcare charges.

The Campaign against Increased Healthcare Charges gained wide coverage in the media, in particular when, on 24 February 2003, the representatives of the JAGFWRS met with government officials and Legislative Councillors in the Legislative Council meeting of the Panel on Health Services. The front page of *Sing Pao Daily News* on 25 February 2003 spared a corner to highlight the inside story of the meeting's debate as to whether the fee-waiver mechanism should apply to old persons, aged 65 and over, who use the public health services. In the photo, Dr Yeoh Eng-kiong, the then Secretary for Health, Welfare, and Food,⁸ who was acting as the representative of the authority and who had joined the meeting, looked very serious and unsmiling. The caption stated that a furious debate had erupted between Dr Yeoh Eng-kiong and the representatives of the seniors' concern groups. The focus of the news stories concerned the dispute between the government and the older persons (together with the support of the Legislative Councillors).

The *Hong Kong Standard* on 25 February 2003 featured an editorial whose caption read "Medical-fee exemption ruled out, as 'many old people have hundreds of billions of dollars': Yeoh riles [my emphasis] elderly." (Yau, 2004). The news

media reported the “angry” comments that criticised the government officials as unsympathetic to seniors. Also according to the news media, Yu Ying-ha, who was the representative of the Joyful Club⁹ in a rural area in the New Territories, had alleged Yeoh was ignorant and unable to understand her difficulties in making a living.¹⁰ The media widely covered and quoted Yu’s criticism that government officials were ignorant of, and indifferent to, the suffering of the poor.¹¹ As for Madam Ho, the media did not report her story, but she told me that she had sat next to Yu Ying-ha and that the TV news had captured her image.

In our conversation, Ho recalled this event and told me that it was her first occasion to speak in the Legislative Council. She served as the representative of her concern group on the LGB Estate, which was one of thirteen community organizations, and she had been proud to declare her beliefs and to represent her group at the Legislative Council meeting.¹²

[Even though I knew that] the TV would broadcast [the news], I just spoke the truth.... [I told the government official] that I was the representative of the [LGB] Estate. Then, we requested that the government grant half prices to older persons...I told them that the bus company...should also grant us half prices. Why did the government need to charge us the full price [in healthcare services]...? We seniors have contributed to Hong Kong...we are not asking [the government] to reward us [for all we have done]. We are asking the government to give us a little reward, to grant us half-price health-care services.... Those who are on CSSA don’t need that [half price]. But we are not on CSSA, so why can’t the

government give us the half-price [discount]? I articulated these points to them [the representatives]...

I am illiterate; I just speak from my heart. I just say what comes to my mind. Just as I'm doing now, during my conversation with you: I'm just saying what comes to my mind...

In her efforts to address the issue of ageing women as frequent users of hospital and healthcare services, Madam Ho based her arguments on her own experiences of requesting government support that would sustain ageing people's minimum cost of living in their later life. Ho explained to me that, by joining ageing women together in the JAGFWRS, the resulting collective could, in defence of their rights, use their gathered power to negotiate with policy-makers.

She recalled that, in their 2003 protest before the Legislative Council, a social worker had invited her to represent her group and, in this capacity, to attend a meeting inside the meeting hall of the Legislative Council. At the same time, ageing women from her estate and from the JAGFWRS were protesting outside the meeting venue to show their support for the struggle and to place pressure on the government. She thought that by organising together with the LC Centre, the activists could gain access to government officials and could then express their views. She also thought that a large number of ageing women and men should exhibit strength in demanding their rights.

Earlier, from April to July 2002, Madam Ho had participated in protest activities. At that time, she joined in the Campaign against Cuts in Old-age Pension. The ageing people's protest created a controversy amongst social workers and gerontologists over the shrinking government role in welfare: namely, here, in healthcare provision.¹³ The government finally suspended the cut in July 2002 and the government was forced to meet with the welfare-rights groups to clarify their intention regarding the welfare review.¹⁴ According to Madam Ho, her senior groups organised with other senior groups from different geographical areas to form a joint-action group, and eventually they managed to convince the government to drop the cuts in the old-age pension. She counted this protest as one of her successful cases that rested on organising and voicing objections to policy-makers:

In the Campaign against Cuts in Old-age Pensions, Tung Che-hwa [the former Chief Executive of Hong Kong] promised us directly that [he] would not cut the old-age pension, that [the elders can] be relieved. [The old-age pension, he said,] a reward for our contribution to Hong Kong. [The former Chief Executive] talked on TV the next day [after our petition]...we protested for three days. If you don't go protest, how can you succeed? It takes time to protest [and to achieve what we demand]. If the LC hadn't brought us there [to the Legislative Council], no one would have brought us there.... No one organised [us]....The district councillors are just helping the government.... They would not go with us...the younger ones need to work and are, thus, too busy to go.... So we ageing women are free, no need to work. So we go to protest. We need to pay for transport when we go...

Madam Ho realised it would be more effective for ageing women to form into collectives from different localities in order to put pressure on the government and to change policies that she considered unfavourable to seniors' self-sustenance in later life. In reviewing the social participation of older persons in about 2002, Lam (2002b), one of the senior-rights activists in Hong Kong, argued that seniors' concern groups are forming into a new social force in Hong Kong society and merit the attention of both policy-makers and social-movement activists. Here, I would like to review the distinctive features of these collectives, which did not possess a formal structure amongst ageing women and which, in this regard, may diverge from formal organisations.

A mobile collective: free to come and go

According to the meeting documents of the JAGFWRS from December 2002 to March 2003, the organisation possessed no formal structure such as chairpersons or a secretary but there was a clear division of labour amongst the representatives from older persons' concern groups such as a spokesperson, who dealt with the media according to the rundown of the organised social actions. The groups' membership was largely mixed sex, not single sex; however, older women

constituted the dominant demographic among participants. The only structural feature of the joint-action group that mirrored the structure of other estate concern groups was a two-tier meeting, namely, workers' meetings and older persons' meetings. Organizers¹⁵ and social workers met together before the seniors' meetings mainly for preparation tasks and for updates regarding actions whereas final decisions were made in the seniors' meetings.

Madam Ho emphasised the importance of activists forming an organisation rather than acting as individuals in defending their rights:

It is impossible for you to go by yourself. It will be useless. You have to go in groups or organizations, [and then] it will be useful. It is useless if you go by yourself...

We have met with many government officials, we are in groups of about twenty and about thirty...we have protested for many times.... We have been to Ngau Tau Kok to hold meetings; there are many of them on the Ngau Tau Kok Estate...and Caritas, there are many nearby who joined [the meetings]...they [older persons on other estates] have ten to twenty people, and we also have ten to twenty people...there are great numbers of us to organise and to go to the Legislative Council.... I know where the LegCo is, I know how to take the bus. I know a lot of places, too.... [But] you have to have someone lead you there....as an organisation.

At the same time, she thinks that social workers from the NGOs played a role in organising the seniors together for information circulation and for the logistics of

arranging protests. And again, rather than organise their protests as powerless individuals, it would be even more likely that ageing women could exert pressure on policy-makers:

For a cut of the ‘Fruit Money,’¹⁶ we went to the Government Headquarters; a few estates [joined the petition]. I remember there were lots of us but cannot recall how many estates [joined]. We went there [to the Government Headquarters] to meet with Tung Che-hwa [former Chief Executive of Hong Kong]. He did not want to meet us, but ultimately he turned up. Three representatives were sent. We were showing our support [outside the Government Headquarters]...

It is worth noting that signature collections constitute another strategy that these seniors preferred and practiced. The joint-action group that organised the Campaign against Cuts in Old-age Pensions in 2002 collected about 18,683 signatures in strong support of their struggle.

To Ho, the Campaign against Cuts in Old-age Pensions was a successful one.¹⁷

However, according to their minutes, the JAGFWRS, rather than form into a long-term and structured territory-wide coalition concerned with seniors’ rights, dissolved itself or remained “inactive” (that is, they neither held regular meetings nor organised activities) afterwards. Nevertheless, as evident in the CD-ROM, *Share the Fight for Senior Rights*, the representatives of the sixteen seniors’ groups joined in a mass meeting held on 11 December 2002 and decided to re-activate the

JAGFWRS to launch a series of campaigns against increased healthcare charges. In order to clarify the focus of their protest, the representatives named the joint-action group JAGFWRS (as I mentioned earlier). Mr. Fu told me that the social workers initiated the related discussions in their own senior-advocacy groups and for other groups that showed an interest in the matters. These groups came together to attend the seminar Viewing Healthcare Charges from Different Perspectives, which was held on 2 December 2002 and which attracted two hundred fifty elderly participants. Mass meetings and seminars serve as a platform to promote the participation of seniors from local communities, and loosely they formed into a network of organizations whose membership was more mobile and flexible than the membership of formal social-movement organisations. Rather than establish a long-term base for the advocacy of seniors' rights or senior-oriented welfare, Ho's group was of an ad-hoc nature such that members would join together on specific issues that related to older persons whenever the issues arose.

According to Ho, JAGFWRS arrived at conclusions through consensus building, including concern groups' airing of different views during discussions. For example, the groups needed to decide whether JAGFWRS should demand that the government grant older persons free services or just half-price services in connection with healthcare services; and also whether JAGFWRS should define

older persons as those aged 60 and over or as those aged 65 and over. The senior-advocacy group discussed these issues at their own local-community meetings before discussing the issues at joint meetings, where members arrived at consensus-based decisions. One of the examples that Madam Ho cited concerns the meeting's decision regarding free healthcare services for older persons. She believed that the government should grant full fee exemptions to all aged people, but during the joint meetings, she carefully considered whether the public would support this proposal or not. Finally, Madam Ho agreed on the half-off fee exemption, which would most probably attract wider public acceptance.

As also shown in the meeting minutes of the joint-action group, the members entered into a reasonable argument about, and analysis of, whether public views supported or opposed the demands of elderly people. The findings served as an important reference point for the arguments that the JAGFWRS eventually used. For example, JAGRWS once cancelled a proposed plan to further explain to the press the seniors' belief that older persons should enjoy half-price healthcare. The meeting minutes stated that the JAGFWRS members drew the conclusion that the public would not support the elders' request for fee exemptions in healthcare costs. Also, in the JAGFWRS CD-ROM *Share the Fight for Senior Rights*, the joint-action group concluded that one of the achievements of the Campaign against Increased

Healthcare Charges was the campaign's ability to gain open support from a majority of the councillors with regard to the campaign's request for half-price healthcare charges. Hence, we can see that ageing women's activism in this case sought support from other sectors of the society in order to sustain the movement. Therefore, Madam Ho and the JAGFWRS consciously presented their arguments to Hong Kong society.

