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**EXPLORING THE TELEVISION PORTRAYAL OF OLDER PEOPLE IN  
HONG KONG: A STUDY OF TWO PUBLIC AFFAIRS DOCUMENTARY  
SERIES**

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**2009**

**EXPLORING THE TELEVISION PORTRAYAL OF OLDER PEOPLE IN  
HONG KONG: A STUDY OF TWO PUBLIC AFFAIRS DOCUMENTARY  
SERIES**

**by  
TAM Caillie**

**A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Social Sciences  
(Sociology)**

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## ABSTRACT

Exploring the Television Portrayal of older people in Hong Kong: A Study of Two Public Affairs Documentary Series

by

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Master of Philosophy

Adopting the contextual social constructionist perspective on social problems, the present study investigates how older people are portrayed in two public affairs television documentaries in Hong Kong over a period of two decades. There were *The Hong Kong Connection* (produced by the public service broadcaster, Radio Television Hong Kong); and *Chasing Current Affairs* (produced by a commercial broadcaster, Asia Television Limited). A mixture of research designs was employed in the analysis, namely: (1) content analysis on the documentary episodes, (2) reviews of government documents and (3) in-depth interviews with social workers and the staff engaged in documentary episode productions. A total of 89 older characters in the 39 surveyed episodes were analyzed.

The research questions in the present study include asking: 1) what are the trends and changes in the portrayal of older people in public affairs documentary episodes 2) are there any differences in the portrayal of older people with respect to economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal traits between public service and commercial broadcasters and 3) are there any gender differences in these areas as portrayed in the episodes. The findings of the research indicated that the major themes of the surveyed public affairs documentary episodes are quite “negative”, in particular, episodes produced in the period between 1987 and 1996. However, the depiction of older people in the episodes have generally been improving during the past decade.

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

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TAM Caillie  
October 2009

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

EXPLORING THE TELEVISION PORTRAYAL OF OLDER PEOPLE IN HONG KONG: A  
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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>C &amp; A Home</b>	Care and attention home
<b>CSSA</b>	The Hong Kong Compressive Social Security Allowance Scheme
<b>DW*</b>	Documentary Worker
<b>EC</b>	Elderly Commission
<b>HK Government</b>	Hong Kong government
<b>HKSAR Government</b>	The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China
<b>NGOs</b>	Non Governmental organizations
<b>OAA</b>	The Hong Kong Old Aged Allowance
<b>SW*</b>	Social Worker
<b>R</b>	The Researcher

\* Social workers and documentary workers are pseudonyms as research ethics requires all participants cannot be personally identified.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1 Background

##### *The emergence of the elderly problem as a social problem in Hong Kong*

The older population of Hong Kong has significantly increased over the past few decades and is expected to increase continuously in the forthcoming decades. Older people aged 65 or above, composed only 3.3% of the total population in Hong Kong in 1966. The figure, however, rose to 7.6% in 1986 and 12.4% in 2006. The number of older people increased from 121,440 people to 408,542 people between 1966 and 1986, and further increased to 852,796 people in 2006. From 1961 to 2006, an average annual growth rate was 5.1%. As of 2008, the figure reached 879,600 people or was 12.6% of the total population of Hong Kong (Census and Statistic Department 2009; 2008a; 1996). Nevertheless, the increase in the older population itself does not necessarily constitute a social problem unless the public are convinced that the condition is “troublesome” and need to be changed. There was no evidence showing that the elderly problem<sup>1</sup> in Hong Kong had aroused public concern in the early 1970s. According to a survey conducted by the Social Research Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1973, none of the respondents regarded the

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<sup>1</sup> The term “the elderly problem” in this thesis does not point to any specific kind of elderly problems. The concept here encompasses many social issues and social problems related to older people such as older people living alone, the insufficient supply of residential care places, or retirement protection of later life. The term does not refer to a particular kind of elderly problem because there are many different social problems related to older people in different periods of times, the topics always change. In other words, “the elderly problem” is a term that is used to group all kinds of social problems related to older people.

elderly problem as a major social problem in Hong Kong (Law, 1995).

Before the first public assistance scheme<sup>2</sup> for older people was introduced in 1973, social services and programs for older people were very limited. Social services such as free meal services, burial services and homes for older people were mostly funded by voluntary associations with religious backgrounds (Leung and Chan 1993). Despite a joint working group being organized by the Social Welfare Department and Hong Kong Council of Social Services in 1975 to study future welfare policies for older people, the government in fact lacked sincerity to establish a comprehensive package of social welfare and services for older people. Given the fact that Hong Kong is not a welfare state, except for the public assistance scheme, the majority of services for older people were still largely administrated by voluntary associations during the mid-1980s. Admitting the importance of the voluntary associations, the role of the government was just to subvent programs operated by voluntary associations. Direct social services run by the Hong Kong Government<sup>3</sup> were very limited (Chow 1985).

The government has not considered the elderly problem as serious until the public started paying attention to the growing older population. Given that Hong Kong has been moving towards an ageing society since the mid-1980s<sup>4</sup>, elderly problems such as living alone, insufficient supply of residential care places, chronic illnesses or disability, health problems and financial deprivation in later life have always been

---

<sup>2</sup> The scheme has been “replaced by the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme in 1993” (Aspalter 2002:123).

<sup>3</sup> Since 1997, the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR government) hereafter referred to as the Government or HK government.

<sup>4</sup> In 1986, the older population numbered 408,542 and made up of 7.6% of the total population (Census and Statistical department 1996).

one of the timely topics of mass media, politicians, voluntary associations and scholars. It is not difficult to discover that there are always problematic descriptions about the miserable experiences of older people via different media sources. Public attention and pressures on the government to tackle various elderly problems have significantly increased. Older people have always been labeled as a burden to society, which drain public resources for social services, health cares and other welfare measures. Increasing numbers of older people and different kinds of difficulties faced by older people have become more visible in society and become a public issue in Hong Kong.

A survey conducted by the Social Research Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1986, asking the same questions used in 1973 to a sample of Hong Kong people, indicated that over half of the respondents rated the elderly problem as a serious social problem in Hong Kong, requiring immediate social action (Lau and Wan 1987). Due to the public demand, our government actively responded to the problem. In April, 1987, with the approval of Standing Panel on Welfare Services of Legislative Councils, an advisory committee, “the Central Committee on Services for the Elderly” was formally established to study and recommend social welfare services for older people. It also witnessed a considerable growth in research interest in the study of older people in Hong Kong among the academia. The Hong Kong Association of Gerontology established in 1986 and its official journal, the *Hong Kong Journal of Gerontology*<sup>5</sup> issued in 1987 can be regarded as a kind of academic reaction to the government’s initiatives to tackle the growing ageing population problem (Law 1995).

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<sup>5</sup> Since 2006 *Hong Kong Journal of Gerontology* has renamed as *Asian Journal of Gerontology and Geriatrics*.

In the coming twenty years, the ageing population trend is expected to continue, as a large number of baby boomers born between the 1950s and 1960s will have aged and join the older age group. Some people may consider the growth of older people as a growing “burden” on society requiring social services and financial support. However, others may think that the extended longevity can give people opportunities to develop enjoyable hobbies and accomplish things that they did not have time to do when they were young. In other words, later life can either be perceived as miserable or enjoyable. On all accounts, how the public perceive images of older people is very crucial to government in addressing policies, which play a significance role in shaping the social status of the older people. Hence, social perceptions of older people have become an extremely timely contemporary policy concern. In what ways we could know more about the social perceptions of older people? Mass media is one of the key aspects of our social life, it influences our values and understanding of society. Given that social perceptions of older people are often reflected in the mass media and the portrayal of older people in mass media may also affect the social perceptions of older people, the present study aimed at exploring the images of older people in the mass media.

### *The portrayal of older people in the mass media*

Literature on negative aspects of ageing was dominant in early gerontological studies (Featherstone and Wernick 1995). Older people were assumed to associate with severe physical and mental decline, role losses and various kinds of adaptation problems as well. Furthermore, older people were either ignored or negatively depicted in the mass media before the 1970s (Palmore 1999). For the past decades,



studies on the images of older people in mass media have been increasing drastically (Bell 1992). There were increasing numbers of studies attempted to demystifying various mythical view and perceptions of later life. More recent studies also put great effort into collecting evidence to substantiate the view that older people nowadays are much healthier and economically well-off than those of their earlier generations (Wellner 2003). Nevertheless, mythical and stereotypical images of older people are still not difficult to find in our popular culture.

In the mass media, older people have often been depicted as sickly, sexually inactive, forgetful, childish, conservative, senile, dull, rigid, unhappy, isolated, useless and poor (Uzoma and Dan 2005; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund and Tanner 2003; Whitbourne and Sneed 2002). They are also always grossly underrepresented, older female in particular (Schneider 2005). Age stereotypes refer to a sort of “simplified, undifferentiated portrayal of an age group that is often erroneous, unrepresentative of reality, and resistant to modification” (Cook 2001:5). Research evidence repeatedly demonstrates that negative stereotypes can lead to adverse effects on viewers’ perceptions of older people and accordingly affect their interactions with older people. Hence, understanding the portrayal of older people in the mass media of Hong Kong can be regarded as one important step to understand the wellbeing of our ageing population.

## **2 Areas of Study of the Current Research**

The topic of the present study is “Exploring the Television Portrayal of Older People in Hong Kong: a Study of Two Public Affairs Documentary Series”. Definitions of the key concepts of the focuses of the present study are:

## *Television*

Television is a dominant source of mass media, which “transmits moving images and sounds” and projects images via radio waves on a picture tube. Television bears a role of providing important sources of information to the public (Holland 2000; Inc Merriam-Webster 2000:1596). An analysis of portrayal of older people on television (TV) was chosen in the present study because television watching is one of the most popular forms of entertainment among many Hong Kong people. Television viewers in Hong Kong can have many channel options.<sup>6</sup> However, the two domestic free-of-charge television channels<sup>7</sup> dominate 99.6% of the entire Hong Kong population<sup>8</sup> (Communications and Technology Branch, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau 2008). Prime time<sup>9</sup> TV programs were always the hot topics for private discussions and public agendas because they can reach a wide range of audience due to their free-of-charge nature (Moran and Keane 2004). Among all television programs, the researcher was particularly interested in exploring the television portrayal of older people in public affairs documentaries because this type of television program occupies a significant portion of the prime

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<sup>6</sup> “Hong Kong viewers can access over 210 television channels, including paid and free television channels in Hong Kong as well as other free-to-air satellite TV channels. The content is diverse and international including channels such as CCTV, CNN, CNBC, BBC, NHK, TV5, Deutsche Welle, Arirang, HBO, ESPN, Discovery, National Geographic, Turner TCM & Cartoon Network, STAR channels, and other familiar TV channels”. There are numerous Chinese Language channels, in Cantonese and Putonghua (Communications and Technology Branch, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau 2008).

<sup>7</sup> The two TV channels are Asia Television Limited (ATV) and Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB).

<sup>8</sup> 99.6% of the Hong Kong population equals more than 6.8 million viewers or 2.2 million households (Communications and Technology Branch, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Prime time starts in the evening hours. It usually refers from 7.00 pm to 10.00 pm when television has the most viewers (Fiske 1987).

time of TV broadcasting.<sup>10</sup>

### *Older people*

The term “older people” as a term generally refers to those aged 65 or above. In the present study, the moderator in the episode provides the age of each of the older characters. If not, some visible criteria derived from other content analysis studies will be used to determine if the character is within the study scope, this measurement will further be discussed in Chapter Four, Methodology.

### *Public affairs documentaries in Hong Kong*

A public affairs documentary is a kind of television program that features a moderator in the episode and with one or many invited guests, discussing one topic/various topics, which is/are in some way related to recent news events (McAnany and Wilkinson 1996). As suggested by an inventor of the term “documentary”, John Grierson, one common feature of documentary is that it deals with the “creative treatment of reality” (Grierson 1966:13). Grierson also regarded documentary as “a tool to win the public’s consent and cohesion for the existing order” (Grierson 1933:199). In fact, documentary is a product of social construction as it could not exist without human creations. Ideas or perceptions that we gain from documentaries, therefore, sometimes reflect needs of vested interest groups such as editors, the political and business groups concerned and other parties involved. The

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<sup>10</sup> The two public affairs documentary series that the present research sampled were: *Chasing Current Affairs* and *The Hong Kong Connection*. The former one is produced by a commercial broadcaster, Asia Television Limited (ATV), which broadcasts at 7.00 pm every Saturday. The later one is produced by the public service broadcaster, Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), which broadcasts at 7.35 pm every Sunday through TVB.

reason some issues rather than others rank above others in media discourse and how they are presented are all about matters of social selection and social construction (Hodgetts, Chamberlain and Bassett 2003; Nichols 1991).