"We contributed... so we can enjoy the benefits as we age"

Madam Ho came to Hong Kong from Mainland China after the Allies' defeat of Japan in 1945 ended Japan's occupation of China. When she settled in Hong Kong, she worked in a fireworks factory till she married at the age of twenty-two. Then she worked in building construction sites and also worked as a custodian in factories and offices throughout Hong Kong Island. According to Madam Ho, Hong Kong people have long contributed to the prosperity of Hong Kong. Slogans and captions summarised this belief: "Older persons have contributed over half of their life to Hong Kong; however, the government has not respected the elders" and "We go without proper clothing and proper food in order to save money for medical treatment: the government bureaucracy has no conscience." These assertions appeared on banners and large signboards that the activists carried at their protests.

The JAGFWRS also affirmed as their slogan that “the government should make policy in consultation with older persons”.

Taking careful consideration of the views of the general public, JAGFWRS and Ho did not ask for free healthcare services because they were afraid that the general public would frown on the demands. Madam Ho also wanted to avoid assigning overly expensive fiscal responsibilities to the government. But she thought that her group could reasonably and successfully demand “half fees” because Hong Kong’s elders had substantially and consistently contributed to Hong Kong’s past prosperity. Further, the group backed up its argument by citing examples of current government practices such as the Leisure and Cultural Services Department’s offer of concessions to older persons’ cultural programmes and activities. Some firms, for example, the Bus Company, offered concessions to persons who were in their 60s or older. Hong Kong residents in their 60s and older received the government-issued Senior Citizen Card, which granted seniors half-price admission to many events. While citing these examples, Ho stressed the point that she relied only on the old-age pension, not on CSSA. She was well aware that some people labelled the recipients of CSSA “lazy” and “over-reliant” on the government, and she did not want to attract these labels to herself. But Madam Ho was troubled not only by the wider public, whose presence was relatively abstract, but also by her neighbours,

whose presence was concrete.

Neighbourhood and Madam Ho's family

As in the previous cases of Choi and Wan, Ho experienced challenges from her neighbours after the print media and TV newscasts covered her 2003 participation in the Legislative Council. I asked how she felt about the challenge from her neighbours. She responded,

I felt most upset regarding the time that we went to the Legislative Council and I was shown on the television news.... They [Her neighbours] said it was useless to make the demands...and they [Her neighbours] said that the LC social workers deceived *ah po* into seeking petitions.

Madam Ho could not agree with that argument and she defensively declared her gratitude for the LC's organising work, which she considered necessary to the social movement's success. She also defended her organisation's efforts by noting that members included people of other age groups. She stated that the neighbours should not single out *ah po*, and she guessed that the opponents dared not to comment on male activists because the resulting quarrels might lead to ugly fights. To date, she felt happy that the success of her activism (the opposition to cuts in old-age pensions and two housing-related struggles that I will discuss in detail later in this chapter)

effectively silenced her neighbours' criticism. Madam Ho concluded that those success stories proved both that LC was working for the benefit of the ageing women and that the neighbours now had to "shut up."

In contrast to Madam Wan, who was not supported by her youngest daughter K, Madam Ho was supported by her family:

I would be more anxious if it were my family [rather than the neighbours, who disapproved of me].... My family did not object to me.... They strongly supported my efforts to volunteer and they only asked me to take care of myself...you know my ankle is hurting...so I will take care of myself. It is alright as long as they are not saying, "you are so old, so why do you still go on?" They did not say this.... My daughter-in-law [wife of the elder son] videotaped the TV newscast for me when they saw me. Also my grandson [son of her elder son] said that I am great, since I was on TV.... My family supports me. They said that if I have the ability, I should go on. No need to worry too much as long as I am happy with what I did.

With the support from her family, Madam Ho felt relieved to continue to defend her activism, even though she once felt uncomfortable with her presence in the media spotlight. She tried to overcome this discomfort by reassuring herself that she had nothing to hide, since she was doing nothing wrong. I would argue that, despite Madam Ho's efforts to present a strong image, the media representation of Madam Ho's activism was consistent with the representations of ageing women as vulnerable (Gibb & Holroyd, 1996).

Media representations: unorganised, suffering ageing women in protest

Ho and her group realised the power that they wielded when they formed into groups and, therein, asserted seniors' rights. Nevertheless, I would argue that the media represented the group members' vulnerability (in relation to healthcare costs) and the members' powerlessness (in relation to political participation). The news stories covered their protest on 24 February 2003 and reported that many (about 200) older persons (women and men) had participated in the petition. Photos showed not only the activities outside the meeting room and the LegCo building but also the mass petitions of older persons—largely women, who filled the space with slogan-covered signboards. The pictures suggested the women's eagerness to voice their demands and to exercise their organized power.

Media studies have long argued that television news' representations of "impartiality, objectivity and neutrality" are constructed as such. For example, Hartley (1982, p. 102) shows that media actually engage in an active production of meaning rather than act as a "mirror to reality," which is the role that news audiences commonly assign to news media. In Madam Ho's case, the media tended to "produce" the powerlessness of the ageing women in their coverage of the women's petitions. For example, the photo published in *Metropolis Daily* (2003)¹⁸ showed the police in formal uniforms and standing tall, directly in front of the

Legislative Council Building. Meanwhile, on the other side, the group of older persons looked more relaxed and were scattered around the metal barriers that the police had set in front of them. Amongst the elder protestors is a casually dressed ageing woman who is holding a signboard but who seems tired and is leaning on a metal barrier. The older persons look fatigued and unfocused: some of them are actually talking or walking around or staring into the camera. They are not directly confronting the police force. The reporter's caption next to the photo states, "The police force is on full alert, forming chains by holding hands, and [their level of organisation] *contrasted strongly* [my emphasis] with the elderly group".¹⁹

In my observations, the commentaries and the editorials expressed their disagreement with the government's argument, as presented by Yeoh, who refused to grant the half-price reduction to older persons because, he argued, many rich seniors who would benefit from the reduction did not deserve it. On 25 February 2003, *The Standard* published an editorial entitled "Heartless arguments," (2003) which criticised Yeoh's claims and which accused him of being unwilling to help older persons. An article in *Sing Pao Daily News*, 25 February 2003, referred to the ageing woman Yu Ying Ha's accusation that the authority was "ignorant of the suffering of the poor." The reporter who wrote up this story titled it "Sadness in Later Life" [晚年悲哀].²⁰ In sum, the media has on the one hand extended support to the claims

made by the older women while, on the other hand, concurring with the prevalent images that equate old age with vulnerability and suffering. Even though the Campaign against Increased Healthcare Charges revealed the wide participation of older persons, the media tended to report on the powerlessness of the ageing women rather than on their organising power.

Similar to the TV programme on Choi's case (see Chapter Four), the media in Madam Ho's case covered no details of ageing women's activist-oriented collectives. I would argue that ageing women's activism is distinctive in two ways. First, Madam Ho's collectives functioned not only at a local level but at a territory-wide level, as well. Second, Madam Ho and her concern group actively engaged in organising different age groups in the community, as well as on the LGB Estate.

Local community as a collective in practice

After I started my fieldwork in 2003, as I sought to identify cases of ageing women's activism I came to consider Madam Ho's case as relevant and distinctive because her struggle concerned welfare-rights issues, which neither Ms. Choi's case nor Ms. Wan's case directly involved. However, during my initial contacts with Madam Ho in 2004, she eagerly recounted to me her successful housing struggles and other issues related to the 2006 redevelopment of the estate,²¹ the latter topic

never receiving media coverage. Unlike Ms. Choi, who successfully “borrowed” the No. 1 Playground near her old blocks on the THT Estate for redevelopment, Madam Ho was ready to leave the LGB Estate and move to the WPS Estate which was newly built (in 2006) on the site behind her old estate. She participated, however, in meetings and protests to negotiate the redevelopment arrangements (such as the completion date of the new estate, ways to select new flats, the safety of the remaining households) so as to ensure that these better fit the needs of the one-person and two-person households. It was striking that Madam Ho did not divide her activism into categories such as housing, healthcare costs, or welfare rights, as I might have done or as social movement studies do. Rather, she viewed all these struggles as constitutive of a common cause because, she believed, the government should not deny seniors their rights, including their right to assemble in support of “active ageing.” In the following sections, I will highlight the two stories of successful activism that Madam Ho enjoyed recounting to me, and we will see what she meant by “active ageing” and how she promoted ageing women’s active ageing in their local communities.

Metal gate: building a safe and protected home on the WPS Estate

The Housing Authority announced that, beginning in June 2003, it would

stop providing metal entrance gates to individual households in new public rental housing. Madam Ho and her concern group learned about this new policy in their regular meetings in the LC Centre. They all felt upset and considered the policy “unfair.” At the meeting, they agreed that they would openly object to the policy. So they started to organise together with two other elderly concern groups (that also joined the JAGFWRS) and voiced their protests to the housing officials: the activists demanded that the authority provide the metal gates to the WPS Estate and the two other estates. Madam Ho recalled the successful outcome to the protests:

The metal gate...every [public housing] estate has that. We do not have that [on the WPS Estate]. [We organised together with] Ngau Tau Kok [the estate there], and Sham Shui Po [the estate there], and altogether, three estates would undergo redevelopment at the same time. So we went to protest. Ms. Cheung [a social worker at the LC Centre] brought us there...many times. We met with lots of housing officials.... After numerous discussions, finally they [the housing authority] approved the provision of the metal gates²².... If there had been no protest, how could we have acquired the metal gates.... People will treasure it [the metal gate] since [it was not a gift but] a hard-earned prize.

Madam Ho recalled how she had responded to queries raised by some of her neighbours. For example, her neighbours questioned why the activists were protesting for metal gates even though the gates were not particularly expensive.

Madam Ho recalled her reply:

You don't care because you have income, but for us... we have no income at all, we just rely on our children to pay as much as they wish. They [Our children] have their own family and they have to pay the mortgage...and everything. So, we have to spend carefully and to live on a small budget and [we have to rely] on the old-age allowance.

Madam Ho was determined to continue her protests and ignored other negative comments such as some people's voiced projections that the organised seniors were unable to change the government's decision regarding the gates. She insisted that she had done nothing wrong. Also, she stated that all the LGB Estate households that had moved to the WPS Estate should receive metal gates. In arguing on behalf of the ageing women's special needs, Madam Ho successfully argued for the authority's provision of metal gates to *all* households, not only for households occupied by ageing women. Both Madam Ho and Mr. Fu recalled that, once, the housing officials proposed that they would install metal gates for the seniors' households only. But the ageing women discussed and then refused the offer, since they considered it unfair of the Housing Authority to deprive any of the redevelopment-estate residents of their rights. In this way, ageing women's activism extended beyond self interest to the benefit of the estate as a whole.

A lift tower to town centre: making a connection possible

The other success that Madam Ho enjoyed was the Housing Authority's promise to build a lift tower in the town centre. The lift tower was connected to the WPS Estate, which was higher than the town centre. In 2004, the LC Centre published a leaflet entitled *The LGB Estate one-person and two-person households for seniors -- Redevelopment updates* (2004).²³ According to this leaflet, government officials from the Transport Department, from the Environment, Transport and Work Bureau, and from the Housing Authority held a meeting on 7 May 2002. At the meeting, the participants agreed to build the lift tower and expected the construction to be complete in January 2006, in consideration of the WPS Estate's residents. The construction of the lift tower meant that, rather than have to walk down a long flight of stairs, the residents could take the lift to go to the town centre, where they would go shopping and pursue other social activities. Madam Ho sustained her argument in favour of the lift by citing the example of the ageing women on the WPS Estate, which had a shopping centre but no Chinese restaurant for older women to go *yin cha*. Madam Ho added,

We will have to go down a slope that is very steep [from our new homes on the WPS Estate]. It has a hundred steps. It is difficult for older persons to walk up and down the stairs to get to the town centre. [Even if they could], they could only go down, as it is much more difficult for them to climb up the slope. If you take a bus to get to the

town centre to buy just a few items.... It is too costly. But you can't just stay at home and not go out. Anyway, there is no Chinese restaurant on the new estate, but everybody [she means ageing women] is used to going to a Chinese restaurant to *Yin cha* in the morning.

“The need for elders to go *Yin cha*” was Madam Ho’s strongest argument in their 2002 negotiations with the government officials from the Transport Department, from the Environment, Transport, and Work Bureau, and from the Housing Department. Madam Ho emphasised to me the great frequency with which ageing women went to *Yin cha*; however, she also told me that she seldom went to *Yin cha* because she wanted to save money and she preferred to cook at home. However, in my observation, Madam Ho would think that going to *Yin cha* is an activity that is good for ageing women as a whole, so she integrated this concern into her argument for a lift. At the same time, she thought that it was crucial for ageing women to communicate and to connect with each other in the community.

In Madam Ho’s case, ageing women were defending their own interests and, at the same time, were benefiting other households by creating for them a more convenient way to get to the town centre. Rather than deprive younger people of resources (as gerontologists have worried: see for example Biggar 1984), Madam Ho’s case presented younger residents with metal gates and the lift tower. Social-movement scholarship should, therefore, take note that ageing activism can

benefit not only the ageing persons but also the community as a whole. To Madam Ho, a mutual-care and self-organised collective that involved the whole community—ageing women and men, neighbours, social-service organizations—was critical to her brand of ageing women’s activism.

In this type of collective, ageing women could connect with the wider community and finally succeed in their demands, benefiting the whole community and nearby residents. In short, Madam Ho and her group’s collective stressed mutual support and mutual benefit in relation to the ‘locality’ rather than to an age group. In striving for a safe (protected by the metal gate) and yet a connected local community (via the lift tower to the town centre), Madam Ho aimed to secure the intended beneficiaries’ access to the security and to the social activities that would enhance the new community where many of the residents would spend the rest of their lives.

As I visited Madam Ho again in February 2006 with a group of students from Lingnan University who were studying in the Applied Gerontology programme, her advocacy group noted that it was organising a protest to object to the Housing Authority’s decision to change the size of single-person household flats. To ensure the more effective use of housing resources, the Housing Authority would start to build flats whose area would be 14 square meters for single-person households. The authority claimed that they had improved the design by re-arranging the living areas,

the toilets, and the kitchen (Hong Kong Housing Authority 2006, p. 15). However, the concern group on the LGB Estate discussed the new design in their group (and they showed us the layout of the newly designed flat). They would not agree to the Housing Authority's argument that the smaller unit would be better than the old design (which was 17 square meters). Madam Ho and the residents on the LGB Estate would not be affected by the new design because it would apply only to new flats built after 2006. But they decided to express their objection to the new floor plan simply insofar as they were familiar with the old floor plan and, thus, could express their informed views on the matter.

At a meeting that I attended, Madam Ho and a group of ageing women were having a discussion in an elderly couple's new flat on 2 November 2006. The discussants shared freely with me their concerns over the facilities, including the number of toilets in the new shopping centre, the available space and seating areas for older persons outside their new blocks, the inconvenience of the stairs, and the lack of toilets on the platform that the Housing Authority had designed and that served as an exercise site for residents. The discussants described life on the new estate, noting that the air quality was better but that the neighbourhood was not so friendly as before. Also, Madam Ho ran through her updated information on the number of households that had moved onto the estate. She also referred to the

presence of a friendly female security guard who shares updated information of the estate with her.

Madam Wan was satisfied with her new flat (though she missed her old and bigger good-quality furniture that could not fit in her smaller new flat); at the same time, she carried on with her activism so that her new local community would have a collective where ageing women could interact with each other freely and enjoy their social activities. In my observation, Madam Ho was striving to remain active and to stay healthy in resistance to the label of “social burden.”

Remaining active as resistance to the “social burden” label

Most of the ageing women whom I contacted in this study were active members registered in more than one elderly centre located in their local community. They were frequent participants or volunteers in activities organized by the senior-service centres. At the same time, they participated in petitions that centred on issues concerning their everyday life: these issues extended beyond medical concerns and into the realm of the social environment that shapes ageing women’s everyday life. Comparatively speaking, though, ageing women’s social participation in protests and social movements has received relatively little attention from the government and from the social-service sectors.

I argued in Chapter Three that, in Hong Kong since 1997, the government has widely advanced the notions of active ageing and of healthy ageing, which professionals in NGOs have subsequently put into practice. In reviewing professionals' management of care services for older persons, Powell and Biggs (2000) point out that gerontology experts and care managers form a disciplinary web of power, surveillance, and normalization that is more likely to exert professional control over older persons' lifestyle than to provide older persons with choices. Nevertheless, in Madam Ho's case, she was working well with the social workers in the social-services centre. I would agree with Betty Friedan, who argued in *The Fountain of Age* (1993, pp. 119-122) that older women are not "helpless" and "vulnerable" to ageing-related difficulties so much as the women are energetic and risk-taking: lively characteristics that young researchers in gerontology were unable to capture in their sketches of older persons' everyday-life practices. Friedan comments that the literature tends to put a gloomy and discouraging face on older women while neglecting the energy and power that older women possess. Ho's and other ageing women's activism suggest that ageing women in Hong Kong, far from being excessively helpless or vulnerable, are indeed energetic and risk-taking, particularly insofar as they form collectives not only in their community but also across estates and neighbourhoods—all of which have been crucial in structuring

ageing women's later life.

As was the case with many other older persons, Madam Ho kept in close contact with the social workers in the social service centres.²⁴ At the same time, the government placed substantial emphasis on the continued contribution of ageing people to the society and, beginning in April 2003, started to fund the Opportunities-for-Seniors Projects on a regular basis. This funding supported programs run by non-government organizations, welfare agencies, district organizations, schools, volunteer groups, and residents' associations, all of which sought to promote life-long education, community participation, and volunteerism amongst the ageing population (Social Welfare Department 2004, p. 29). After 1997, the Hong Kong government's calls for "active ageing" and "healthy ageing," translated into various government announcements, policy papers, and publicity videos²⁵ that widely promoted an image of actively participating older persons. This theme was central also to the efforts of the Hong Kong Elderly Commission, which tried to build on these new policies that addressed the growing populations of older persons.

Madam Ho began her work as a volunteer in 1997, three years after her retirement in 1994. Ho and a group of ageing women formed a volunteer group in Centre D on the LGB Estate, where she resided. They met regularly and they

planned activities such as home visits. She told me that she paid regular home visits to ageing people living in the local community. Prior to their visits, the centre's social workers would confirm the visits with the older persons by telephone contact. Madam Ho and her group wore name tags and carried cards that included the name "Centre D" printed thereon. Madam Ho told me that the name tag could help the older persons whom the volunteers visited to identify them and that this arrangement, because it involved clear identification, could improve the volunteers' efforts to gain access to older persons. During her visits, Madam Ho would talk with the single older persons and would try to identify their needs, such as blankets and clothes. Madam Ho would also try to identify any emotional or family problems that were troubling the older persons. Ho would try to talk with them to mitigate their unhappiness. After the visit, she would report her findings to the social worker. The social workers in the elderly centre would handle the follow-up work such as delivery of blankets or clothes and also so-called difficult cases. Madam Ho was ready to defend the social workers in LC Centre who helped them to organise collectives with other local communities.

Ho demonstrated her commitment to the government's call for older persons to stay healthy and to serve the society by participating in volunteer work. Precisely by staying healthy and serving the society, Ho avoided being a burden to society. At

the same time, she put extra effort into keeping herself “in touch” so that she could avoid being alienated from the rapidly transforming society—a phenomenon (particularly relative to technological advances such as computer use) that is prominent amongst ageing populations generally. Ho told me that she kept herself up-to-date by listening to the radio all the time.

I listen to the radio all day, the news. Whenever I return home, I will turn on the radio.... I learn the knowledge. Indeed, I know nothing...so I need to learn

Madam Ho toured me around the market and the shops where she usually shopped for reasonably priced items. Along the walk to the bus stop, she displayed her familiarity not only with the place but with the people there, as well. When we passed by a playground that extended into a park, she approached a few ageing persons who were seated there on a wooden bench under a tree. After chatting with them causally, she introduced me to them as “her friend” when they asked about me. I felt that they had asked because her who I was because my face was unfamiliar to them. Maybe it is this familiarity that promoted their sense of security and that ageing women rely on in their later life.

Ho gave me a strong sense that she was eager to maintain her daily-life routines. On one occasion, she and I carried on a conversation that lasted until six

o'clock in the evening, at which time she hurried home so that she would not be too late for her dinner. On another occasion, she cancelled an interview that we had scheduled for about 4:30 to 5:00 p.m. (which would have followed her outing to the Governor's House on February 27, 2006) because her outing, itself, had been delayed: she explained to the social worker that an interview later in the day would clash with her dinner time. Discipline and structure underpinned her daily life.

Ho contentedly remarked that the estate where she lived was convenient with regard to the availability of food (such as dairy products) and to the affordability of food:

I did it everyday. I cooked three meals a day at home...I did it [the cooking] by myself. I still can handle it right now.... I cleaned up my own place, too.... I will try to spend less. I walked to the city centre to do my shopping. In the morning, there are fresh fish there: fresh and cheap. Those big fish are expensive, but I buy small ones.... The food could last for two to three days.... After the shopping, I get them prepared and ready to cook. Then, [during meal times], I just push a button [on the rice cooker] after I return home. Then, I can enjoy the meal.... I will go to the fresh fish market again in two or three days' time.... [It takes about] thirty minutes [for her to walk] to the fresh fish market.

Madam Ho enjoyed her low-cost living sustained by the market nearby. At the same time, she also enjoyed the activities available in her estate. Ho and her group participated in a wide variety of activities that ranged from self-care (shopping for

and preparing food) to volunteer activities to organizing and executing “protests.” It is interesting to note that Hong Kong’s social-services centres for the elderly have focused on providing recreational and social services to seniors rather than on encouraging rights advocacy: after all, the centres’ stated mission was primarily to take care of the recreational and the social-care needs of elderly people.²⁶ Nevertheless, Ho organized her activities across service boundaries by familiarizing herself with various senior services whose projects included community-development projects that would facilitate seniors’ independent living. This particular project was important to Ho, who in her later life, realized that she had to live alone, both independently and alongside her friends and neighbours in the community.