*The public service broadcaster versus the commercial broadcaster*

The major sources of data in the present study were public affairs documentary episodes that were drawn from two television broadcasters. One is the sole public service broadcaster in Hong Kong, Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) and the other is a commercial broadcaster, Asia Television Limited (ATV).

The term “public service broadcasting” is a kind of “system that is set up by law and generally financed by public funds and given a large degree of editorial and operating independence” (McQuail 2005:179-180). Public service broadcasting in Hong Kong is not commercially funded. It is free from “political interference” and pressure from “commercial forces.” (Legislative Council Secretariat 2006:3). Public service broadcasting carries a role to “cater to the needs of minority interest groups” and “educate and entertain the general public” through the air. It also aims “to provide timely, impartial coverage of local and global events and issues” (RTHK 2009). Then, what are the differences between public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting? “Commercial broadcasting” is the opposite of public service broadcasting that with the prime objective of making money (Wieten Murdock and Dahlgren 2000). Commercial broadcasting has to strive for survival in the competitive business environment. In this regard, it is not uncommon that

“tabloidisation”<sup>11</sup> was often found in the productions by the commercial broadcaster (Carver and Pikalo 2008). The reason why the productions of these two broadcasters were sampled will be discussed in Chapter Four, Methodology.

### **3 Significance of the Study**

A review of Western literature on the study of the images of older people in mass media revealed the majority of them tended to focus on movies and television advertisements. Relatively few studies were focused on newspapers, news programs and public affairs documentaries. In Hong Kong, studies on the images of older people were very limited. None of the research focused on public affairs documentary. The purpose of this thesis is to fill this research gap in Hong Kong. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, documentaries might more or less accurately present imagery of things or people with its socially constructed nature. The portrayal of older people might be distorted if documentary producers have any biased preconception about older people. Yet, the nature of documentary is always regarded as closer to the “facts” as compared to other fictional productions. It is widely perceived as a sort of reliable information source in the eyes of general public (Aufderheide 2007). Last, but not least, it is hoped that the findings of this study will provide policy makers with a more comprehensive understanding of the image of older people in television media and with some points of reference for further policy making with respect to public service broadcasting.

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<sup>11</sup> Tabloidisation is a term used in journalism to describe news topics reported in ways that emphasize the entertaining aspects of portrayal such as using sensational and vulgar language, visual stimulation, sloganised headlines and reduction in complexity of description of the story that viewers’ strong emotions are evoked. (Carver and Pikalo 2008; Keeble 2005).

#### **4 Objectives of the Study**

The present study sought to understand the general portrayal of various aspects of older people in public affairs television documentary. It also tried to study if there are any differences in the portrayal of older people between public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting. In addition, gender differences in the portrayal of older people were also examined. The last objective was to explore if there are any changes in the portrayal of older people over the past decades.

#### **5 Research Questions**

Based on the literature and knowledge of the subject area, the following research questions were discussed, as follows:

- 1) How have older people been portrayed in public affairs television documentaries in Hong Kong over the study period<sup>12</sup>? Has the portrayal varied over the two study periods and, if so, in what ways?
  
- 2) Are there any differences in the portrayal of older people between public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting? If so, has this varied over the two study periods<sup>13</sup>?
  
- 3) Are there any gender differences in the portrayal of older people in the

---

<sup>12</sup> “The study period” here refers to episodes produced between 1987 and 2006.

<sup>13</sup> “The two study periods” refers to period one, 1987-1996 and period two, 1997-2006. The decision of splitting the study period into 2 periods of time was derived from the contextual social constructionist theory on social problems, which will further be discussed in Chapter Three, Conceptual Framework.

documentaries? If so, has this varied over the two study periods?

The operationalization of these questions is discussed in Chapter Four.

## **6 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is organized in seven chapters. The current chapter introduced the major areas of the present study with an introduction to the process of how the elderly problem is recognized as a social problem in Hong Kong. The chapter also highlighted the objectives, significance and research questions of this study.

The second chapter summarizes the review of the literature on the portrayal of older persons in various mass media sources in Western societies and in Hong Kong as well.

The third chapter highlights the theoretical framework of the present analysis. The chapter began with an elaboration of the roots and developments of the social constructionist theory. Major concepts of the social constructionist approach such as definition of claims, claims-makers, and the natural history of social problems were introduced.

Chapter Four provides a detail explanation of the methodology of this study, including the population and sample of the present research, its data collection methods and measurement of major variables. The chapter also reported the result of the inter-reliability test of the content analysis in the present study.

Chapter Five and Six reports the research findings and discusses their practical implications of the present research, including testing research questions: explaining the trends and changes of the portrayal of older people in public affairs documentary episodes; explaining the differences in the portrayal of older people between public service and commercial broadcastings and between different genders.

The final chapter deals with an overview of the findings and limitations to this study. It also provides some recommendations and a research agenda for further study.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter consists of three main parts. The first part presents a review of previous studies in relation to the portrayal of older people in various mass media in Western societies, including:

- 1) television advertisements
- 2) television documentaries and series
- 3) magazine advertisements
- 4) fictional movies
- 5) newspapers
- 6) children's literature and greeting cards

The second part contains studies on the portrayal of older people in Hong Kong in the following types of mass media:

- 1) newspapers
- 2) fictional movies
- 3) television advertisements

Each of the studies being reviewed contains a brief introduction of the study and a highlight of its major findings. The last part of this chapter will give concluding remarks about the literature reviewed.

## 1 Portrayal of Older people in Various Mass Media in Western Societies

Bytheway (1995) and many other studies suggest that they are negative age stereotypes associated with old age. In addressing how older people are portrayed in Hong Kong's popular culture where the literature is sparse, it is helpful to turn first a review of relevant research in Western societies.

### *Portrayal of older people in television advertisements*

Miller, Leyell and Mazachek (2004) were among the first to use a longitudinal study design to conduct an historical study of US television advertisements (TV ads). They examined TV ads between the 1950s and 1990s. Their major findings included two main aspects. First, older people in television advertisements were found underrepresented as compared to the actual share of the American older population in the total population. Second, older individuals were either coded as consistent with or somewhat consistent with each of the seven stereotypes<sup>14</sup> identified by Hummert and colleagues (1994). Surprisingly, almost 80% of these stereotypes were positive stereotypes (Perfect Grandparent, John Wayne Conservative, Adventurous Golden Ager, and/or Productive Golden Ager); only about 12% of depictions were somewhat consistent with negative stereotypes (Despondent, Mildly Impaired, and/or Shrew/Curmudgeon). Miller, Leyell and Mazachek concluded that older people in general have been portrayed more positively over time.

A more recent study on television advertisements does not support that older

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<sup>14</sup> The seven stereotypes are: Adventurous Golden Ager, Productive Golden Ager, Perfect Grandparents, John Wayne Conservative, Despondent, Shrew/Curmudgeon, Mildly Impaired (Hummert et al.'s 1994).

people were underrepresented. Lee, Carpenter and Meyers's (2007) findings indicated that TV ads characters were not underrepresented in their samples. However, there is a gender difference in the portrayal of older males and older females. The number of older females was comparatively less than the number of older males within the TV ads. Only 38% of older females were involved in ads that covered elderly products, which was not proportionate to their actual proportion. Of those advertisements, older male characters were shown more frequently than their female counterparts to act as spokespeople, which presented about a 10% difference.

In exploring the types of advertised products featured with older people, Meyers found that advertisements more often focusing on food products, medications/medical services, health/ beauty, and cars/ vehicles. Other categories such as games/toys/fun, beverages, computers/electronics and vacation/travel were presented infrequently. In addition to that, older persons tended to be absent from commercials for office supplies and sporting gears. These findings may somehow imply a negative portrayal subtly, such as considering older people as sick and inactive; having some age related skin problems; rarely know about information technologies and less willing or less able to travel as compared to younger people.

#### *Portrayal of older people in television documentaries and series*

Hodgetts et al.'s (2003) study investigated how older people were depicted in documentaries. They studied the television documentaries of New Zealand ("Golden Oldies") produced between 1995 and 1997. The study included both inactive and active depictions of the ageing population. For example, older people in the footage were sitting passively in the window area and watching the outside world. The

spokesperson then, commented that: “ageing experiences nowadays can be quite different due to the consciousness of the older persons about exercise and nutrition”. His comment was supported by some color images of older people joining fitness classes (2003:423).

Another focus of “Golden Oldies” was to associate increasing life expectancy of the older people with increasing financial burden on society by providing services for those inactive older people (i.e. those with Alzheimer’s disease). At the end of the documentary, the spokesperson suggested that if older persons take the initiative to maintain their later life actively by using dietary supplements, exercise and having private retirement plans, New Zealand would probably not need to be burdened by a large population of older people. Hodgetts et al.’s in this study claimed that to remain active is crucial to later life adaptations. The authors commented that the concept of “ageing”, in the documentary, was depicted as a sort of health problem. It was depicted as an illness rather than as a normal part of life. Under this assumption, older people can be eventually stigmatized. The author of the documentary stressed that the responsibilities of older people have to be active in maintaining their lifestyle in order to sustain their health. The authors also asserted that the depiction of ageing as an illness was the justification for governments to cut the possible expenditure in health care for older people.

Kessler, Rakoczy, and Staudinger’s work (2004) examined prime time television in Germany between 1998 and 2001. Consistent with many other studies, older people were found underrepresented in the sampled series. Older people, in this study, comprised only less than 9% of television characters shown, although they made up 22% of the German population. Underrepresentation of older females was

also found to be more pronounced than the underrepresentation of older males. Another finding of this study was that older males were presented in a more favorable light than older females. For instance, older females were presented as having a lower level of education and less sexually active than older males. Despite this, many of the older characters in the series were portrayed as having jobs. Gender differences in socio-economic/health and psychological status were also found. Over half of the older males were portrayed as enjoying both relatively high socio-economic/health and psychological status. By contrast, only slightly more than one-third of the older females in the study were portrayed as enjoying high socio-economic/health-related status.

#### *Portrayal of older people in magazine advertising*

As compared to younger age groups, older people were found to be portrayed as less desirable in magazine advertisements. For example, in Peterson's (1992) study on how people aged 45 and above were portrayed in advertisements among popular magazines in 1989, he found that older people were depicted in a less desirable manner (i.e. mental and physical competence) than their younger counterparts. Also, older people were not as frequently represented as younger people.

Another study also provides evidence to support the idea that older people were often underrepresented in magazine advertisements. In the study of popular US magazine advertisements from the 1950s through to the 1990s, Miller et al. (1999) looked at three popular magazines with different targeted readership and advertisement products, (*Better Homes and Gardens*, *Popular Mechanics* and *Life*). Although the older population in the US had continued to grow during the studied

years, the proportion of advertisement with older people seemed to present a decreasing trend. Miller et al. found that the percentage of advertisements depicting people which included the older people from this sample ranged from 8.3 % in 1956 to 6.6 % in 1996, with the highest percentage (12.2%) in 1964. (Miller et al. 1999:333) Nevertheless, the research revealed that no extreme negative stereotypes such as recluse, vulnerable, severely impaired or despondent stereotypes were detected during the whole sampled period. Negative stereotypes were mostly found attached to the oldest-old group, rather than young-old and middle-old groups, in advertisements for medicines and other remedy products.

#### *Portrayal of older people in fictional movies*

Bazzini et al.'s (1997) study on the 100 top Hollywood grossing movies in the period between the 1940s and the 1980s found that older female characters were underrepresented as compared to their male counterparts. They were portrayed as less attractive and less moral than male older male characters. However, this negative correlation of age and morality was not applicable for older male characters. The research findings also indicated that older female characters were not only portrayed as less attractive when they are aged, but also were portrayed as less intelligent and possessing less wealth than older male characters. Compared to younger characters, both older female characters and older males characters were depicted as less friendly and having fewer romantic involvements.

In the study of popular US teen movies from the 1980s, 1990s and the 2000s, Magoffin (2007) investigated 60 popular teen movies. It was found that older people were underrepresented in these teen movies. Older women were found to have fewer

numbers than older men. Also, rather than major or minor roles, most of the older people were acting incidental roles in the study. Concerning physical attributes, Magoffin found that nearly all older characters in the movies appeared to be active or very active and with good health status. Only 15% of older characters were portrayed having minor health problems, but none of them were portrayed as seriously ill. Older characters, in general were portrayed as having limited wrinkles and gray or white hair. Older women were more likely than older men to be cast as hunching over, but older men were more likely to be depicted with gray hair.