To Ho, the meaning of *active ageing* refers chiefly to (1) social participation, (2) affordable and accessible housing, (3) an affordable and accessible local community, and (4) other welfare services (such as healthcare and old-age pensions) that facilitate active ageing. To promote these four objectives, she chose to participate in petitions for protecting the rights of ageing women as a group rather than focus exclusively on her individual needs. Ho’s group-centred activities led her to compose collectives in her local community and then to forge ties with nearby communities. I remember a revealing comment that she made during an early

conversation that she and I had when she still lived on her old estate. I asked her how she would maintain her connections with the ageing women on the LGB Estate if they all needed to move in 2006. And I asked her how she would adjust to the changes and with whom she would be moving, such as her next-door residents or her good friends in the group. In response, she told me,

Both the centre and I will move.... But I am not sure about the other one [another senior centre].... It doesn't matter; when I move there, I will have neighbours and also friends.... I know there are a lot of *kaifongs* [on the LGB Estate] moving there [to the new estate] too.

In my visit to her new home in 2006, I could see that she was still actively working to transform the new community into a better place for ageing women and, at the same time, for all households. She kept in close contact with LC Centre during her relocation, and Mr. Fu arranged for a volunteer to do some work in her new home.

One afternoon in November 2006, eight months after her relocation (she remembered exactly the dates), Mr. Fu and Madam Ho were talking freely on her arrangement of her furniture and how she might fit her clothes under her new bed. She also told us that the nice garbage collector on her block had reserved a discarded cabinet for her. Mr. Fu and Madam Ho also discussed the new estate's social services, the neighbourhood organisations' efforts to organise blood-pressure tests,

transportation that would help seniors to update their identity card, and to receive their anti-influenza injections. Madam Ho kept in close contact with these senior-services centres on the new estate.

In sum, Madam Ho was trying hard to shape the public's views on seniors' rights and on seniors' needs. To shape these views, she made herself heard. And to make herself hear, she relied partly on social workers, who helped activate the web of loosely connected older persons' advocacy groups. Constituting a significant social force through which seniors could speak their voice, the web of groups—and specifically Madam Ho—defended the participation of social workers therein. At this point, I would like to explore this defence in greater detail.

Defending social workers' involvement in ageing women's activism

Social-service organisations and social workers themselves played a significant role in the formation of the JAGFWRS by providing meeting venues, by covering expenses, and by undertaking other logistical and clerical support. With the support of social workers, ageing women created a web of small groups in their local community and a wider network with senior-advocacy groups. The resulting joint-action group served the ageing women as a flexible platform on which they could organise, disband, and then reorganise when issues concerning the wider

ageing population arose. Madam Ho agreed that the social-services organisations were crucial for the joint-action group's success. The steps leading up to this success are evident. First, local NGOs would organise local ageing persons into groups and would then organise a mass meeting amongst these groups so that attendees could discuss their common concerns such as the government's increases in healthcare charges. Second, social workers would provide the seniors with information regarding relevant policy proposals. Third, by sending letters to the responsible government department, by informing the press about the seniors' actions, by inviting councillors to negotiate with the government, and by undertaking other tasks assigned to them in the JAGFWRS mass meetings, social workers would help the seniors—including the many ageing women—organise the protests.

In our conversations, Madam Ho exhibited her sincere appreciation for the social workers' efforts that enabled seniors to meet with the policy makers and to transform the concerned policy:

Now we succeeded, all because LC [Centre] brought us there [i.e., to the Housing Authority]. Without LC [Centre], we could not have succeeded; they brought us to fight for that.

However, the involvement of social workers in helping the ageing women protest the increased healthcare charges was under attack. In Madam Ho's case, government

officials accused the social workers of distributing inaccurate information to the older persons and hence of creating an unwarranted split between the government and the elderly. Yeoh Eng-kiong participated in a radio programme, namely *Saturday Forum* (政經星期六)²⁷ in the same week in which the healthcare debate took place in the Legislative Council. The programme was produced by the Commercial Radio (CR1) Channel²⁸ on March 1, 2003, a week after the furious debate between Yeoh and the ageing women. The media widely reported the details concerning the interview in which Yeoh participated on *Saturday Forum*.²⁹

The media focused on Yeoh's assertions that social workers had provided inaccurate information to older persons and that this information had given rise to unfounded worries that triggered the furious debate. After the radio programme, Yeoh met with the press and, through the Government Information Department (2003) on 1 March 2003,³⁰ delivered a press release. According to this release, Yeoh stated that he had not blamed the social workers, and he then tried to clarify his position:

I'm just saying that if there are organisations of people that are misleading the public, I hope that they stop doing that. If they are unhappy with our policies, we are very happy to listen to them and to discuss and debate the policies but not to mislead older persons because my main fear is that you create a lot of anxiety among the older persons that is unnecessary

As for social workers, Yeoh made a further suggestion:

And of course, we have a lot of social workers in our non-government organisations, in the Social Welfare Department, the medical social workers in our hospitals who help us spread the appropriate message. They would be able to tell older persons what the policies are, where the services are, and what they can apply for and what they can't apply for and the criteria. So the social workers and medical social workers can help us to provide the more appropriate and the accurate information.

He denied that he was referring to social workers, but he mentioned “some organisations” without specifying their identity. He commented that any such organisation was unethical if it spread inaccurate information and frightened seniors. The inaccurate information in question concerned the assertion that the government no longer would take care of seniors, who would lose access to medical treatment in the absence of sufficient funds. In the press release, he cited an example of the alleged inappropriate behaviour: he had found that “someone” was coaching the elderly to call Yeoh’s office and to make complaints over the phone. Yeoh’s secretary reported to him that there had been “someone” sitting next to the older persons who had telephoned and that this “someone” was audibly feeding lines to the older person.

The Director of the Hong Kong Council of Social Services, Feng Man Sang,

responded to Yeoh's comment and stated that social workers' interventions should facilitate the "disadvantaged" groups' efforts to channel their views to the government.³¹ The Legislative Council member representing the social-services constituencies, Dr. Law Chi Kong, voiced his disagreement with Yeoh's comment that social workers were misleading older persons ('Yeoh Eng-kiong gets angry again' 2003). This debate has nevertheless shifted the focus of the discussion on senior rights: whereas the previous focus had concerned the rights themselves, the later focus concerned the roles of social workers in the issue. Moreover, Yeoh's assertions mirror the accusations made by Ho's neighbours: that social workers deceived ageing women into lending their support for petitions. This accusation, in turn, mirrors the prevalent bias according to which older women in particular (as they—not older men—were called *ah po*) are ignorant and incapable of differentiating truths from falsehoods.

The JAGFWRS discussed Yeoh's accusation and stated that social workers help, rather than deceive, old persons. Madam Ho was angry about Yeoh's accusation and she repeatedly told me that the social workers in LC Centre had been very helpful to her. She added that the government officials were, in essence, accusing ageing women of being foolish, an attribution that she opposed. When Madam Ho talked about her marriage, she emphasized that she was "modern" or

“civilized” (文明) as compared to the old ways of arranged marriage. Unlike her sister and the girls at that time, Madam Ho was proud that her marriage had not been arranged (盲婚啞嫁): she and her husband had become lovers before choosing to marry each other. In much the same way, Madam Ho made decisive choices in forming collectives that provided older people with mutual care and mutual support.

Conclusion

According to Gilleard and Higgs (2000, pp. 2-3), the “cultural turn” that prioritizes “the role of culture in shaping the experience and expression of ageing” has penetrated social gerontology only slowly. By ‘culture’, they are referring to the various complex systems of meaning that constitute everyday life (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000). In their book *Cultures of ageing: self, citizen, and the body*, the authors:

examine the systems of meaning that “ageing” takes on, both in individual lives and in social institutions, and how these systems of meaning are located in the changing social structures of the twentieth century. (Gilleard & Higgs 2000, p. 3)

In my study here, and particularly in this chapter, I have followed this structural conception in understanding Madam Ho and her group in terms of their social participation. In this chapter, I have reviewed how these ageing women both

adopted activist roles and accepted assistance from social workers in order to form a collective. This loosely formed collective was community-based and lacked a fixed, formal structure of chairpersons, a secretary, or key coordinators. In JAGFWRS, there was no formal registered membership and representatives from advocacy groups changed according to the schedule. Nevertheless, the senior-advocacy groups were well connected with each other. This well-connectedness did not extend to outsiders, who would find it difficult to gain access to the collective's spokespersons when they were not in "action." The only way to gain access to them would be both *through* the networked web of concern groups and *with* social workers acting as chief coordinators. Upon gaining this access, one could see, as I have shown, that JAGFWRS was an issue-based collective responsive to government-proposed policy.

Ageing women's participation is primarily issue-based, and they are free to choose to join in or leave. In Ho's case, the social worker in the NGO played a crucial role in organising ageing women. Mr. Fu arranged the interviews and visits for me. When I asked Ho for a means by which I could contact her directly, she asked me to contact Mr. Fu or the centre: she did not give me her own contact number. I found that some ageing women felt comfortable with this arrangement and that they would rely on social workers' support in many ways.

While reviewing Madam Ho's activism on welfare rights, I summarised Ho's belief that collectives offer activists three ways in which they can gain power to negotiate with the government. First, collectives can help smaller collectives negotiate with policy-makers. Second, by promoting the contributions that older persons have made to Hong Kong's prosperity, collectives can convince the public to support older persons' activism and not to label older persons a "burden" on society. Third, ageing women's collectives can benefit the whole community rather than focus only on older persons' rights. In this way, Madam Ho and her group turned local communities into collectives of mutual care and mutual benefits.

As with Wan and Choi, whose cases I reviewed in the previous chapters, Madam Ho stated that the support from the social workers was crucial for ageing women's sustainability when facing challenges from the local community and the general public. Kam (1996, p. 391) commented that social workers have been "enabling elderly people to adapt to personal changes arising from old age, to spend leisure time, to provide personal counselling, and to receive basic care in the community." Kam argued that social services for seniors should try to empower seniors, and I extend this argument to Hong Kong's population of seniors, who could benefit from Hong Kong social workers' "empowerment-oriented" practices. In this way, seniors and social workers, together, might improve economic security, medical

care, housing protection, and social participation.

A long-term goal in Hong Kong might be the formation of district-based advocacy groups, then a district-based coalition comprising the advocacy groups, and then a “tertiary-wide coalition” aiming at policy advocacy and collective empowerment (Kam, 1996, p. 390). Madam Ho’s case exemplifies territory-wide activism that, through distinctive networking, enabled its activists to join in or to leave as they wished. Staying healthy and keeping down costs were Madam Ho’s primary concerns. Therefore, it is not surprising that her activism was in resistance to policies that threatened these concerns. However, in the process, Madam Ho and other ageing women used their collective to benefit the wider community.