Magoffin also discovered that there were gender differences in position significance (leading position vs. subordinate position) in the US popular teen movies. Older men were more likely to have roles as a leading character such as a boss, while older women were more likely to have roles as a subordinate character such as a worker. Moreover, about one-third of older characters in Magoffin's study were possessing positively stereotypes (i.e. "Perfect Grandparent" or "Golden Ager"). Less than one-fifth of the older characters were consistent with negative stereotypes (i.e. "Mildly Impaired" or "Vulnerable"). Comparing the overall portrayal of older characters in teen movies during the 1980s and 2000s, Magoffin suggested that older characters in the recent decade sounded slightly more positive than in the previous decades.

#### *Portrayal of older people in newspapers*

Literature on ageing issues and older individuals in newspapers is comparably sparser than other forms of media (Whitfield 2001; Nuessel and Stewart 2000; Nuessel 1992; 1995). To assess the portrayal of older individuals in U.S. newspapers,

Wass et al. (1984) developed a content analysis to examine the Sunday issues of 22 daily newspapers published in 1983. It was found that American newspapers devoted very little space to topics related to aging and older people, which only accounted for 0.87% of the total amount of newspaper space. Older people in newspapers of low circulation groups were described as more passive than those in metropolitan newspapers. Their findings support the prevailing view that older females were often significantly underrepresented in various mass media. Older females were less often reported by all newspapers than older males, in the ratio ranging from 1:3 to 1:4. Articles in the sample were found mostly event-based rather than issue-based. Among all the reported topics, most of those were about health and health care. The next largest numbers of topics were about social security, followed by health insurance, nursing homes, housing, and income. This result, again, is consistent with many common stereotypes of older people (i.e. weak and poor) as discovered in different mass media sources.

Roanova and Northcott (2006) examined a Canadian national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, published in 2004 to find out in what ways older people were portrayed. Older women rather than older men were found to more frequently appear in family situations. For instance, older women were always portrayed as caregivers or care recipients, whereas older men as employees or retired volunteers. There was a variety of representations of older people including both active and healthy portrayals as well as passive and frail portrayals. Due to the diversity of the portrayals of older people, Roanova and Northcott could not determine a single description of whether the older people were positively or negatively portrayed initially. Newspapers articles presented both sides. Topics investigated were found to devalue the autonomy and the flexibility of the older persons. For example, despite



older people contributing to various family works such as caring for grandchildren, they were found to be depicted as involuntary and without bargaining power. Another example, some older professionals were able to maintain their position in the job market, but they seemed to be portrayed as stubborn and not willing to make changes in their work.

Another particular finding of Rozanova and Northcott's study was the successful ageing theme, Rozanova and Northcott separated older people into two diverse groups: the successful agers and the unsuccessful agers. The successful agers were those who were lucky and had made good retirement choices to maintain their productivity, health, social wellbeing, and independence. On the contrary, the unsuccessful agers were suffering from bad luck, poor or frail health, and were blamed for not being responsible enough to have a good retirement plan. These unsuccessful agers, according to Rozanova and Northcott, are the group of older people which increased the cost of the health care system and threatened the benefit of the society, and eventually heightened the intergenerational conflict.

#### *Portrayal of older people in children's literature*

Compared to the portrayal of older people in other media, the representation of older people in children's literature was relatively more stereotypical. They were portrayed as having overt characteristics that differed with children in such physical attributes such as number of teeth, hair color and their visual functioning. For instance, in Janelli's (1988) study, many of the grandparents were portrayed as persons with grey hair and wearing glasses. Some negative attributes were used to depict grandparents such as, no teeth and always feeling tired. In an attempt to find

out more about the depictions of grandparents, Janelli and Sorge (2001) conducted a content analysis on children's readings. Predictably, the majority of the grandparents were found to have gray hair and wearing glasses, hats or scarves. One-third of the grandparents had wrinkles. On the whole, these books produced some stereotypical images of grandparents in their roles and appearances.

However, the two studies by Janelli on the portrayal of grandparent characters yielded quite different results. In her first study, which was conducted in 1998, Janelli found that grandmother characters were most often portrayed as the role of cook, storyteller, and housekeeper. None of the depictions involved walking outside. Grandfathers, by contrast, were portrayed as more active; they were more likely to walk in the park or at the beach rather than gardening. In her second study, Janelli and her colleague (2001) found that gender was not a determinant factor of a grandparents' work role. 21% of the grandfather characters were involved in a job, only 3 % higher than that of the grandmother characters. However, grandmother characters were still more likely than grandfather characters to appear in a caring role such as caregiver (45% vs. 21%), or housekeeper (42% vs. 21%). Hardly surprising, none of the grandfather characters were depicted sewing or knitting.

## **2 Portrayal of Older People in the Hong Kong Mass Media**

The portrayal of older people in the mass media of Hong Kong has, to date, not been particularly in a positive manner, if not an overly negative manner. For example, older people have been depicted as economically vulnerable, dependent, with a stereotypical appearance and health, as well as a disproportionate representation as compared to their actual share of the older population of Hong

Kong. Apart from that, older female characters in Hong Kong tend to be more negatively portrayed, similar to the results drawn from the Western studies. Gibb and Holroyd (1996) intended to see how older people are represented in Hong Kong's printed media. Two popular newspapers were examined, *the South China Morning Post* and the *Sin Tao Daily*. It was found that many articles covered in the two newspapers showed moral intent to convey to the public a message that more resources should be allocated to the older people to better their livelihood. One of the most frequently reported news articles was about older people as victims of crime. Also, quite a number of news stories in Sing Tao Daily were about the deaths of older people caused by accidents resulting from the negligence of family care. Older people were implicitly represented as child-liked, fragile and dependent.

Moreover, many older people featured in the newspapers articles were being excluded from the job market: with no formal income and economically dependent. Some older people were portrayed as frail and facing physical or mental mistreatments, while others reported articles about some adaptation problems of older people such as they committed suicides and incapability in maintaining good relationships with family members. Very few news stories contained positive depictions of older people.

In addition to newspapers, Wong (2003) examined the portrayal of older adults on Hong Kong popular movies from 1981 to 2001. The findings of Wong were in line with those found in the Western mass media studies. Older people in Hong Kong movies appeared disproportionately less than their real population and older women than men were found even less often. Besides, there were some gender differences in terms of the settings in which older people usually involved. Older men were

perceived more often than their women counterparts in participating in a work setting rather than in a domestic setting. Older men were perceived to have higher socio-economic status and have more desirable personality characteristics than older women. Regarding the physical characteristics of the older adults, many of them were depicted as having white hair and wrinkled skin, but able to walk without physical aids. Yet, in terms of personality, the number of older adults with positive personalities outweighed the number of older adults with negative personalities. Wong was also interested in exploring image changes of older people between the 1980s and the 2000s. The image of the health status of older adults was better in the later research period. Many of them were able to work, which implied that they were healthy enough to carry out their daily activities. However, the socio-economic status and the family status of the older people was found to decline after the 1990s as older people often portrayed as retirees.

In a study published two years after the Wong's study, Chan and Leung (2005) conducted a content analysis of prime-time advertisements in two network channels to examine the images of older women. Chan and Leung believed that most advertisements in Hong Kong are targeted towards younger generations with higher purchasing power. Therefore, there were only a few advertisements containing older women. Among the sampled advertisements, older women were depicted negatively. They were portrayed as frail, dependent and ignorant. In a Calcimex Hi-Calcium Milk Powder ad, for instance, older people were depicted as inevitably suffering from symptoms of osteoporosis (i.e. bowed back) if they did not consume enough calcium in their younger years.

### **3 Concluding Remarks**

A review of literature on the portrayal of older people in various mass media sources found that there was a great deal of research on the portrayal of older people in movies and commercials. Nevertheless, relatively little is known about the portrayal of older people in newspaper, news programs or public affairs documentaries. In my review of the literature, most, if not all, articles repeatedly demonstrated the underrepresentation of older characters in mass media productions, female characters in particular (Magoffin 2007; Miller et al. 2004; Kessler et al. 2004; Wong 2003; Bazzini 1997; Wass et al. 1984). In addition to that, gender differences in the portrayal of older people were commonly found in various studies (Lee et al. 2007; Magoffin 2007; Razanova and Northcott 2006; Kessler et al. 2004; Wong 2003; Janelli and Sorge 2001; Bazzini 1997). Furthermore, older people in many cases were depicted as having physical deteriorations and unattractive appearances such as silver hair, glasses, or having no teeth (Magoffin 2007; Wong 2003; Janelli 1988). Portrayal of older people in advertisements was also usually more positive than that of the other mass media sources. This might be due to the increasing number of older people, more and more businesses may regard older people as their potential consumers. Television advertisers will produce more advertisements to promote their products to older people. To attract these older people, television advertisers might realize that the use of negative portrayals of older people does not help them to promote their product.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Conceptual Framework**

A social constructionist approach is employed as the theoretical framework in the present study making reference to Joel Best's contextual social construction theory (2003; 1995a; 1995b; 1990) in particular. This chapter starts with an introduction to the social construction theory on social problems and its key concepts. It is followed by the illustration of the differences in the analysis of social problems between strict social constructionism and contextual social constructionism. Finally, an application of the contextual social constructionists' analysis of social problems in the present thesis was also illustrated.

#### **1 Social Construction Theory on Social Problems**

Many undergraduate social problem textbooks commonly define a social problem as “a widely regarded undesirable condition that affects or is thought to affect a large number of people” (Farley 1987:2) or “a social condition that has been found to be harmful to individuals and/or societal well-being” (Bassis, Gelles and Levine 1982:2). Also, social problems are commonly measured by objective indicators.<sup>15</sup> These definitions have been called as objectivists' definitions of social problems in which objective facts are their focus. However, according to social constructionists, there are four major flaws for an objectivists' definition. First, the “widely regarded” element of the social problem definition presents methodological problems. For example, the founders of the social construction analysis of social problem, Malcolm Spector and

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of objective indicator are rates of incidences, numbers and types of conditions (Blumer 1971).

Jonm I. Kitsuse asked how “widely regarded” must the condition be? Which and how many people must regard the condition as undesirable in order to fulfill the condition of “widely regarded”? (Spector and Kitsuse 2001).

Second, the above objectivists’ definitions are too vague: apart from the harmful nature of a social problem, it contributes no more for people to understand the similarities or differences among different social problems. The causes and consequences of a particular social problem, thus, cannot be generalized to all social problems. Different social problems have, in turn, little in common<sup>16</sup> (Best 2004).

Third, the objectivists’ definition of social problem cannot help people in explaining why historically the lists of social problems have changed. Spector and Kitsuse used the marihuana case to illustrate:

“For a numbers of years the official definition of marijuana included the notion that is was not only dangerous, but addictive as well...At a later date, marijuana was removed from the addiction classification, and the medical literature no longer referred to the pot smoker as an addict...there is nothing in the nature of marijuana itself to explain this definitional change. The nature of marijuana remained constant throughout the interval and, therefore, an explanation of the variation in definition must come from another source” (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:43).

Fourth, objectivists regard social problems as social conditions that are harmful to the well-being of a society. Even though many conditions in our society are harmful, not all of them are considered social problems. The American diet, for example, which medical professions often warn Americans that their diet is high in fat and

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<sup>16</sup> For example, there is a list of social problems such as crime, alcohol and other drugs, urban, population, income inequality and pollution. People find it hard to distinguish the common characteristics of these problems except that they are all in some way harmful.

cholesterol, which increases the likelihood of developing various health problems. By definition, the American eating style fulfills the requirements of the objectivists' definition of social problems as it does not only threaten the health of many American at the individual level, but also burdens the American government at the national level in terms of rising health care expenditure. Nonetheless, it is uncommon for people to define the American diet as social problems. From this example, Joel Best, contended that the subjective aspects of defining a social problem should not be neglected. "Social problem are what people view as social problem" (Best 1995:4).

Richard Fuller and Richard Myers<sup>17</sup> asserted that a social problem should include both an "objective condition"<sup>18</sup> and subjective definition".<sup>19</sup> Merely an "objective definition" is "not sufficient to constitute a social problem". It is because if a condition is defined as a social problem, it must involve "a considerable number of persons" who consider that the condition is deviated from "some norms that they cherish" (Fuller and Myers 1941b:320). However, this definition of social problems is not problem-free. Their assertion that "a considerable number of persons" think that a condition is offensive has its operational difficulty. Spector and Kitsuse (2001) also questioned the subjectivists of how many people should be considered as "a considerable number of people" in practice. On top of this, Spector and Kitsuse criticized the definition of social problems as defined by Fuller and Myers was theoretically inconsistent with that of their original assertions on the subjective

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<sup>17</sup> They are the key developers of the subjectivists' study of social problems.

<sup>18</sup> An objective condition is defined as a "verifiable situation which can be checked by impartial and trained observers" (Fuller and Myers 1941b:320).

<sup>19</sup> "The subjective definition is the awareness of certain individuals that the condition is a threat to certain cherished values" (Fuller and Myers 1941b:320).



element of social problems. Spector and Kitsuse used Fuller and Myers' analysis of "the physical problem" to illustrate:

"The physical problem represents a condition which practically all people regard as a threat to their welfare, but value-judgments cannot be said to cause the condition itself...The causation is thought of as nonhuman, resting outside the control of man. (Fuller and Myers 1941a:27)."

Spector and Kitsuse asserted that Fuller and Myers's assumption on "the causation of physical problem is a thought of non-human", which emphasized on the objective condition that totally abandoned subjective value judgments of people. In fact, the classification of a condition as a physical problem is a kind of social construction, but not really nonhuman as it involves value judgments and the human construction of theories to "make causal inferences about a condition they find intolerable"<sup>20</sup> (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:48-49). In order to avoid turning the attention back to the objectivists' definition of social problems, Spector and Kitsuse contended that establishing a distinctive subject matter which can be generalized into the analysis of different social problems is very important for the developments of the sociological study of social problems. They specifically named themselves social constructionists.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Spector and Kitsuse used the example of an earthquake or hurricane. If no one in society considered it a social problem and the mass media did not report the occurrence of such an incident, then no one pays attention to that harmful condition. Would the condition still be considered a social problem? The answer is obviously not.

<sup>21</sup> Social constructionists are mainly concerned about the definition process for a condition to become a social problem and about the social actors that are involved in the social problem defining process.

## 2 Key Concepts in the Constructionists' Analysis of Social Problems

Key concepts in the social constructionist analysis of social problems included: (1) social problem as claims-making activities; (2) claims-makers and their relationship with each other and (3) the natural history of social problems.

### *(1) Social problems as claims-making activities*

Social problems in social constructionist's view refer to "the process by which members within the society making assertions of grievances and claims about some putative conditions as a social problem" (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:75). This definition process of naming a putative condition<sup>22</sup> as a social problem is called claims-making activities. Claims-making activities are to convince the public that certain conditions are social problems. These activities are acts of communication, which play a central role in drawing the attention of audiences. A social problem claim fundamentally contains four elements: that some condition exists; it is problematic, troubling and ought to be addressed; it has particular characteristics<sup>23</sup> and some sort of action should be taken to deal with it (Best 2001c; 1995b). Best states that social problems are what people view as social problems; they are some conditions that we consider troubling. In other words, it is a collective interpretation that a condition is problematic.

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<sup>22</sup> The term "putative conditions" is different from the term "objective conditions" that was used by objectivists. Constructionists ignore objective reality. Putative conditions refer to typifications (which are descriptions and evaluations) of a social problem. It "highlights the symbol and language-bound character of claims-making activities and direct us to consider how members' facility with rhetorical and reasoning idioms-language that used to enlist others sympathetic moves in order to create a sense of social problems" (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993:30).

<sup>23</sup> The condition must be common, have known causes or serious consequences, or is a problem of a particular type (Best 2001c).

*(2) claims-makers and their relationship with each other*

Claims-makers are people who work to bring social problems to public attention (Best 2001a:14). There are two kinds of claims-makers, namely, “insiders” and “outsiders”<sup>24</sup>. According to Best (1990), only insider claims-makers such as lobbying organizations,<sup>25</sup> legislators,<sup>26</sup> and government officials<sup>27</sup> are powerful in social problem construction or extension.<sup>28</sup> They play a crucial role in a well established social problem<sup>29</sup> as they have direct access to policy making. Outsiders such as individual claims-makers most of the time find it very hard to get the attention of the media unless their complained condition is novel or dramatic enough

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<sup>24</sup> “Outsiders” are those who claim outside the polity, they can be individual social activists or victims of the problems (Best 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Lobbying organizations are established organizations that have connections to government officials and legislators. They are well-established in the sense that they have their offices and hold regular meetings with their “alliances members” (alliances members usually consist of various kinds of pressure groups). Lobbying organizations represent the interests of their clients. These organizations routinely influence government decisions and their claims are often recognized by policy-makers. Many of these lobbying organizations have “problem ownership” (responsibilities about the problem and are specialized in handling it. Whenever any new questions about the problem arise, people ask these owners for their interpretations which are easier to expand the policy domain) of the particular social problem (Best 2003). Lobbying organizations have been called “watchdog committee” by Spector and Kitsuse (2001).

<sup>26</sup> Legislators have direct access to the highest law-making body of a society. Legislators usually have a strong affiliation with political parties and feel pressure to work in line with the ideology of their affiliated party. Legislators have the greatest interests in gaining ballots in order to win in an election. Thus they are motivated to please their voters by producing claims that fulfill the demands of their targeted “customers”-voters therefore spur government welfare spending. Persson, Roland and Tabellini (2003) found significant welfare expansions during and after the election years.

<sup>27</sup> Government officials interest in “proposing their agencies programs be expanded to solve some social problems” (Best 2001a:16).

<sup>28</sup> Social problem extension are claims that keep the problem heating and will not be turned aside easily, leading to further actions and culmination in the establishment of the social problem. Social problem may die or disappear if it cannot keep itself heated. There are many claims within society at the same time, “the vast majority of such claims are disposed of. Many may simply ignored; others may dissolve when the claim is satisfied; still others may be bargained away, cooled off, or bought off” (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:143; 149).

<sup>29</sup> A well established social problem refers to a “social problem that already has a wide recognition; the public, journalists, legislators and even sociologist who write social problems textbooks generally acknowledge that something ought to be done” to that problem (Best 1990:13).

for raising vigorous discussion or provoking emotion of the public (Best 2003; 1990).

The focus of the present study was on insider claims-makers because the elderly problem in Hong Kong was already well established.<sup>30</sup> For claims-makers who are not either of the two mentioned kinds of claims-makers, experts and professionals<sup>31</sup> and mass media,<sup>32</sup> also have significance in claims-makings. Social problems are products of social construction-products that are created by people. Claims-makers describe the causes and characteristics of social problems (Best 2001a).

Spector and Kituse pinpoint the power of claims-making group during the claims-making process. They emphasize that “a larger membership, greater constituency, more money and greater discipline and organization will be more effective in pressing their claims than groups that lack these attributes” (2001:143). Thus, claims-makers recognize the importance of collaborations among different

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<sup>30</sup> The establishment of a central committee on services to the elderly people since 1987 already symbolized the governments’ recognition and concern in handling the problem.

<sup>31</sup> Experts and professionals are often referred to people with special training in their own field like academics, social workers or doctors etc. They fundamentally have professional knowledge and qualifications to analyze the causes and effects of social problems related to their fields and are able to propose solutions. Without their efforts and professional advices, the magnitude of problems may not be confirmed and receive the government’s attention (Best 2001a).

<sup>32</sup> The mass media is also a claims-maker, which includes those who work in the broadcasting media, printed media and electronic media. The media offers a channel for different claims-makers to publicize their message (Best 2001a). Other claims-makers are always welcome to provide information to the mass media because media coverage can offer them with prestige and legitimacy and hence greater their chances of promoting their claims (Best 1997). However, the mass media do not merely restate claims made by other claims-makers. Instead, workers of mass media “translate and transform them to fit the media’s requirements” (Best, 1997: 73). In sum, “claims of other “non-media” claims-makers are selective, mass media repeating some of them, but not all,” (Best, 1997: 91). Here, it seems initially that the role of mass media is passive, but in fact, that is not true. In some circumstance, claims-makers who work in the mass media are very active as they have the ability to actively create meanings in an issue and engage a larger pool of audience, which may give rise to pressure for the government to address the problem (Best, 1991; 2001b:269).

claims-making groups and recruit new members to participate in claims-makings to increase their resources. For example, lobbying organizations often invite experts to conduct research on the problem that they want to claim and help them to publish research findings via mass media in order to justify their claims and disseminate them. On the other hand, the mass media relies on experts' statistics to make their discussed topic more persuasive and attractive to audiences. Experts, in this regard, also gain privilege by receiving attention from other claims-makers (Best 2001a). While claims-making, claims-makers frequently use different strategies to capture people's attention, such as holding hearings, protest demonstrations, drafting specific proposals and etc so as to lobby government officials and legislators and to urge them to address to the problem claimed. All these claims-making strategies, in turn, higher the possibility for a claim to receive higher visibility in the public and possibly to make successful claims. In practice, legislators tend to respond to lobbying organizations rather than individual claims-makers<sup>33</sup> (Best 2003; 2001a; 1990).

For social constructionists, the number of claims-makers who are engaged in claims-making activities are not their concern. Instead, what really matters is who the key claims-makers are engaged in social problems. Key claims-makers refer to claims-makers with highest visibility and most power in claims-makers. These claims-makers have good relationship with those inside the highest law-making bodies<sup>34</sup> of society. In the following, two types of key insider claims-making groups

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<sup>33</sup> Individual claims-makers outside the polity such as cranks or lone crusaders are also called "outsiders". "Compared to insiders, these outsiders have limited access to and little influence with policymakers; they find it much harder to change policy". Nevertheless the mass media are more receptive to outsiders' claims due to their constant need for fresh material (news) (Best 1990:14; 16).

<sup>34</sup> Those law-making bodies include, for example, legislators and government officials.

were introduced: lobbying organizations and legislators who are interested in elderly issues.

In the context of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)<sup>35</sup> has always been one of the key lobbying organizations since the emergency of claims on the elderly problem in Hong Kong. HKCSS regularly press policy paper and feature articles<sup>36</sup>, give speeches at various occasions and meet different legislators and government officials to discuss various social issues (HKCSS 2009a; 2009b). HKCSS also “has an extensive working and cooperation experience with various government departments, particularly with the Social Welfare Department” (Law 1995:234). Benefiting from the long history of HKCSS, lobbying organizations organized by her in 2004, the Monitoring Alliance on Elderly Policies<sup>37</sup> (MAEP) is also one of the visible claims-making groups in Hong Kong. Other prominent lobbying organizations such as Elderly Right League (ERL)<sup>38</sup> and

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<sup>35</sup> The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) has more than 350 social service agency members and the largest number of individual social worker membership. It is the one of the most influential NGOs in Hong Kong (HKCSS 2009a; 2009b).

<sup>36</sup> For example, Hong Kong Plan of Action on Ageing, 2008

<sup>37</sup> MAEP is composed of nine elderly people care agencies, including: Concern Alliance on the Interests of the elderly; The Hong Kong Association of Senior Citizens; HYWCA Ming Yue District Elderly Community Centre, Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association; Hong Kong Christian Service Elderly Council, Hong Kong Christian Service; The Hong Kong Society For The Aged; The Salvation Army Tai Po Integrated Services for senior Citizens; The Salvation Army Mutual Aid Society; The Salvation Army Carer Association and Retired Persons Volunteers Association, St. James' Settlement. It acts as a “watchdog” for services and policies towards the older population and watches all issues related to social services and welfare for older people (HKCSS 2009a; 2009b).

<sup>38</sup> The Elderly Right League was founded in 1991 and was affiliated with the Society for Community Organization (SoCO). It generally identifies marginal group like older people living alone and recipients of CSSA as its members. The Elderly Right League has always taken an activist approach to organize social movements (i.e. claiming for increasing the rate of payment of CSSA between 1992 and 1995; requesting installation of emergency alarm systems for the elderly who were receiving CSSA and living in public estate in 1996). It has always been “seen as the most militant” claimsmaking group by the government (Kam 2000:317). The League was also active in pressing reports on various topics such as working older people in the Sham Shui Po district (1999), the needs of death planning among older people (2005), and non CSSA older recipients’ views towards primary care expenditure (2007) (English translations) (SoCO 2009).

Joint Alliance for Universal Retirement Protection (JAURP)<sup>39</sup> are also actively participating in claims-makings in various elderly people issues. Another type of powerful insider claims-making groups which have even closer relationships with government officials and legislators are the advisory body of the government (the Elderly Commission<sup>40</sup>) and the Welfare and Social services panels of Legislative Council.<sup>41</sup>

Examples of well known legislators concerned with elderly issues in Hong Kong over the past years have included Leung Kwok Hung, from the League of Social Democrats (LSD); Fung Kin Kee, Frederick, from the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (ADPL); Lee Cheuk Yan, the General Secretary of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) and Tam Yiu Chung, from Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) and previously the Chair of the Elderly Commission (EC). These legislators are all members of the Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services; and Cheung Kwok-che, the Deputy Chairman of the Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services and social welfare functional constituency. Also, Chan Yuen Han, a former Chairperson of the Legislative Council

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<sup>39</sup> Founded in 2004, Joint Alliance for Universal Retirement Protection (JAURP) associated with more than fifty alliance partners from NGOs with different representatives includes older people, women, grassroots, youths, labors, professionals religious, social welfare and disabled groups. JAURP advocates providing older people with “a sense of security”, thus, they are guaranteed to have basic medical care, housing and long term care services and to live with dignity (JAURP 2009).