NOTES

¹ For a detailed comparison of the term ‘collective’ and the term ‘cooperative’, see Smith (2005).

² LGB Estate is public rental housing that was built in 1968. There were altogether 5,479 flats with 4,700 households and a population of 14,700. The name is a made-up one for the purpose of preserving anonymity.

³ The locations of the concern groups include Sha Tin and Tai Po in the New Territories; Wong Chuk Hang, Sai Wan Ho, and Lei Yu Mun from Hong Kong Island; Ngau Tau Kok (Lower Estate), from Kowloon; and finally Kwai Fong and Kwai Chung Estates in the Tsuen Wan District and Kwai Tsing District.

⁴ Mr. Fu is the social worker who worked in the community-development projects operated under an NGO, known as LC, on the LGB Estate. I knew him when I was working as a community-development worker. He had been in community work for over 10 years. I assigned him a made-up name to preserve his anonymity.

⁵ The CD-ROM, entitled *Sharing the Fight for Seniors Rights: Starting with the*

Issue of Government Increases in Healthcare Charges, <從政府增醫療收費事件分享—爭取長者權益>, was produced by the JAGFWRS (Medical Matters), <爭取長者福利聯合行動組(醫療)>. The CD-ROM documents the movement that the JAGFWRS launched from 2002 to 2003 in objecting to the government's proposed increases in healthcare charges.

⁶The special programme *Financial Secretary's Budget Proposal* was broadcast on the News Magazine, Chinese channel, ATV on 8 March 2003. News Magazine [時事追擊] is a TV programme that, produced by Asia Television Ltd, discusses current issues related to the politics, economics, and social conditions in Hong Kong. Mr. Fu videotaped the programme, but I could not find it in the archive of ATV programmes.

⁷ LC Centre is the name of the NGO that provided services on the LGB Estate, where Mr. Fu worked. It is not a real name but a made-up one for the purpose of preserving anonymity.

⁸ Yeoh Eng-kiong resigned from his post on July 7, 2004.

⁹ According to the meeting minutes of the JAGFWRS, the Joyful Club (喜福會) was a senior organization for those elderly people living in the village areas in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long and was supported by the NGO called The Neighbourhood Advice-action Council.

¹⁰ Ms Yu's statement was quoted on 25 February 2003 in the following newspapers, 'Yu po po accused the Government officer' *Sun Daily* (2003), 'Yeoh Eng-kiong gets angry' *Sing Pao Daily News* (2003), and 'Some elderly have thousands of million savings' *Hong Kong Economic Times* (2003).

¹¹ For example, "Heartless arguments," *The Standard*, (2003); Benitez (2003).

¹² The meeting was organised by the Panel on Health Services of the Legislative Council, for meeting minutes see Panel on Health Services (2003); and the paper prepared by the Health, Welfare, and Food Bureau (2003a) for the meeting.

¹³ See for example, Leung, Ambrose "Elderly-allowance review under fire," EDT4, *South China Morning Post*, 20 May 2002. <200205200270048>.

¹⁴ "Meeting with senior-advocacy groups" *Tai Kung Pao*, (2002); "Yeoh: Absolutely no intention of cutting the Fruit money," *Hong Kong Economic Times* (2002).

¹⁵ Organisers were used to differentiating government-funded organizations' workers from non-government-funded organisations' workers because the former were not necessarily trained in social work. The Social Work Ordinance required that, beginning in 1997, all social workers needed to be registered in the registration board.

¹⁶ 'Fruit money' is the name popular amongst older persons in representing the

old-age pension, which some use as “money for fruit.”

¹⁷ For detail of the media report, see Leung, Ambrose and Ng Kang Chung (2002)

¹⁸ ‘Yeoh, Eng-kiong pointed out that there are many rich elderly’ Metropolis Daily (2003). Metropolis Daily was launched on April 15, 2002 with a daily circulation of more than 320,000 copies. It is distributed free-of-charge from Monday through Friday.

¹⁹ The Chinese caption of the photo in questions is: <逾百名長者立法會大樓請願，要求政府豁免對長者的收入和資產審查，警方則嚴陣以待，手拉手排成人鏈，與長者形成強烈對比>.

²⁰ For full story see, ‘Elderly and Councils fiercely criticized Yeoh Eng-kiong’ *Sing Pao Daily News* (2003)

²¹ For details of the housing struggles, see The LGB Newsletter (2006). The Newsletter is a regularly published by the LC Centre.

²² The press release announced that the HA—and not the tenants—had initiated the erection of metal gates in estates built as reception estates for redevelopment. The article also stressed the high proportion of seniors who were living on redevelopment estates and who had long resided on old estates equipped with metal gates. See, Hong Kong Housing Authority (2004b)

²³ *LGB Estate one-person and two-person households for seniors – Redevelopment updates* (2004), is a regular pamphlet published by the LC Centre.

²⁴ Madam Ho, Wan and Choi were members of at least one elderly centre. According to the 2003/2004 Annual report of the Social Welfare Department (2004), there were 214 elderly centres in Hong Kong that welcomed older persons to join the centres and to participate in the activities. [Online] available at: <http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/annreport/0304annrepe.pdf> , retrieved on March 4, 2006.

²⁵ Chan, Leung, and Luk (2003) analysed the advertisement that the Elderly Commission posted to promote healthy-ageing practices amongst older persons. See Chan, Leung and Luk (2003, p. 53).

²⁶ The original objective of senior services, especially in senior centres, was to meet the recreational needs and the care needs of the ageing population. However, in 2003 and 2004, senior services underwent modifications that shifted the services’ focus onto fulfilling the care needs of “frail seniors”.

²⁷ The host of the radio talk show will invite policy opponents and policy supporters to speak on a hot topic-of-the-week and to respond to audience members who phone in their views.

²⁸ CR1 (FM881) is a talk-based channel that features news, current affairs, traffic,

finance, and talk shows, as well as drama. For details, see [Online] Available at: <http://pshweb02.881903.com-881903.com>, retrieved on February 19, 2005.

²⁹ ‘Yeoh, Eng-kiong responds to critics of CSSA cuts’ *Oriental Daily* (2003); ‘Yeoh Eng-kiong gets angry again’ *Apple Daily* (2003); ‘Yeoh, Eng-kiong criticised some organisations’ *Sun Daily* (2003) and ‘Yeoh, Eng-kiong criticised the organisations’ *Ming Pao* (2003).

³⁰ The press release provides a detailed transcript of Yeoh’s conversation with the press, both in Chinese and in English.

³¹ ‘Yeoh Eng-kiong responds to critics of CSSA cuts,’ (2003); ‘Yeoh Eng-kiong criticised some organisations’ (2003).

Chapter Seven.

Conclusion

In the course of writing my dissertation, I kept in contact with the three ageing women, Choi, Wan, and Ho, from time to time. Wan and Ho each carried on with their activism regarding affordable housing and desirable living environments for older persons. And Choi continued her roles not only as a passive recipient at social-service centres and in local residents' organisations, but also as an active member of her network of ageing women's neighbourhood groups. Ms. Man and Mr. Fu, social workers at the NGOs, also kept in contact with me and invited me to participate in various activities held by senior-advocacy groups. On the Sunday morning of 8 October 2006, I attended a press conference organised by Madam Ho's group. The press conference served as a forum in which the group could express senior residents' complaints about their new WPS Estate's shopping centre, whose design, as outlined by the Housing Authority, did not best fit the senior needs.

Mr. Fu invited me to the press conference and asked me to speak on how an "unsafe" environment that is "unfit for activities" could influence older persons' later life. I was to address the issue from the perspective of an expert studying older persons. In other words, their group hoped that I could speak as an "academic" or as someone from the University who could support their demands that the Housing

Authority install elderly-friendly facilities such as public toilets and handrails. Other speakers, three old persons, also reflected their views on the environment, but from the perspective of residents or users there. Apart from the results of a survey that reflected elderly residents' satisfaction level regarding the new WPS Estate (a survey conducted by the Polytechnic University) and that were released at the press conference, the newspapers cited my comments on the importance of a safe environment for older persons' enjoyment of local social activities.¹ Madam Ho did not show up. Mr. Fu told me that she arrived after I left for another activity, the Fundraising Walkathon that was held by Madam Wan's group and that had been scheduled for the same day. At the Walkathon, I did not see Madam Wan but talked with her friends whom I knew from my study. I was told that she was ill and could not turn up for the event.

In the course of my thesis research, I gradually familiarised myself with the practices of ageing women's activism: namely, the ageing women's organisation strategies and the ageing women's arguments. Throughout this learning period, I could not help myself but to wish that their activism would flourish. Rather than focus on the successes and the failures of their social movement, I tended to examine the meetings, the discussions, and the plans that characterised the ageing women's protests. Placards, routines, and other practices shed light on the focus of

my examination. Also, I wanted to know about the family relations, the neighbourhood relations, the health and illness issues, and the other ongoing daily events that characterised—sometimes indirectly—the ageing women’s activism and that would always remind me of my contact with the women, whether in their homes, local cafés, Chinese restaurants, an eye clinic, or even a hospital.² I came to realise that the women’s activism was bound up largely with their everyday life and that to separate the “political” from the “cultural” in my social-movement analysis would be to create a theoretical division where none existed in practice.

Informed by Pat Chambers’s (1998) call for feminist scholarship to concern itself with older women, I have long wished to work in this direction. As I wrote up their stories, I tried to share my writing with the three ageing women involved. For instance, I have been aware that the “lone” ethnographer raises problems. Rosaldo (1989) identified some of these problems and noted that they derive from the ethnographer’s assumption that he or she has “absolute” control over both the field work and the articulation of this field work. By inviting my study’s three ageing women to give me feedback about my writing, I aimed not so much to strengthen my study’s “authenticity” as to ascertain their responses to my representation of their stories. After all, I was representing the women’s self-interpretation regarding important incidents that they had experienced, remembered (fondly or not), and

articulated to me.

Madam Choi and Madam Ho appeared to be quite indifferent to my study and displayed no eagerness to know what I was writing about them. In contrast, Wan reminded me to write her story “positively” and to avoid the topics of her poverty and of her suffering, which some of the media had emphasised. After completing my interviews with Madam Ho, I invited her to talk about my writing. She simply told me to inform Mr. Fu of my progress: she could get the information from him. She stated that she did not want to bother me again because I would, according to her, be too busy to travel the long way to her flat. Nevertheless, I could feel that each of the three women was happy that I kept in contact with her as a way to show my care and concern.

Gradually I come to realize that it is difficult for ageing women to get involved in academic discussion of their social-movement activism because, among other factors, they have little access to gerontological knowledge. They are not familiar with the debates that characterise, in particular, social-movement studies and the field of gerontology. Indeed, these debates occur almost uniquely amongst gerontologists and professionals. I believe that my study here is valuable as a starting point for a widening of these debates towards the possibility of greater interaction between concerned academics and front-line activists in social

movements today.