<sup>40</sup> “In 1997, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) has made “Care for the Elderly” a Strategic Policy Objective of the Government of the HKSAR. The objective is to improve the quality of life of our elderly population and to provide them with a sense of security, a sense of belonging and a feeling of health and worthiness. The Elderly Commission was established in 1997 and its main task is to provide advice to the Government of the HKSAR in the formulation of a comprehensive policy in caring for elderly population. Commission members include professionals from elder related services and other sectors, academics, and community leaders” (the Elderly Commission 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Legislators and various NGOs have to go via this official government channel to advocate social policies and programs for older people under an executive-led administration of the Hong Kong government (Chan and Chui 2002).

Panel on Welfare Services; Cheung Chiu Hung, Fernando, a former social welfare functional constituency; Dr. Leong Che Hung, a former legislator, is now the Chair of the EC.

### *The natural history of social problems*

There are four stages in the natural history of social problems as asserted by Spector and Kituse and Best. Social problems may die during any of these stages.

#### *Stage one*

Stage one is an initial claims-making stage. Claims-makers groups attempt to assert some conditions as problematic and transform private troubles into public issues. In the claims-making process, claims-makers unavoidably classify a condition or a problem into specific spectrum such as “economical, moral or political problem, give descriptions about why the problem exists and attach solutions with that attribution”. This classifying process is what constructionists called as “typifications”<sup>42</sup> (Spector and Kituse 2001; Best 1995b: 8,9).

Apart from the above descriptions, typifications also include “images in our heads of types of things, experiences and people” (Loseke 1999: 25). While typifying the condition, typifying examples are often used by claims-makers, especially among media workers. Typifying examples usually focus “on events in the lives of specific individuals, these stories make it easier to identify with the people affected by the

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<sup>42</sup> Typifications has been called as “condition-categories” by (Spector and Kituse 2001) and “problem frames” by Donileen R. Loseke (Loseke 1999).



problem” (Best 1990:28). With media coverage, a social condition or an established social problem is allowed to be publicized (/continually<sup>43</sup>) and yield the concerns of the public, other claims-makers and government. Typifying examples are essential in initial claims-makings, but it can also occur in whichever of the social problem stages until the social problem dies.<sup>44</sup>

The mass media often select some extreme or horrifying examples to typify social problems’ nature and magnitude in order to frighten the audiences and convince them that the condition is really troublesome and harmful. These horrifying examples are a “standard journalistic technique, it serves as to rivet audiences’ emotions and it plays an important role in the political, social and institutional success of a social problem. It can be applied to describe any reporting that evoke feelings of horror, shock, revulsion, sadness, anger, tragedy, or any strong negative feelings in the audience. Negative emotions may be aroused by detailing gruesome facts of injuries; inhuman treatment or dramatic details of a specific individual case and retain the audiences’ attention for the rest of the story”(Johnson 1995:17-23). Media workers also like to focus on “life and death issues, tales of heroism or villainy to typify the problem to gain attention, sympathy and action” (Best 1990:79).

### *Stage two*

Stage two is the official validation process. In this stage claims-making groups

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<sup>43</sup> As an established social problem is already widely recognized, if the media keep reporting it, it will continue to be publicized.

<sup>44</sup> A social problem will die when the social problem is absent from workable solutions and no claims-makers are willing to contribute further effort to work on the social problem.

have already brought considerable pressure on government, and the government accordingly, started responding to the complaints of the claims-making groups. Claims-making groups may be invited to join in official proceedings or public hearings on the problem claimed. They may be asked to suggest solutions. Notwithstanding the social problem has received recognition; it may die if nothing more can be done apart from cheap talk. To make sure a social problem continues to exist, claims-making groups have to strive to create “a committee to study the problem” and to pressure government to create policies to cope with it (Spector and Kituse 2001:149; Best 1990).

### *Stage three*

In stage three of the social problem, some complaints towards the social problem emerged. However, complaints in this stage may not be the same as that of the complaints in stage one. Stage three complaints mainly pointed towards an organizational level with regard to some of the bureaucratic procedures and methods of dealing with the problem, a sense of distrust developed.<sup>45</sup> Some visible lobbying organizations were formed to monitor the established procedures to handle the problem, claims-makers of lobbying organizations were also concerned about the effectiveness of the claims (Spector and Kituse 2001). Furthermore, once a committee has been established, claims-makers in stage three would like to secure their positions and recognize the importance for them to initiate sustainable developments of a social problem. To maintain a sustainable development of a social

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<sup>45</sup> “The outcome of such complaints may need to reform or new practices, dismissal of a high level administrator and possibly the establishment of a new and more specialized body to deal with the problem” (Spector and Kituse 2001:152).

problem requires expansion of definitions of the problem<sup>46</sup> or policy domain. Otherwise, their resources, authority and ownership of the problem may fade if the problem has “cooled off”. The present study focused on the expansion of the second type, policy domain (Best 1990).

The expansion of policy domain<sup>47</sup> is the emergence of new social polices. This expansion fosters the growth of sectors<sup>48</sup> that specialized in the problem and permit ongoing developments of a social problem (Best 1990). Claims-makers often realize that it is not possible for them to “cure” the imputed conditions immediately. So they aim to structure social problem solutions into stages and expand the scope gradually until one day they can no longer work within such problem solving industry.<sup>49</sup> (Fine 2006; Best 2003). In the views of Ibarra and Kituse, in the progress of a society democratic gradually, it is inevitable that the domain expansion will come into play. Claims-makers attempt to ensure the enlargement of coverage "of a good, services and right" and all members would gain more as the result of the extension of those qualities (Ibarra and Kituse 1993:34).

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<sup>46</sup> Domain expansion describes claims-making activities that “extend the definitional boundaries of an established social problem” to include similar conditions to claim for a new or related social problem (Haines 2003:41). “Claims-makers present new, peripheral issues as another form of essentially the same as ‘the moral equivalent of,’ or ‘equally damaging as’ the original, core problem” (Kunkel 1995: 240).

<sup>47</sup> It has been called “incrementalism” by Fine (2006).

<sup>48</sup> For example, professionals, services agencies and government officials in related turfs (Best 1990).

<sup>49</sup> A social problem that no longer works within such problem solving industry means “all feasible practice absent” (Fine 2006:5).

### *Stage four*

In social problem stage four, claims-makers shift their attention from lobbying organizations to challenge the established bureaucratic procedures or committees responsible to tackle the problem. If the sense of distrust and lack of confidence still prevails after most of the feasible solutions have been carried out, claims-makers will propose “alternative, parallel or counter” solutions to radically change the established procedures.<sup>50</sup> The creation of new institutions “may produce a new set of experts” in the given problem. Successful and workable alternative institutions exert pressure on established institutions to answer their critics. The government may invite claims-makers of the new institutions to participate in conferences to evaluate their alternative proposals to tackle the problem (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:153-154).

According to the social constructionists’ views, the natural history of social problem was in stage one when claims-makers became interested in a particular social problem and made claims-makings activities about that problem. Law (1995) asserted that some visible claims in regard to the elderly problem were made in the early 1970s. However, recalling the two surveys cited in Chapter one conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1973 and 1986, the concept of the elderly problem as a social problem in Hong Kong has not received public and government attention until the mid-1980s. Theoretically speaking, stage two of the elderly problem in Hong Kong can be signified by the creation of a Central Committee on Services to the Elderly People in 1987. Then, when a new commission (The Elderly

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<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, they may “disaffiliate and withdraw from the institutional system and attempt to create alternative institutions outside of the system” (Spector and Kitsuse 2001:153-154).

Commission) was established to deal with the elderly problem, it symbolized the natural history of social problem has evolved to stage three. In the present thesis, the study period was split into two periods of time: period one, from 1987 to 1996, representing stage two of the natural history of the elderly problem in Hong Kong; period two, from 1997 to 2006, representing stage three. More details on stage three of the natural history of the elderly problem in Hong Kong is provided in Chapter Five-“The Trends and Changes of the images of Older People in Public Affairs Television Documentaries.”

### **3 Strict and Contextual Social Constructionism**

One major criticism faced by social constructionists, “ontological gerrymandering” divided social constructionist literature into two camps, strict constructionism and contextual constructionism. “Ontological gerrymandering” is a term used to describe selective objectivism in the analysis of social problem. Steve Woolgar and Dorothy Pawluch (1985) accused social constructionists that on the one hand they do not agree that a social problem should be determined by objective condition, but, on the other hand, they smuggled the objectivists’ element (objective conditions) into their analysis in form of “putative condition”. Woolgar and Pawluch exemplified their argument by using Spector and Kitsuse’s analysis on marijuana: Spector and Kitsuse claimed that if the nature of marijuana (the putative condition) has remained constant, then the definition of marijuana should not have changed. But if it did change<sup>51</sup>, it must be relying on things beyond objective condition.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Marijuana was considered addictive in the 1930s, but it was officially removed from the United States Pharmacopoeia (USP) in 1940s and it was considered no longer a harmful and addictive drug (Alison 2001; Spector and Kitsuse 2001).

<sup>52</sup> For example, it depends on the claims-makers involved, the kinds of claims, evidence and political

Woolgar and Pawluch believed this assumption could lead to theoretical inconsistency in constructionism because the major focus of such an analysis was actually based on an invariable “objective” nature.

### *Strict social constructionism*

In responding to Woolgar and Pawluch’s criticism about the theoretical inconsistencies that originated from the term “putative condition”, Ibarra and Kitsuse said that merely focusing on the term “condition” often misdirects people’s attention to objectivism. They created a new term, “condition-categories”<sup>53</sup> to substitute “putative condition” to avoid such confusions. The most important element in “condition categories” is language<sup>54</sup>, the way that claims-makers “translate their claims into publicly and readable expressions” (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993:31). Emphasizing the significance of language allows Ibarra and Kitsuse to subvert the criticism on selective objectivism, as language is the product of social construction. Besides, to avoid ontological gerrymandering, they restated that objective conditions should be totally abolished in a social problem identifying process. Thus, Ibarra and Kitsuse think that constructionist researchers should only concentrate on the dynamic process of how claims-makers organize and accomplish claims and how they respond to the other claims-makers.<sup>55</sup> But not to examine the

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strategies that the claims-making participants used to support their claims, are also the support given by governmental agencies for institutionalizing the definitions. (Spector and Kitsuse 2001).

<sup>53</sup> Condition-categories are typifications (are descriptions and evaluations) of a social problem. It “highlights the symbol and language-bound character of claims-making activities and directs us to consider how members’ facility with rhetorical and reasoning idioms-language that used to enlist others sympathetic moves in order to create a sense of social problems” (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993:30).

<sup>54</sup> For example, protests are an action for claims-makers to make their claim explicit and to achieve a dramatic effect.

<sup>55</sup> For example, how different claims-makers make alliance or have conflict with other? What are the

accuracy of those claims or using approach looking into objective condition such as “historical records or government statistics” (Loseke 1999: 206; Best 1995a; Miller and Holstein 1993), these assumptions and insistence made themselves begin to be classified as strict constructionists.

#### Contextual social constructionism

The contextual social constructionists’ position is most markedly represented by Joel Best. Contextual social constructionists not only focus on claims-making activities, but also seek to understand claims within their context.<sup>56</sup> Considering Woolgar and Pawluch’s criticism of ontological gerrymandering, Best refutes their critique by pointing out their failure to show how Spector and Kitsuse’s assumption on the unchanged nature of marijuana is problematic. He contends that it is not possible for any analysis to avoid any assumption (i.e. the unchanged nature of marijuana). Critique was raised without clear demonstration is a logical error and it is “counterproductive to the development of an adequate social constructionist theory of social problems” and diverts analysts’ attention of the analysis of problem construction away from the study of human (Best 1995a; Miller and Holstein 1993a: 7, 8).

In contrast to the strict social constructionism, contextual constructionists allow some usage of objective facts such as statistics.<sup>57</sup> Some people believe that allowing

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subtexts of members’ claims? What political strategies they are in use, or how are the evolution and the changes of meanings about the problems? (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993)

<sup>56</sup> “Claims emerge at particular historical moments in particular societies; they are made by particular claims-makers who address particular audience. Claims-makers have particular reasons for choosing particular rhetoric (the study of persuasion) to address particular problems” (Best 1995a:345; 1995b:13).

<sup>57</sup> For example, they can be official criminal justice statistics or public opinion polls (Best 1995a:347).

the use of objective conditions in identifying social problems may lead social constructionists into a blurred position with that of objectivists. However, Best declares this is absolutely wrong because contextual social constructionists see things very differently compared with objectivists. For example, objectivists simply regard statistics as really objective and true. On the contrary, contextual social constructionists consider data as the product of social construction. They are more interested in the question of how familiar claims-makers are with statistics, in what ways they interpret numbers, and why they choose particular pieces of data but not others to justify their claims (Best 1995a).

Moreover, the key concerns of contextual social constructionists and objectivists are completely different. Regarding the homeless problem, for example, objectivists might measure its magnitude by counting how many people are homeless. They want to find out reasons that cause people to not have homes, “or otherwise exploring homelessness as a social condition”. But, the social constructionists on the other hand would figure out whose claims receive most public attention, in what ways those claims typified the homeless problem. They would also be interested in how the general public and policy makers respond to the claims (Best 1995a:338).

To maintain the integrity of social constructionism, strict social constructionists avoid looking into statistics to find out the accuracies of the claims. They also insist in doing cases studies as the analyses on claims-makers’ rhetoric activities<sup>58</sup> unavoidably require some basic assumptions to the studies of social conditions. Strict social constructionists think that case studies direct them to theoretical

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<sup>58</sup> Claims-makers’ effort to persuade the public that a condition is a social problem (Best, 1995b:13).



problems. Quite the opposite, contextual social constructionists favor developing empirical case studies. Yet, due to the openness of them in terms of accepting objective assumptions, they find it harder to defend themselves about the consistency of their theory grounds. But, indeed, contextual social constructionists go a step further in contributing the academia in the understanding of complexity of social problem such as providing insight into why certain claims are successful and why other claims fade easily (Loseke 1999). The contextual social constructionist approach to the study of social problems was employed by the present study as a conceptual framework. It is important to note that this thesis is aimed at examining the television portrayal of older people, but not examining the emergence or construction of the elderly problem as a social problem in Hong Kong because the elderly problem has already been successfully constructed as one of the major social problems in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, exploring the development of the elderly problem as a social problem helps us to explain changes of the portrayal of Hong Kong older people in the public affairs television documentary over the research period.

#### **4 Application of a Contextual Constructionists' Analysis**

One of the widely recognized strengths of the contextual social constructionists' approach is examining the shift in typifications and definitions of a social problem. More importantly, applying social constructionist theory to the present study can provide us with a better understanding of the social definition process of the elderly problem in Hong Kong. In fact, this approach has been employed by a number of researchers and covered various topics, such as a pedophilia (Jenkins 2004); sudden infant death syndrome (Johnson and Hufbauer 2003); premenstrual syndrome

(Rittenshouse 2003); professional deviance of doctors (Morrow 2003); white-collar crime (Nichol, 1999); images of ageing (Featherstone and Hepworth 1995); stalking (Lowney and Best 1995); serial murder (Jenkins 1994); and many other social problems. In line with the contextual social constructionists' approach to the study of social problems, the present research also makes use of a review of government documents and in-depth interviews on top of the content analysis of documentary episodes. Details of these three research designs are discussed in the next chapter, "Methodology."

## **Chapter Four**

### **Methodology**

The present study contains three research questions:

- 1) How have older people been portrayed in public affairs television documentaries in Hong Kong over the study period<sup>59</sup>? Has the portrayal varied over different periods and, if so, in what ways?
- 2) Are there any differences in the portrayal of older people between public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting? If so, has this varied over the two study periods<sup>60</sup>?
- 3) Are there any gender differences in the portrayal of older people in the documentaries? If so, has this varied over the two study periods?

#### **1 Research Design**

In line with the contextual social constructionists' approach, this study makes use of three types of research designs to examine the portrayal of older people in public affairs television documentaries, namely: (1) content analysis on the documentary episodes, (2) reviews of government documents and (3) in-depth interviews with

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<sup>59</sup> "The study period" here refers to episodes produced between 1987 and 2006.

<sup>60</sup> "The two study periods" refers to period one, 1987-1996 and period two, 1997-2006. The decision of splitting the study period into 2 periods of time was derived from the contextual social constructionist theory on social problems, which will further be discussed in Chapter Three, Conceptual Framework.

social workers and the staff engaged in documentary episode production.<sup>61</sup>

This present study employed content analysis as the main research method. To find out how older people have been portrayed in public affairs television documentary. Research design (1): content analysis on the documentary episodes was designed to answer all three research questions by examining how the older characters were portrayed in the sampled documentary episodes.

Research design (2): reviews of government documents and (3): in-depth interviews with social workers were designed to find out the reasons why or why not the portrayal of older people in the documentary episodes varied over the two study periods.

Research design (3): in-depth interviews with documentary workers was also designed to help the researcher to have a better understanding about the differences in public service and commercial documentary workers using typifying examples to illustrate the elderly problem. Details of each of the research designs were highlighted in the following sections of this chapter.

### *Content analysis*

Content analysis is a documentary research method that helps researchers to determine “the meaning of textual or visual source by systematically allocating their content to pre-determined, detailed categories, and then both quantifying and

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<sup>61</sup> Examples of these staffs include documentary producers, editors, photographers, etc. As the interviewees state explicitly they do not want their job position disclosed, the research used a shorthand “documentary workers” to describe these interviewees.

interpreting the outcomes” (Payne and Payne 2004:51). Textual sources can be applied to books, records of interviews and speeches, articles, catalogs, magazines, dissertations, poems, songs, or historical documents. While visual sources can be employed to analyze advertisements, photos, paintings, TV dramas, TV news programs or movies, content analysis nowadays has extended its applications from printed and visual sources to electronic media like internet polling and other computer-based programs.

There are two coding types of content analysis, namely manifest content analysis and latent content analysis. The former is a quantitative research method. It primarily deals with visible and straightforward content. This method usually does not involve personal judgment and interpretation, but simply counting the number of times that certain well-defined, standardized and measurable indicators appear in the research unit. Therefore, manifest content analysis is always regarded as more reliable than that of the latent content analysis. Researchers can use dictionaries to help in constructing operational definitions of the unit of analysis (Riffe, Lacy and Fico 2000). The latter coding type of content analysis is a qualitative research method. It is designed to discover hidden meanings of the content. It usually contains the researcher’s subjective evaluations and interpretations of the hidden meanings of the research materials (Sarantakos 2005). The present research made use of manifest content analysis because standardized indicators and measurements were designed for most, if not all, research variables.

### *Why content analysis?*

The methodological strengths of content analysis, the quantitative method in particular, includes four major aspects: inexpensiveness, rectification, unobtrusiveness and easiness for comparison of imagery. First, content technique was chosen in the present study because it is an inexpensive research method that permits the duration of study to take place over a relatively long period of time. Researchers can save money for interviewing a large number of respondents in data collection. Secondly, with standardized indicators and measurement, the reliability of the present study is likely to be increased. Whenever there are any unclear points or uncertainty, the researcher can always return and replicate the coding procedure of the data, which eventually promotes a higher degree of consistency in coding data. Moreover, content analysis is a type of unobtrusive research technique that does not require the researcher to interact with the subjects. Hence, it rarely has interacting effects on the subjects being studied. Last, but not least, content analysis is also good at examining imagery changing over the studied period. (Babbie 2007; Sarantakos 2005).

### **(1) Content Analysis on the Documentary Episodes**

#### **1. Population and sample**

The population in this study is public affair television documentaries with older people as the main theme. In Hong Kong, there are four television broadcasters producing public affairs documentaries, including three commercial broadcasters (Asia Television Limited (ATV), Cable TV Hong Kong (HKCTV) and Television

Broadcasts Limited (TVB)) and the sole public service broadcaster, (Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK)). The researcher originally aimed to investigate all documentary episodes during research period from all free-of-charge TV channels<sup>62</sup> as these channels dominate the majority of viewers in Hong Kong and is thought to have greater impact on society. However, samples were finally drawn from the documentary produced by two of the free-of-charge television channels<sup>63</sup> (ATV-*Chasing Current Affairs*<sup>64</sup> and RTHK-*The Hong Kong Connection*<sup>65</sup>) due to the availability of data. Documentary series of TVB-News Magazine were excluded from this study because many of the episodes were missing.

#### *Coverage of the study*

The present research studied public affairs documentary episodes produced between 1987 and 2006. As mentioned in Chapter three, the study period<sup>66</sup> of this study was further divided into two periods of time: period one, from 1987 to 1996, representing stage two of the natural history of the elderly problem in Hong Kong; period two, from 1997 to 2006, representing stage three.

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<sup>62</sup> It includes ATV and TVB. Television programs that were free-of charge also include productions from RTHK, but RTHK itself does not have a TV channel, its production is broadcasted during the prime time of the broadcasting interval of the television channels. Since 1989, the renewal of the two free of charge television broadcasting licenses (ATV and TVB) are subject to whether the broadcasters have reserved “2.5 hours per week” for programs produced by RTHK “being broadcast during prime time on each Chinese Channel of ATV and TVB and 1 hour of productions is scheduled during prime time on each English Channel of ATV and TVB per week (Legislative Council 2006:3).

<sup>60</sup> HKCTV is a paid television channel.

<sup>61</sup> In Chinese it is called as 《時事追擊》.

<sup>62</sup> In Chinese it is called as 《鏗鏘集》.

<sup>63</sup> “The study period” here refers to episodes produced between 1987 and 2006.

## **2. Data collection**

To obtain the full list of public affairs documentary episodes, which had older people as a main theme, the researcher read the title and the synopsis of each episode provided on the local joint library search engine, Hong Kong Academic Library Link (HKALL) chronologically so as to find out the episodes that were related to older people. The first broadcast date of *The Hong Kong Connection and Chasing Current Affairs* was 1987 and 1989 respectively. An older-people-themed episode is first defined by the title of each episode. If the title contains words to the effect of older people, such as ageing, elderly or senior, then it is obvious that the theme of the episode is mainly about older people. But if the researcher could not judge whether the episode included older people in it by merely reading the title, she would read the synopsis to check whether it is related to older people. In the present study, there were 39 episodes about older people in the studied period.

## **3. Measurement of major variables and concepts**

A coding scheme was designed to provide principles that guide the researcher in standardizing the criterion of coding. The scheme was developed upon a mutually exclusive principle and using clear and precise wording to avoid confusion. In the pilot study, the researcher pre-tested about 10% or 4 episodes of the sampled episodes. Minor modifications have made to the scheme. The scheme comprised the following three major parts.

(1) Older people



(2) Major character

- a) Economic conditions of older character
- b) Self care abilities of older character
- c) Overall personal characteristics of older character

(3) The major theme of the episodes

*(1) Older people*

People older than 65 years old were considered to be older people. Basically, the moderator of each episode would explicitly tell the audience about the age of the characters. If not, the following indicators were used to indicate whether the character is an older person (Magoffin 2007; Robinson & Anderson 2006; Robinson 1998; Peterson 1992; Swayne & Greco 1987). If one or more of the indicators were observed, the character would be coded as an older person.

- an appearance or statement of retirement
- extensive gray or white hair
- wrinkles in the skin
- extensive loss of hair or balding
- cracking voice
- use of an aid such as a stick or wheelchair
- the parent of a son or daughter who is middle-aged or older
- evidence of grandchildren or great-grandchildren

## *(2) Major character<sup>67</sup>*

To examine the portrayal of older people in the sampled public affairs television documentary series, the unit of analysis is the major character(s) of each documentary episode. A major character is operationally defined as a character who is very important to the storyline or with a speaking part greater than one minutes<sup>68</sup>. Some of his/her background information, such as age, job or livelihood, were provided in moderator's speech. As the major theme of the present study is the portrayal of older people, only older major characters were coded. Minor characters<sup>69</sup> and background characters<sup>70</sup> were excluded from the analysis.

### *a) Economic conditions of the older characters*

Economic conditions of the older characters were mainly classified into two types: relatively good and relatively disadvantaged economic condition.

#### 1) Indicators of relatively good economic condition

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<sup>64</sup> Major character (older-major-character) hereafter is referred to as "older character".

<sup>65</sup> In coding the portrayal of older people, the length of time that an older character appeared in the episode was important. If the length of time showing an older character was too limited, it was hard for the coder to determine the portrayal of them. Thus, minor characters and background characters were excluded from this study.

<sup>66</sup> "Minor character" refers to a character who is clearly visible, but is not the major focus of the episode as none of their background information such as age, job or livelihood was provided in the narrator's speech. The character might have a speaking part, but the length of it is very limited (from a few seconds to less than one minute).

<sup>67</sup> "Background character" refers a character that is hard to find (i.e. a character who is mixed in with the group or the face of the character can not be clearly seen) by a viewer, the character does not have any speaking parts and has no significance in the episode.