By applying the notion of reflexivity to my research methods, I tried to make sense of my observations. That is, I drew on my own experiences. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw applied reflexivity to their composition of ethnographic notes and argued that “fieldnotes and finished ethnographies are inevitably and unavoidably mediated by the ethnographer’s person, experiences, point of view, and theoretical orientation” (1995, p. 215). However, they further pointed out that, as “a participant who has a place in the local setting and who has some degree of involvement with the people in it, the researcher is part of the world being studied and not a neutral, detached observer” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 215).

Hertz’s (1997) concepts of “reflexivity and voice” also supported my argument. I would take on the role of cultural researcher in my study on ageing women’s activism, a type of role that the following passage describes succinctly:

As “situated actors” (active participants in the process of meaning creation), we bring to each interview our own histories (Manning 1967 as quoted in Hertz 1997, p. xiii).

Hertz argued that “voice is a struggle to figure out how to present the author’s self while simultaneously writing the respondents’ accounts representing their selves” (1997, p. xi). In this way, it is important for the author to say not only “what I know”

but also “how I come to know about it.” To this end, I have drawn on a broad range of qualitative methods such as participant observations and in-depth interviews. The voice of the author is certainly not absent from this text, as I drew upon my self-knowledge and personal experiences in ageing women’s activism to form my frame of understanding of ageing women’s social life and human behaviour. Hertz argued that “the self becomes both the subject of the study and the narrator” (1997, pp. xii-xiii). Both my current position as a researcher in a gerontology centre operating in Lingnan University, Hong Kong, and my past experiences in ageing women’s housing struggles would serve as a base on which I could frame my understanding of ageing women’s activism.

These three case studies are based almost entirely upon my conversations with the three women and in particular upon what the study’s participants told me. These participants included social workers, who supplemented the three ageing women’s information with detailed information and written documents that were in the form of meeting minutes, newspaper clippings, VCDs, and the like. However, I also had to do library searches for some of the materials regarding the women’s protests, and these materials included policy papers, government press releases, government-policy documents, and TV programmes’ broadcast dates—missing information that neither the social workers nor the ageing women could clarify for

me. As I gathered, verified, and supplemented information from my participants, they remained friendly and welcomed my study and my own participation therein. They were eager to tell me their stories and enjoyed my interest in their lives. In some large measure, they interpreted my study and the special attention that I paid to them as a sign of my support for their activism, which they treasured.

From a social problem to a social force

This study examines the practices of ageing women in Hong Kong social movements, considered in light of Hong Kong peoples' power as it emerged both before and after 1997. I have reviewed how discourse regarding both seniors and healthcare tended to represent ageing women as a "social problem." According to that discourse, this problem fell in the lap of what I call the "ageing industry," which is a wide network of care professionals, policy-makers, and gerontologists. In Chapter Three, I state that the media and the public typically portray ageing women as fragile, helpless, and vulnerable and, thereby, help to shape ageing women as a social problem. Also, this portrayal suggests that the "problem" of vulnerable ageing women is growing quickly, both globally and locally, and that it is, in fact, "uncontrollable." On the basis of calculations and projections, policy-makers in Hong Kong drew the conclusion that the rapidly growing population of seniors

would result in a huge demand for care-related services and that the wider population in Hong Kong would not be able to meet this demand.

In reviewing the development of gerontology studies in Hong Kong, I have argued that gerontologists who focus on the provision of medical and of other care services are not quite able to acknowledge the brighter side of the ageing story. My study diverges from the majority of gerontology studies, which have generalised the dependence of ageing women. I have reviewed ageing women's struggle to acquire and to preserve an independent mode of living. This study is an unusually "positive" interpretation of women's experiences of ageing. Aiming to capture the practices of ageing women's activism (which often concern everyday-life issues), I have focused on the women's understanding of being old—an understanding that was bound up with widespread characterisations of vulnerability, ignorance, and limited mobility. I have noted that ageing women sometimes applied these characterisations as "tactical identities" to social movements (an application that is under-represented in both gerontology and social-movement studies to date). In this regard, and in other regards, I have argued that ageing women are not powerless, passive individuals. Rather, they are active agents capable of generating multiple identities that enable the women to participate in and to interact with an environment that poses concrete obstacles to their participation. This level of activity was common in the cases of

Choi, Wan, and Ho and also in their groups.

Leung's (1992) study of student movements and labour movements in Hong Kong illuminated the "cognitive praxis" that underlies social movements. My analysis, however, diverges from Leung's insofar as I have put the focus of this study to the cultural politics of ageing women. Ageing women integrate their ageing experiences with their life histories and with their interpretations of Hong Kong history; they evaluate and respond to widely circulating cultural images of their ageing as a "burden" to others, and even as a "peril" to future generations. By identifying ageing women as active agents, my study shows how ageing women who started with down-to-earth problems regarding housing, health, and rent issues eventually came to realize their important position in society and to assert their right to an independent mode of living. This realisation surfaced by means of mutual-care networks and collectives that figure only marginally in local gerontology studies.

To understand ageing women's solidarity, I did not prioritise the assertion—made by many political-process theorists—that social-movement outcomes stem from a confluence of political opportunities. Nor was my focus that of SMO theorists, which concerns the effectiveness of organisation strategies and of mobilisation strategies. Rather, I focused on ageing women's everyday-life politics, which overflowed with cultural interpretations of "being old," and on the women's

ageing experiences. I crafted much of my methodology following research by Fred Chiu (2002), who reviewed the post-colonial political contestations in Hong Kong after the hand-over. Also helpful in this regard was a commentary on Chiu by Meaghan Morris, who highlighted the distinctiveness of his work in formulating:

an alternative, research-based narrative before deconstructing the rhetoric enveloping an event; to begin analysis with the concrete in social life and activity, not with a bibliography of market-sanctioned texts; and, on this basis, to generate rather than reify theoretical understanding of practical problems (2002, p. 29).

I referenced a second insightful work by Chiu (2003), who, this time, conducted an anthropological study on female workers in a Hong Kong factory. I gleaned from this work the proposition that the formations of workers' collectives derive not so much from "industrial solidarity" as from the workers' networks embedded often in female workers' local networks. Applying this proposition to the ageing women's activism that I studied, I viewed ageing women's identity and solidarity as cultural practices that are bound up with the women's networks and with the women's consolidation of their age-related experiences.

At the same time, my study reviewed the paradox inherent in the notion of empowerment, widely advocated by social workers and activist groups. On the one hand, empowerment is a goal of social-movement action; on the other hand,

empowerment necessitates the prior existence of powerlessness—in my study, the powerlessness attributable to women who are, in fact, social activists. In my study, ageing women tended to accept the prevailing cultural stereotypes concerning the aged but they also tended to focus on the tactical use of their widely recognized fragility, which functioned as a powerful weapon in the women's negotiations with the Housing Authority, councillors, the community, and even social workers. In this way, ageing women created an emergent social force within their local community, in the formulation of old-age policy, and in managed self care.

Ageing in a “desirable” community

I made a few phone calls to Madam Choi, including during the Chinese New Year, to send her a New Year's greeting and to update myself regarding her accomplishments in 2004 and 2005. I enjoyed my conversation with her and, indeed, learned of her recent activities. Let me refer back to Madam Choi's involvement in the visit of guests from the University of West Sydney on 4 May 2004 (an event that I discussed in Chapter Four). This event reveals the effective organising work that she conducted with ageing women on the THT Estate's new block. Without any hesitation, Madam Choi immediately promised to get everything organised for me. She did this on her own, without any assistance from former social workers or local

organizations. She even referred me to Mr. Lau, who belonged to a local residents' organisation and who might lend us a meeting place. She organised her group by making phone calls (referring to her small pocket address book) and by passing on messages through the network. A rather big group, about 20 of the participants—most of them women—showed up and warmly greeted each other. To my surprise, she also organised a lunch gathering after the visit and invited the former social worker, Tsang (who was pregnant at that time) to meet with us. At the lunch gathering, they enjoyed updating information about where they had moved and who was a neighbour of whom on a given block. Also, Madam Choi proposed that their group should visit Tsang after her baby was born, a topic that the ageing women discussed happily.

In my observation, Madam Choi perceived the event as another of the women's gatherings, as an opportunity to meet her old friends on the estate. I could discern from their casual conversation that the women did not meet one another as often as they had met on their old blocks. Madam Choi told me that the local residents' organisation (the place where we were meeting) had invited her to organise the older persons again. But Madam Choi refused the offer, saying that she felt satisfied with her new, enjoyable living arrangements. Nevertheless, and with the assistance of my translation, the women were eager to explain their recent

social-movement experiences to the Australian guests—how the women had successfully demanded that the authority build new housing blocks for them despite the opposition of certain residents there. Then, the women divided into small groups (two to three ageing women a group) and toured the guests around the estate. I felt that the women were proud to discuss both their success and their enjoyment of the new blocks.

With regard to social workers, the discourse of professionalism³ in Hong Kong emphasises their code of practices and their “professional” relationships with “clients”, but never mentions the intimacy and the trust-based relationships that I witness between social workers and their clients in the THT struggle. I found that a group of ageing women on the THT Estate had established intimate relationships not only amongst themselves but also between themselves and the social workers there. Sometimes, it would be difficult or paradoxical for a social worker to remain detached or distant as passion, anger, and other powerful emotions surfaced in the ageing women’s activism.

This group of ageing women exhibited three ways in which sentiments and aspirations fuelled the women’s activism. First, the term ‘sentiment’ refers here to the emotional ties that bound the core group and the social workers to one another. Sentiment was essential to the social movement. Second, the women’s sentimental

attachment to their long-term residence—to the THT Estate, where they had resided for half a century—was a core strength underlying their petitions. Finally, it is clear from their behaviour in this case that the ageing women aspired to acquire an independent mode of living that was intimately connected with their old neighbourhood and that was safe and comfortable for them. Ageing women were motivated to participate in the pursuit of these goals despite the Housing Authority's decision to break up their well connected mutual-care and self-care network.

The (Self) Making of ageing women: not defeated and not disheartened

Madam Wan represented herself as an undefeated woman. Meanwhile, the media portrayed her (1) as a poor older resident of a public-housing estate who could not afford her rent, (2) as a mother and a grandmother, and (3) as a retired *dim sum* worker. It appears that her three-year legal battle with the Housing Authority came to an end in November 2005, when the Court of Final Appeal ruled in favour of the Housing Authority and claimed that the Authority had no legal responsibility to keep residents' rent lower than ten percent of the median-income ratio. I kept track of the results of the court case and, from time to time, received email messages from Ms. Man regarding plans to organise protests in support of rent-reduction demands. Madam Wan and her group decided to push for a rent-policy review on the

affordability of public housing. This review remains one of the hot issues of 2007, as my study comes to an end. Expanding her concern to the issue of rent policy, Madam Wan expanded her activism. For example, in December 2006, I unexpectedly popped in on a group meeting where Madam Wan and other members were discussing issues concerning the march (in which she and I participated) for universal suffrage in Hong Kong. The march took place on 4 December 2006,⁴ and I was glad to see that other group members took good care of Madam Wan as they headed to the government office, arm in arm.