- not a CSSA recipient
- expressing sufficiency in daily expenditures
- receiving economic support from adult children regularly
- living in descent living environment<sup>71</sup>
- engage in activities that requires money to support<sup>72</sup>
- hiring a maid or caregiver

## 2) Indicators of relatively disadvantaged economic condition

- being a recipient of CSSA<sup>73</sup> Scheme
- express financial worries explicitly
- forced to be over frugal in sustaining one's basic necessities
- doing a labor intensive job to earn a living<sup>74</sup>
- living in poor living environment<sup>75</sup>
- unable to afford any accidental spending<sup>76</sup>

If the major character is a recipient of the CSSA scheme, then the character was

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<sup>68</sup> For example descent living environment include, place with sufficient lighting, clean, housing of home ownership scheme or private housing.

<sup>69</sup> Examples of activities that require money to support include, going to fine dinning restaurants, traveling frequently, elegantly dressed.

<sup>73</sup> CSSA refers to the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme.

<sup>74</sup> Cardboard, picking up cans for recycling are examples of labor intensive jobs.

<sup>75</sup> Examples of poor living environment include dark, dense, deteriorating, dirty, partitioned place with others, etc.

<sup>76</sup> Medication, funeral preparation, home repairs are examples of accidental spending.

undoubtedly considered as having a relatively disadvantaged economic condition.<sup>77</sup>

If an older character possessed both relatively good and relatively disadvantaged indicators of economic condition, the researcher would decide which type of indicators was dominant in terms of the numbers of indicators. If an older character was absent from any kinds of the indicator to determine his/her economic condition, the economic condition of him/her would be coded as “no observable details for judgment”.

#### b) *Self-care abilities of older character*

Self-care abilities of older characters were divided into three types: independent, having minor health limitations and dependent.

##### 1) Indicators of being independent

When an older character was classified as independent, he/she had to meet both of the following two criteria:

- absence of chronic illnesses or with few chronic illnesses but able to care for himself/herself in daily activities<sup>78</sup> in front of the camera

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<sup>77</sup> For an older person to be eligible to get the assistance, he or she “must pass both the income and assets test. For income test, the total assessable monthly household income of the applicant and his/her family must be insufficient to meet their total monthly needs as recognized under the Scheme. For assets test, the total value of the capital assets (including land/properties, cash, bank savings, cash value of insurance policy, investments in stocks and shares, and other readily realizable assets) held by the applicant and his/her family members must not exceed the prescribed limit depending on the kind of assistance applied” (HKSAR 2009:1).

<sup>78</sup> A common way to measure whether older characters are able to take care of themselves is to measure the activities in daily living (ADLs) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs). Examples of activities ADLs includes bathing, dressing, toileting, transfer from bed or chair, continence and feeding (Katz, Down and Cash. 1970). Examples of IADLs include traveling,

- absence of cognitive illness, disability,<sup>79</sup> or severe deterioration in cognitive function(s)<sup>80</sup>

## 2) Indicators of having minor health limitation(s)

- The older character is considered to have minor health limitation(s) if any one of the following indicators was observed in the sampled episodes
- some chronic illnesses and/or impairment leading to some restrictions in his/her/mobility or sensory functions, but basically, he/she is still able to perform most of the self-care
- early stages of cognitively illness, but still absent from severe cognitive function deterioration

## 3) Indicator of being dependent

The older character was considered as dependent if any one of the following indicators was observed in the sampled episodes.

- physical disabled<sup>81</sup>
- cognitively disabled<sup>82</sup>

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shopping, meal preparation, housework and handling money (Lawton and Broady 1969).

<sup>79</sup> For example, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and dementia are examples of cognitive illness.

<sup>80</sup> For example, mumbling, unable to understand what others mean or expressing oneself.

<sup>81</sup> For example, not being able to move without using a wheelchair or even lying in bed.

<sup>82</sup> For example, mumbling, unable to understand others' meaning or inarticulate. If an older character is in the later stages of Alzheimer disease or dementia, he/she is also being considered as cognitive disabled.

- although he/she is not physically disabled or cognitively disabled, they are still unable to perform self care activities<sup>83</sup>

c) *Overall personal traits of the older characters*

In this study, the overall personal traits of the older characters were classified into three categories: positive, neutral and negative. Seven dichotomized personal traits of older characters were designed to be measured. Some older characters contained both positive and negative personal traits. If positive personal traits outnumbered negative personal traits, the older character was coded as having a positive overall personal trait, and vice versa. If the number of positive personal traits and negative personal traits were equal, the older character was coded as neutral. Operational definitions were elaborated and modified based upon the meanings of words provided in dictionaries.<sup>84</sup> In the following, if one or more of the sub criteria under any of the personal traits was met, the character was coded as possessing that personal trait.

1) Indicators of positive traits

- active
  - ◇ engaged in action, characterized by physical effort
  - ◇ taking the initiative to engage in activities
  - ◇ developing hobbies; learning new things or skills

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<sup>83</sup> For example, even the older character was not physical disabled or cognitively disabled, but he/she was suffering a stroke and could not bath himself/herself.

<sup>84</sup> This is from the online dictionary: dictionary.com, Webster's revised Unabridged dictionary.com, wordnet.com and Chinese English dictionary.

- ✧ participating in political activities
- ✧ being engaged in a variety of roles and responsibilities
  
- socially involved
  - ✧ having social interaction with others
  - ✧ maintenance of one's social network: family network, kinship, friendship network or neighborhood network
  
- productive
 

any activities performed by an older person having social and economic value, whether paid or not, these include:

  - ✧ volunteering
  - ✧ taking care of grandchildren
  - ✧ working
  - ✧ providing informal care for sick or disabled relatives or friends
  
- good tempered
  - ✧ patient
  - ✧ not easily irritated or angered even when encountering some problems such as dissatisfaction or conflict with others
  - ✧ expressing complains or appeals softly and reasonably using low pitch of voice

- happy
  - ✧ smiling
  - ✧ speaking in an up beating tone
  - ✧ expressing life satisfactions or enjoyments of current life
  
- well informed
  - ✧ knowing the appropriate channel for seeking help from others when needed
  - ✧ provided with information<sup>85</sup>
  - ✧ having extensive knowledge in one particular subject or in a variety of subjects
  
- capable
 

exhibiting ability or strength<sup>86</sup> in any of the following aspects:

  - ✧ linguistic intelligence
  - ✧ logical-mathematical intelligence
  - ✧ spatial intelligence
  - ✧ bodily-kinesthetic intelligence
  - ✧ musical intelligence
  - ✧ interpersonal intelligence
  - ✧ intrapersonal intelligence
  - ✧ naturalist intelligence

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<sup>85</sup> For example, an older character knows where to get “free-rice” or he/she knows well about news in society or worldwide.

<sup>86</sup> For example, good at storytelling, using humor, using empathy; craftwork; literature; teaching; leadership; playing the abacus, music, chess.



## 2) Indicators of negative traits

- inactive
  - ✧ sluggish
  - ✧ sedentary
  
- socially isolated
  - ✧ loneliness
  - ✧ disconnected with the outside world
  
- non-productive
  - ✧ absence of goods or services produced by the older person shown to have social and economic value, whether paid or not
  
- bad-tempered
  - ✧ offensive actions
  - ✧ speaking in a high pitched voice
  
- sad
  - ✧ crying or sobbing
  - ✧ wearing long face
  - ✧ expressing worry or uncertainty
  
- poorly informed
  - ✧ lacking knowledge of how to reach appropriate channel for seeking help from others when needed

- ✧ lacking judgment not based on specialized knowledge
- incapable
  - ✧ not possessing the ordinary capability to do a certain task<sup>87</sup>

The personal characters of the older characters were specifically: active-inactive, socially involved-socially isolated, productive-non-productive, good tempered-bad tempered, happy-sad, well informed-poorly informed, capable-incapable (Zhang; Hummert and Garsrika 2002; Hinterlong, Morrow-Howell and Sherraden 2001:7; Law 2001; Hummert et al. 1994; Howard 1983; Vernon et al 1991; Havighurst 1963).

(1) The major theme of the episodes

The major theme of the episodes was mainly classified into one of three types: positive, neutral and negative. Each type of major theme consisted of several sub themes as following:

*1) Positive themes*

- ✧ Low risk of disease and high mental and physical functioning

This category of episodes emphasizes various measures that older people adopted to keep their mental and physical health. These measures include

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<sup>87</sup> For example, having difficulties in memorizing or learning.

developing hobbies and skills, maintaining a balanced diet or having regular body checks.

✧ Active involvement in society

Any activities showing the older people's involvement in society such as engaging in voluntary work or participating in social movements were grouped into this category.

✧ Hobbies/activities and enjoyment of later life

The main focus of this category of episodes is older people who are actively engaging in hobbies and activities to seek moments of joy in their later life.

✧ Milestones in life

Episodes in this category feature a significant milestone or achievement that is regarded as a deed for an older person. Episodes here also focus on qualities and resilience of older people in maintaining their well being in later life.

✧ Planning for death

Planning for death includes choice of funeral plans for funeral rituals<sup>88</sup> and

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<sup>88</sup> For example, Buddhist, Taoist and Christian.

the disposition of one's body<sup>89</sup> after death, before dying. Even though death is a taboo to many traditional Chinese people, having a funeral plan in advance is a sort of positive intervention and an active step to help an older person to alleviate the fear of death.<sup>90</sup>

✧ Good relationship with others

Episodes in this category show that the older characters have good relationship with their family members and social networks.

2) *Neutral themes*

✧ Personal story

Episodes in this code show older people reminiscing about their past, telling their life stories and sharing their experiences in front of the camera. The topic(s) discussed in the episode must not include any present hardship faced by the older character or policy controversy.

✧ Introducing the existing social services or programs for older people

Topics discussed in this category were about the introduction of current social services or programs available to older people. The content of the

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<sup>89</sup> For example, burial underground, burial at sea or cremation.

<sup>90</sup> The anxiety that we experience in daily life, but not the anxiety experienced in coping with immediate threats to one's life, which is caused by the anticipation of the state in which one is dead (Tomer 1994:3).

episode does not mention any inadequacies of the social services and programs introduced in the episodes.

### 3) *Negative themes*

#### ✧ Victimization

Older people who are victims of accident, crime, fire, fraud, robbery or assault are coded in this category.

#### ✧ Pathos of ageing

Episodes here refer to issues pertaining to loneliness and inattention; stories of dying alone and living alone come under this category.

#### ✧ Adjustment problems

Different kinds of adjustment problems associated with transition into stages of later life such as widowhood, retirement are the focuses of this category; accommodation problem that come with a new living environment and stories of suicide are also coded under this category.

#### ✧ Family problems

This category focuses on problems of older people residing with their spouse or adult children. These problems ranged from inability to live harmoniously

with other family members to elder abuse.

✧ Economic vulnerability/problems of financial support and related policies

This category focuses on the economic hardship faced by older people in making a living. They were normally working class workers as they were young, lacking pension support and care provided by family members. If the content of episode appears to blame the government for not providing enough financial security to elderly people, it was also classified into this category.

✧ Health problems or problems of health care and related policies

This category focuses on any kinds of descriptions about older people suffering from physical or mental illness; or emphasizing the cost and inadequacy of health care services for older people.

✧ Problems of living conditions or housing-related policies

In this category, episodes focus on topics about the living conditions of older people or housing policies of the government. For example, this category may include inadequacy of housing specially designed for ageing population, housing allocations problem or poor living conditions.

✧ Problems of education related policies

Any topic related to insufficient policies or programs to facilitate life-long learning for older people are central to this category.

✧ Problems of long term care related policies

Episodes under this category refer to the insufficiency of residential places for older people in Hong Kong. This includes hostel for the elderly, homes for the aged, care and attention home and nursing homes.

✧ Problem(s) with social services

Problems and inadequacy of various social services for the older population are coded in this category. Examples here might be claims for expansion of older volunteer programs, activities organizing funds, or outreach services towards older people.

The major theme of each of the episode was determined by the number of the sub-theme(s) that appeared in the episodes. If the episode had both positive and negative sub-themes, the researcher decided the type of the major theme in terms of the numbers of the dominant sub-themes type. When positive theme(s) in the episode outnumbered negative theme(s), the major theme of that episode was coded “positive”, and vice versa. When the numbers of positive theme(s) and negative theme(s) in the episode were equal, the major theme of that episode was coded “neutral”. When the number of positive theme(s) and neutral theme(s) in the episode were equal, the researcher did not focus on neutral theme(s) and the major theme of that episode would be determined “positive” and vice versa (Murphy 2004:17; Steihauser et al. 2000; Rowe and Kahn 1998; Gibb and Holroyd 1996).