Madam Wan has complained to me that the press uncovered her private life and her youngest daughter's private life. Wan blamed the media for needlessly complicating her life. I could see that she and her group nevertheless maintained their contact with the media. Indeed, Madam Wan actively engaged with the media with regard to her continued struggle in the rent court case. They showed me that they had participated actively in "shaping the news" so that it pleased the activists. At the same time, they kept negotiating with the wider society for a right to uniqueness and to aspirations that were uncommonly recognised in gerontology debates in Hong Kong. The women's activist use of the media was largely ignored in social-movement studies, which lack an understanding of the complexity of media and of media-based politics (for example, Kuan and Lau 1998).

Madam Wan was negotiating with the media over her self representations. Her experiences had made her realize that she had to handle the press carefully. Once, in 2005, we were having lunch together and reading the newspaper reports on ageing women's objection to the CSSA cuts. Madam Wan clarified for me that a newspaper had wrongly identified her as another older woman who cried during the LegCo meeting. Both of us laughed but she then seriously told me that she would not have cried at that LegCo meeting because she thought that crying would make her look weak. Similarly, she actively engaged with the media when they reported on the final results of her court case in November 2005. Although she lost the case, she repeatedly told the media that she was not disappointed and that she felt good because her friends had been supporting her. Moreover, she put the focus on the only judge (together there were five judges) of the Court of Final Appeal, Kemal Bokhary, who supported her case.

Mr. Bokhary's surname is rendered in Chinese as Bao, as the "new Bao Qingtian"—a legendary judge who hailed from the Song Dynasty, who was renowned for his courage in chastising government officials, and who became a symbol of justice for peasants. By emphasising him and his support of her case, Madam Wan justified her assertion that she was not "disheartened" upon her "failure." She strongly declared, "I will not be defeated" and "I don't want to be like

a turtle whose head is hidden in the shell. I will move on.”⁵ Similarly, she told me repeatedly in our conversations that she did not want to come across as a “cowardly old lady.” In this respect, rather than be a passive victim of the family conflicts that she faced, Madam Wan negotiated with the media and with other parties in the movement so that she could, in part, shape a distinctive older-woman image that differed from the prevalent stereotypes according to which ageing women themselves, as well as society at large, view ageing women as useless and frail.

In reviewing ageing women’s representation of their frailty (particularly in the case of Madam Choi) and also their power in activism (particularly in the case of Madam Wan), I would argue that a dynamic understanding—not a polarising monolithic one—better facilitates cultural researchers’ efforts to capture the complexity of ageing women’s activism. Here, the notion of a “mask of ageing” serves as an invaluable theoretical starting point to illustrate the paradoxical and the strategic assumption of the “mantle of frailty” that underlies the women’s activist practices. Ageing women’s strategy in emphasising their vulnerability proved very effective in their negotiations with the authorities, with the media, with neighbours, with the surrounding community, and most important, with the women’s children.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the concept of a “mask of ageing,” initiated by Featherstone and Hepworth (1989). They pointed out that underlying the experience

of ageing is a contention between a younger self identity and an ageing body: the former connotes invulnerability and strength whereas the latter connotes vulnerability and frailty. Since these researchers first presented their findings, theories on ageing have devoted more and more attention to “a masking motif.” Indeed, a common understanding of “masking has been employed to interpret the management of an ageing self in an uncertain and unequal world” (Biggs 1997, 2003, p. 152). Biggs (2003) summarized two diversified key approaches to the use of this masking process. Featherstone and Hepworth (1989) focused on the ageing body and consumer culture (use of anti-ageing products) from a postmodern perspective, whilst both Kathleen Woodward (1991, 1995) and Biggs (1993, 1999) focused on the use of masquerades and personas as a psychological coping mechanism relative to hostile social environments (Biggs 2003). My study, here, benefited from these discussions of masks, of masquerades, and of the many layers of meaning that attach themselves to ageing experiences. I was able to expand the scope of these arguments to the social movements that ageing women’s everyday activism was generating.

Part of my analysis, however, focused on the ageing women’s paradoxical and strategic application of the mantle of frailty to the ageing women’s activist practices. It is noteworthy that this application occurred in response to a hostile social environment. The ageing women faced hostility that came from their

neighbours and that was largely gendered: women bore the brunt of the neighbours' assignment of blame because, in Hong Kong society, women are more susceptible than men are to accusations of ignorance or of gullibility. Thus, opponents to the old persons' activism accused the *female* old persons of falling prey to the deceptions of social workers or of political parties (see, for example, the cases of Madam Wan and Madam Ho). Stereotypes might still colour ageing women's interactions with the media; however, ageing women's activism has benefited from Chinese society's traditional respect for the aged and from news media's increasing monitoring of government wrongdoings. This is not to say that discrimination against ageing women in the media is diminishing; rather, I would argue that ageing women, at least those in my study, actively engage with the media through their repeated use of petitions.

On 25 March 2006, I saw Madam Wan's interview on the TV news after her and her group's petition to the Secretary of Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau, Michael Suen. She spoke on behalf of her group and her activism in objecting to the newly proposed rent policy of the Housing Authority. Her efforts to mould herself into an outstanding, undefeated proponent of ageing women's activism attracted media attention. Madam Wan's case points to the ways in which older women can begin to name themselves, discover their subjectivity, and hence contest some of the

negative ways in which they are perceived and named (Furman, 1997).

Remaining “nomads of the present”

In the case of Madam Ho, I had less success in staying connected with her than I did with Choi and Wan. I was not able to meet with Madam Ho after our interview in 2004. According to Mr. Fu, Madam Ho was busy relocating her residence in late 2005 and early 2006. I visited the new estate in October 2006 and could see a group of thirty to forty older persons, most of whom were women, sitting around the three new blocks’ open areas. There was no proper seating arrangement there, so most of the women sat in subgroups along the edge of the open areas’ flower beds. As Mr. Fu and I made our way to Madam Ho’s home, a few women recognised him and waved to him. The atmosphere was warm and energetic in this open area where older women gather.

In her flat, Madam Ho told me that she would rate her life there ninety out of one hundred and that she was satisfied with the new home and also with her relationship with her three children. She explained to me that she had offered this same evaluation only a few days earlier to another interviewer (whose identity she could not recall). Apparently, the interviewer had asked Madam Ho how she would rate her life so far at this age. Madam Ho further shared with me some details

concerning her daily life. She told me about the new air-conditioner that her elder son had brought over, and how his friends had helped out when during her relocation into the new flat. She also recalled that she had experienced aches in her leg a few weeks earlier and that, consequently, another ageing woman had helped her to buy rice and other food at the new shopping centre. Mr. Fu also named a few ageing women who had moved into units that were near hers so that they could help each other. Madam Ho felt safe and comfortable as she moved into these new blocks, largely because the familiar collectives that the women had once formed quickly took root in the new environment. She was again prepared to collaborate with seniors' groups in support of seniors' welfare rights.

Madam Ho's senior-advocacy group exhibited a characteristic that was distinct among current social movements: membership patterns were unstable and mobilisation patterns were sporadic and discontinuous. The joint-action group that Madam Ho and her colleagues had formed in support of welfare rights (e.g., old-age pensions, senior fare for transportation) served as a platform for the women's related protests and for protests concerning other matters, such as their housing struggle for "metal gates" on the three estates. Furthermore, the collectives and the networks in Madam Ho's local community were simultaneously rooted in formal organisations but fluid so that ageing women could join together either within their local

community or across communities when necessary. The unstable membership and the sporadic and discontinuous mobilisation that characterised the women's local connections were distinctive of ageing women's activism. I would argue that these collectives and networks provided the foundation for the formation of a new politics of ageing amongst women in Hong Kong.

Power and empowerment in ageing women

I remember that, once in 2005, Mr. Fu helped arrange a meeting between Madam Ho and me. At the meeting, I could clarify some points with Madam Ho. According to Mr. Fu, she had promised to come at about 4 p.m., following her completion of outdoor activities on that day. And she had to leave at 5 p.m. to prepare her dinner. However, Madam Ho did not show up. Mr. Fu explained to me that the reason concerned a traffic jam; her coach had been delayed, and she could not come to the centre on time. So she decided not to come for the discussion, because the delay would inevitably clash with her meal time. Mr. Fu also explained to me that Madam Ho, at that time, was busy preparing for her removal to the new estate and that church activities quite often occupied her time.

From my observations, ageing women made their own choices as to how they participated in their senior-advocacy group after the spotlight on their activism faded.

My findings on this matter are inconsistent with the findings of linear empowerment analyses, according to which social movements empower actors therein and encourage the actors to make a long-term devotion to the social movement. As Mayo and Craig (1995, p.6) argued:

“Empowerment”... is about collective, community (and ultimately class) conscientization – to understand reality critically in order to use the (currently limited) power which even the relatively powerless possess to challenge the powerful, and ultimately to transform that reality through conscious political struggle.

I would argue that the collectives characteristic of ageing women’s activism in my study were more mobile and fluid than other collectives and allow for choices and decisions that were unique to ageing women.

The ageing women whom I studied for this project revealed to me the effects that empowerment can have on personal change. Madam Choi told me that her participation in ageing women’s activism helped her realise her own power. Madam Choi stated that after the struggle, she came to realise her “braveness.” She recalled how she used to cry when she first started to speak over the microphone during protests. She could not understand why her tears came out automatically. In retrospect, she explained that her “braveness” finally came out.⁶ In extending the meaning and the operation of the notion of empowerment, Madam Choi deepened at

least my understanding of the empowerment that “comes out” of what is suppose to be “inside” a person. In a sense, she gradually regained her power.

In Hong Kong, the general public still largely ignores ageing women’s participation. Throughout the course of my study, research on ageing women’s activism remained scarce in Hong Kong gerontologist scholarship, which has focused on the power and the empowerment of ageing persons (for example, Kwan and Chan 2002; Lee 1996a, 1996b). Nevertheless, Madam Choi’s case was included in the teaching materials of two social-work training institutions⁷ whilst Madam Wan was taken up as the spokeswoman for the rent struggle, and her media coverage lasted over three years (as I discussed earlier). As for the case of Ho, her collective in the JAGFWRS and their Campaign against Cuts in the Old-age Pension were recognised as significant events in the forming of a new social force (Lam 2002b).

An earlier study conducted by Lee (1994), though lacking a gender perspective, has pioneered the focus on the political participations of ageing populations and suggested that the coalition be termed an “age-graded association” or an “age-based social movement,” which social-movement studies in Hong Kong had previously neglected. In exploring the characteristics of elderly participants in age-graded associations, Lee (1996b) pointed out that the degree of participation was positively related with the participants’ educational attainment and with the

participants' perceived health status. Whilst the participation of older persons was found to be lower amongst those with a high degree of loneliness and larger number of co-habitants. Lee's (1996b) findings suggested that organisational involvement such as social-work organisations and residents' organisations facilitated older persons' participation. Self-esteem was found to be a determining factor in their political efficacy. My study put the focus on ageing women's activism in relation not to pre-existing structures but to the practices of networks and collectives.

The topic of senior rights in Hong Kong is of gradually growing importance amongst social-service organisations. *The Voice*, the first monthly Chinese newsletter published by the St. James Settlement, since 1976 has targeted mainly older persons and, in 2002, devoted substantial discussions to older persons' protests for their right to welfare (for example, Lam 2002a and 2002b). In subsequent issues, articles called for greater attention to gray power and to the possibility that the political participation of ageing populations could link up with wider demands for democracy and equality (for example, the Association for the Rights of Elderly 2004; Lam, 2004). Most of these articles were written by core members of the Association for the Rights of Elderly (ARE). Formed in 1979, the organisation consists mostly of social workers and professors who teach in social work or in related subjects. The association advocates "positive thinking on the ageing trend" and urges the

government to regard the ageing trend as a challenge, even an opportunity, to adopt “a positive and developmental approach [to] the problem by utilizing the valuable human resources of the elders,” an effort that “will surely promote the present and future well-being of the elders as well as the whole society.”⁸ On 16 November, the Senior Day of 2006, the ARE in collaboration with local senior advocacy groups (the senior group in Centre G in which Madam Wan participated) launched a forum declaring the rights of the elderly in Hong Kong.

In 2004, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service that has been coordinating all elderly services in Hong Kong announced the formation of the Alliance on Monitoring Ageing Policy (AMAP), which consists of nine senior-advocacy groups. Before the Legislative Council election on 12 September 2004, The AMAP held an open forum at which the candidates discussed their views on the formulation of ageing policy. The representatives from the AMAP also formulated an Action Plan identifying specific policy areas for advocacy. These areas included long-term care policy, medical services, disease prevention, mental health promotion, retirement protection, and legal protection of the elderly from abuse.⁹ Not much news has been heard from the alliance since then; however, the formation of the alliance in Hong Kong illustrates the ageing population’s growing need to participate in the Hong Kong polity.

As an emerging social force, ageing women's activism has met challenges from the women's families because the activism led to public intrusions into private lives. Opposition came also from the women's neighbours, who questioned the women's motivations and the possibility of success. The general public still holds a sceptical attitude towards ageing women's social participation and assumes that there is a behind-the-scenes "prime mover" that directs the ageing women in their struggles. Other sceptics argue that the success of ageing women's social movements would result in a deprivation of benefits for the rest of society. There remain strong boundaries and assumptions regarding the "age-appropriate" behaviours of ageing women and, more generally, of older persons in Hong Kong.

Accordingly, this study's ageing women may have felt upset at or disappointed by the unexpected responses from the women's own family or neighbourhood. Yet, these reactions, rather than prompt the women to withdraw their participation, helped them to consolidate their ageing identities and even to double their participatory commitment to the movement, as they enjoyed friendship and intimacy within their collectives.

Toward a new politics of ageing

Theoretically, this study builds on the common ground between two emerging disciplinary developments: first, the gendering of social-movement

theories (for example, Taylor 1999; Kuumba 2001) and, second, the establishing of a feminist gerontology (for example, Ray 1999). In connecting these two trends through an engagement with cultural studies, I aim to situate ageing women as active agents and to develop a new politics of ageing that takes on the cultural politics of ageing women's struggles. It is impossible, for example, to grasp the modes of political efficacy achieved by the older women in my study without appreciating the cultural forms and contexts in which their politics could develop: namely, their tactical use of the theme of the "vulnerability" of older women; their opportunistic formation of flexible, highly mobile collectives and networks; and, perhaps above all, their everyday politics of caring.

Walker (2006) has reviewed the relationship between ageing and politics with a particular reference to Western Europe and North America, a topic that he identified as relatively neglected. He argued that the new politics of ageing is different from the old one that was rooted in "the campaigns waged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by older people and organized labor to establish pension systems" (Walker 2006, p. 340). He further pointed out that the old politics of ageing was characterised by a welfare state in which "older people were regarded as a deserving cause for welfare spending" (Walker 2006, p. 340). In delineating politics as a multi-layered phenomenon, Walker argued that there is a

maldistribution of power in the three levels of new politics that he identified:

In the public arena, there are micro-level political activities undertaken by older people, individually or in groups, to protect their interests. Then there is a range of meso-level organizations and structures that represent the interests of older people either in the form of self-advocacy or representational politics (or a mixture of both). Finally, at the macro level, there are policies that mainly emanate from the state (including local government entities), as well as from corporations, the third voluntary sector, and the International Government Organizations (IGOs) (2006, p. 340).

I support Walker's recognition that gerontologists should address the macro politics of ageing. Gerontologists in Hong Kong should remain critical of the influence of IGOs and of the "Plan of Ageing" developed by the United Nations. Rather than adopt a top-down perspective, people who are involved in gerontology should adopt a bottom-up perspective that takes ageing women's views seriously. In this regard, Walker made a useful suggestion:

Many of the newest and most radical pensioner groups have been formed to campaign against welfare state retrenchment dictated by neo-liberal oriented policies. The truism that "all politics is local" applies particularly to older people and, if a new grassroots politics of old age is to develop into effective gray power, then this is most likely to happen at the local level. Conflicts over local rationing of health and social care, transport, housing, crime and public safety are potential flashpoints (2006, p. 354).

In the present study, I concur with Walker's projections. The local community where ageing women reside is an important site for activism studies and, especially, for ageing-related narratives that produce knowledge about ageing women as active agents. Rigorous research in this field would open up a new politics of ageing ripe for exploration.

Further, I would argue that a new politics of ageing should treat ageing as a gendered process. In view of the global ageing population's male-female ratio, gerontology studies (including those that focus on social movements) should build on the views of ageing women and should reconceptualise gender. Social workers and gerontologists should work closely with ageing women to facilitate the expression of the women's views. Social-movement scholarship should address the voices of ageing women and should recognize ageing women's activism as part of the people's power in Hong Kong and elsewhere. In extending Melucci's (1989) notion of "nomads of the present" to the notion of ageing women as active agents, new social-movement theorists can further reframe our understanding of unorganised networks or submerged networks that are interwoven in small local communities and that may not directly or chiefly address themselves to political systems. Greg Martin argued that researchers in the field should combine theories of new social movements with theories of subcultures to provide a way of

“conceptualising cultural politics” (2002, p. 73). Specifically, the data of this study point to the need to reformulate social-movement theories in two ways. First, the valuable theoretical insight of Melucci (1985) on the notion of collective identity identifies collective actors as nomads of the present. Second, studies on ageing women should review the process by which collective identities evolve in relation to an environment.

Finally, my study here explores the possible connections between social-movement studies, gerontology studies, and cultural studies in two ways. First, in respect of the methodology issue, the combination of social movements and social gerontology requires qualitative cultural research methods, encompassing action research, unstructured interviews, and the author’s self reflexivity. Second, cultural researchers should engage in controversies over cultural politics; indeed, Martin argued that “while the work of CCCS (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) was deeply politicized, cultural studies now lacks a sustained political agenda and tends to focus only on micro-politics” (2002, p. 79) . However, as I illustrate in this study, local women’s struggles regarding their everyday needs and wants reflect Hong Kong’s material and concrete post-handover context. It is possible that researchers will uncover an alignment between these women’s local struggles for independence and Hong Kong people’s wider struggle to negotiate with China over

the issue of democracy; in each of these two cases, both independence from authority and affirmation of an established way of life are key considerations.

Rather than being typecast as either “powerless” or “perilous”, ageing women need to be taken seriously. As an emerging social-movement base in Hong Kong, they will make up an increasingly large proportion of Hong Kong’s ageing population in the years to come. If we take these women seriously, then we perhaps can address our own as-yet undiscovered anxieties toward ageing and can reflect constructively on Kathleen Woodward’s (1991 p. 3) argument that “nervous anxiety is masked by a denial of another’s subjectivity in a way that appears to be reassuring but is in reality silencing and repressive.” Echoing a call to explore the social politics of anger and ageing made by Woodward (2003), my study here reflects my pursuit of a deeper understanding of the social politics of anger and ageing. The academic world has a responsibility to better address ageing women’s passion.

NOTES

¹ A collection of the newspaper clippings was sent to me by Mr. Fu. These include: “Ten sins of the design of the newly built [WPS] Estate” *Sing Pao Daily News* (2006); “80% of the elderly in [WPS] Estate alleged insufficient facilities provided,” *Ming Pao*, (2006); “Facilities ignore seniors’ needs,” *Sing Tao Daily News* (2006).

² Madam Wan suffered a stroke in November 2006, and I visited her in the Yan Chai Hospital. She could not recognise me but was grateful to be visited. According to my telephone contact with Ms. Man later on, Madam Wan returned home and is in recovery.

³ A Social Workers' Registration Board was established in 1998 under the Social Workers Registration Ordinance, which has been in effect since 6 June 1997. The Board declares that the establishment of a regulatory system is to monitor the quality of social workers and ultimately to protect the interests of service users and the general public. The professionalism of Hong Kong social workers, as a topic, has given rise to disputes amongst social workers who object to government regulation in this sensitive "hand over" period and also amongst social workers who suspect that the government would restrict social workers' autonomy. For details on the professionalisation of social workers in Hong Kong, please see the webpage of the Social Workers Registration Board, available online at <http://www.swrb.org.hk>., retrieved on 31 January 2007.

⁴ The pro-democracy camp organised the march to express their demand for universal suffrage of all seats of the Legislative Council and also the election of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. The march took place right before the Legislative Council determined whether or not the Council will accept the Hong Kong government's proposed reform package. Altogether a group of twenty-five pro-democracy legislators planned to veto the government's proposed reform package proposed, since the government had not stated a clear timetable for universal suffrage in Hong Kong. Estimates of the number of people who took part in the march vary considerably, from 80,000 to 250,000. However, the group was larger than expected, and it was clear the marchers demanded a clear road map for universal suffrage in Hong Kong. See also Cannix Yau (2005); Cheung, J, Ambrose Leung, and Dikky Sinn (2005).

⁵ Hui, Polly and C. K. Lau (2005); Wong, Albert (2005); "Bao Qingtian supports", *Hong Kong Economic Times* (2005)

⁶ Choi also discusses this in the video *Ageing-Home* produced by Amy Yeung, Fanny Fung, and Luk Kit Ling in 2000; this video was named a "selected work" in the Open Category in the 6th Independent Short Film and Video Competition organised by the Hong Kong Arts Centre in 2000.

⁷ The two institutions are: City University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

⁸ The webpage of ARE, [Online] available at: www.are.org.hk/en_main_dom.htm , retrieved on April 1, 2006.

⁹ For details see, webpage of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, <http://www.hkcss.org.hk/el/SCD2005.htm#2>, retrieved on March 18, 2006

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