### *Reliability Test*

After the data were coded, an inter-coder reliability test was utilized to enhance the reliability of the coding scheme. An inter-coder reliability test<sup>91</sup> serves to indicate the extent of agreement on the coding of variables between coders.

In the present study, 15% (6 episodes) of the researched documentaries were sent to the second coder (a second-year Social Sciences MPhil student<sup>92</sup>). Prior to the inter-coder reliability test, a briefing session was carried out. In the session, the coding scheme and the data collection from (see appendix II, p.175-176) were distributed to the second coder. The researcher introduced the research design to the other coder by coding one episode in front of him in order to ensure he could understand the research design and was able to work independently. However, the researcher did not explain each variable in detail because as long as all the indicators in the scheme were clearly defined, any coder using the same coding scheme should be able to replicate the analysis without guidance.

After the briefing session, each variable of the episode was re-coded by the second coder. If there was any discrepancy between the two coders, the researcher would discuss the relevant variable(s) with the second coder to find out if a consensus could be finally reached. However, if the two coders could not reach agreement on the coding, a third coder would be invited. At the end of the inter-coding procedure,

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<sup>91</sup> When the coefficient alpha value of the reliability test reaches .7 the coding is regarded as adequate and appropriate. If the coefficient reaches .8, it is regarded as good and acceptable, whereas .9 or greater as “very good” and always acceptable (Lombard, Duch and Bracken 2005).

<sup>92</sup> The reason for choosing an MPhil student as the second coder was primary due to the assumption that a postgraduate student had more formal academic background and research experience, which could better ensure the quality of the inter-coder reliability test.



including the researcher, only two coders were employed, as disagreements could all be resolved after discussion between coders (see footnote 93 and 94).

**Table 4.1**

Results of the inter-coder reliability test

Areas	Inter-coder reliability test result
Economic conditions of older characters	1.00
Self-care abilities of older characters	1.00
Personal traits of older characters <sup>93</sup>	0.96
The major theme of the documentary episodes <sup>94</sup> .	1.00

Table 4.1 summarizes the results of the inter-coder reliability test. The table indicated coders were completely consistent in the coding on economic conditions, self-care abilities of older characters and the major theme of each of the documentary episode (three areas of coding all reached 1.00). The inter-coder reliability of the personal traits of older characters reached 0.96. These figures suggest that the coding

<sup>93</sup> Of all 6 episodes for inter-coding, there were 55 personal traits of older characters, the coder agreed on 53 of them and the rate of agreement was 0.96. In episode 10, Problems of Elderly Suicide, Mr Kwan was the 17th character. In the analysis, Kwan was coded as inactive, unproductive, sad and poorly informed by the researcher. But the second coder did not mark “poorly informed” for Mr. Kwan. If an older person was found in the episode showing a lacking in knowledge to seek help from others through the appropriate channel when needed or the lacking in judgment which was not based on the lacking in specialized knowledge, then an older person was portrayed as poorly-informed. In the episode, Mr. Kwan said that he had thought about requesting a psychiatric doctor to inject poison into him to end his life. After discussion with the second coder, agreement were reached that Mr. Kwan lacked basic judgment that psychiatric doctor had no authority to perform euthanasia for older people with depression. In episode 14, Is CSSA Sufficient For the Living of Elder People? The second coder coded Character 26, Granny Kong as possessing three personal traits: active, socially involved, productive but unhappy. In comparison, the researcher agreed with most of the coding results of the second coder, but she forgot that Granny Kong in the episode had to pick up cans to recycle to better her livelihood and omitted to mark that Kong was also therefore economically productive.

<sup>94</sup> Among the 6 episodes for inter-coding, altogether there were 6 major themes and 10 sub themes. Although the inter-coder reliability in this part reached 1.00, there was a minor difference in terms of one sub-theme: in episode 11, Older People Dancing Festival, the researcher had two codes: “high mental and/or physical functioning” and “milestone of life”. But the second coders only made a code on high mental and/or physical functioning. Then, I talked to the second coder to discuss if older people with functional limitations could still perform dancing on wheelchair, whether the scenario should be considered a kind of achievement of older people. Thus, the content category of episode 11 should also include “milestone of life” and the second coder agreed with the judgment of the researcher.

scheme of the present study was reliable and well beyond the acceptable ranges.

## **(2) Reviews of Government Documents**

The content analysis of documentary episodes was limited to an understanding of the trends and changes of how older people were portrayed in public affairs documentaries. However, it could not provide an explanation on why there were such trends and changes; what happened in a particular historical moment that affects the life of the elderly problem in Hong Kong. A review of government documents is, thus, a very important method to identify any change related to a social problem and government reaction to that social problem as Loseke, and Miller et al. asserted:

“Contextual constructionism allows some objective context of claims to be brought into the analysis. For example, within contextual constructionism, analysts can look at some claims (such as historical records, government statistics, and so on) and use these claims to comment on the truth of other claims. Analysts can ask questions such as, “What was going on in the social environment that led to claims-making about this problem at this particular historical time?” Loseke (1999:206)

“According to Best, any social problem claim can be evaluated with reasonable confidence by using available statistical and other information about the condition that the claims describe” (Miller and Holstein 1993b:12).

According to contextual social constructionism, understanding of the emergence and development of the elderly problem needed to capture the social context of Hong Kong. In order to learn about how our government reacted to the rapid increase in the elderly population, policy addresses by our governors<sup>95</sup> or chief

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<sup>95</sup> There are two governors in Hong Kong during the research period: David Wilson (1987-1992) and Chris Patten (1992-1997).

executives<sup>96</sup> were analyzed. Hence, in exploring why the television portrayal of older people varied over the past two decades, documentary analysis on government documents of Hong Kong was an integral part of the present research. Through the analysis, the researcher was able to understand the trends and changes of policies in relation to older people over the past two decades.

### Policy addresses

All policy addresses from 1987 to 2006 were included. A total of 20 policy addresses were collected and reviewed. The focus of the analysis was on how government reacted to the elderly problem by examining the scope of social policies and programs for the older population.

### **(3) In-depth Interviews**

Contextual social constructionists seek to identify typifications or social definition of social problems in a particular social context. Many of them think that the most direct way for such an exploration is by means of in-depth interviews with major claims-makings groups and policy makers (i.e. Houson 2008; Wijnsma-Bil 2005; Lippert, Randy 1998; Law 1995). Thus, the second research technique in this study was in-depth interview. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research technique that permits the researcher to gain information on a specific topic by conversation (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2005).

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<sup>96</sup> There are two chief executives in Hong Kong during the research period: Tung Chee Hwa (1997-2005) and Tsang Yam Kuen (2005-2006).

The in-depth interviews can help the researcher to explore the natural history of the elderly problem in Hong Kong. Three experienced social workers and two documentary workers were interviewed. These interviewees were referred from the Office of Service-Learning, Lingnan University and the social network of the researcher. The interviews contained the following major themes:

Interviews with social workers:

- a) social services and programs, recent changes, if any
- b) images of older people in mass media, recent changes, if any

Interviews with documentary workers:

- a) relationships among different claims-makers
- b) shooting techniques
- c) selection of older characters
- d) factors affecting the choices of the major theme of a particular episode

Table 4.2 summarized the details of the interviews, including interview date, time and nature. Three out of five interviews were in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews duration ranged from 32 minutes to 51 minutes. The other two interviews were short interviews with social workers. Only short interviews were conducted with social workers 2 and 3 because some key responses and many of the statements, views and arguments provided by them were duplicated with the social worker 1. Except for the interview with social worker 3, all interviews were conducted in face-to-face format. All in-depth interviews in the present study were transcribed,

see appendix III.

**Table 4.2**

Detailed information of the interviews

Interviewee	Date and starting time	Duration (minutes)	Nature
Social worker 1	21/4, 12.00 pm	32	Face to face in-depth interview
Social worker 2	21/4, 12.33 pm	14	Face to face short interview
Social worker 3	1/5, 8.30 pm	10	Telephone short interview
Documentary worker 1	5/5, 4.40 pm	51	Face to face in-depth interview
Documentary worker 2	21/5, 12.50 pm	43	Face to face in-depth interview

## **Chapter Five**

### **Trends and Changes in the images of Older People in Public Affairs Television**

#### **Documentary**

The present chapter aims to answer the first research question, which consists of two parts (Chapter 1, p. 10): “How have older people been portrayed in public affairs television documentaries in Hong Kong over the study period?” and “has the portrayal varied over different periods and, if so, in what ways?” Possible explanations of any trends and changes in the images of older people in public affairs television documentaries will also be discussed in the latter part of the chapter.

#### **1 “How Have Older People been Portrayed in Public Affairs Television Documentaries in Hong Kong over the Study Period?”**

In order to answer this research question, two domains were examined: (1) the major theme of the episodes during the study period<sup>97</sup> and (2) the portrayal of the economic conditions, self-care abilities and overall personal traits of older characters in the episodes.

##### *(1) The major theme of the episodes*

As discussed in Chapter Four, the major theme of the episodes was classified into

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<sup>97</sup> “The study period” here refers to episodes produced between 1987 and 2006.

three principal types: positive, neutral and negative. Table 5.1 indicates the percentage distribution of the major theme of the episodes during the study period. The major theme of the majority of the episodes (48.7%) were “negative”<sup>98</sup>, whereas 38.5% were “positive”<sup>99</sup> and the rest (15.4%) were regarded as “neutral”.

**Table 5.1**

Distribution of the major theme of the episodes, 1987-2006 (%)

Positive	38.5
Neutral	15.4
Negative	48.7
Total	100.0
(N)	(39)

Examples of the major theme of the episodes being coded as “positive” included, firstly, episode 11, entitled *Older People Dancing at a Festival*. In this episode, there were two older characters.<sup>100</sup> The episode was a story about two wheelchair bounded older characters joining a dancing competition. The episodes tried to demonstrate that disabled older people can still have colorful lives. It consisted of two “positive themes”. The first was “milestone of life”: older people were capable of dancing regardless disability, which showed that they have usual resilience. The second theme was “low risk of disease and high physical functioning”: “wheelchair dancing” allows older people to maintain their levels of activities and in some ways

<sup>98</sup> The major theme of the episode was coded as “positive” which means when positive themes in the episode outnumbered negative theme(s), the major theme of that episode was coded as “positive”.

<sup>99</sup> The major theme of the episode was coded as “negative” which means when negative themes in the episode outnumbered positive theme(s), the major theme of that episode was coded as “negative”.

<sup>100</sup> As mentioned in Chapter four, older characters in this study refer to major characters only. Major character is operationally defined as a character who is very important to the storyline or with a speaking part over one minutes. Some of his/her background information, such as age, job or livelihood, were provided in moderator’s speech.

helps them to delay physical deterioration.

Another example of a major theme of an episode being considered “positive” is episode 33, *Population Aging*. There were four older characters in this episode. The episode consisted of three sections. The first section of the episode was described economic hardships faced by two older characters, which brought out controversial views on policy of means-test system of OAA.<sup>101</sup> The focus of the story was illustrations of older people with some, but limited saving who would no longer be eligible to have OAA if means-tested mechanism was applied to them. Their livelihood might become even harder than currently if the policy was eventually implemented. Thus, this section of episode was coded as a sub-theme under “negative themes” (problems of financial support and related policies). The second section of episode focused on an older female character who was relatively economic affluent, she enjoyed learning English, Cantonese opera and calligraphy in her later life. This section was coded as a sub-theme under “positive themes” (hobbies and enjoyment of later life).

The third section of episode 33 showed that later life can remain meaningful. This section was a story about some older people who were professionals when they were younger, visiting other older people who were living alone. This section of the episode was coded into a sub-theme of “positive themes”, (active involvement in society) as older characters in the episode were engaging in voluntary services after retirement. As there are two “positive themes” and one “negative theme” in the episode, “positive themes” outnumbered the “negative” one, therefore the major theme of episode 33 was considered as “positive”.

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<sup>101</sup> OAA refers to old age allowance.



Episode 5, *Voluntary Workers Provide Home Repairing Services for Elderly People*, is an example of an episode with a “neutral” major theme. There were two older characters in this episode. The story of this episode was about groups of voluntary workers from different backgrounds providing home repairing services to older people. As the focus of this story was merely informing the audiences about voluntary services available for older people, but not aiming at advocating new social policies or portraying older people as miserable, this episode was coded as having a sub theme under “neutral themes”,(introducing the existing social services or programs for older people).

A second example of an episode being coded as having “neutral” major theme was episode 22, *Older People Going to University and Problems of Establishing Education Courses for them*. The episode was composed of two older characters. This episode has two foci. The first focus was showed that older people can achieve a sense of self-worthiness if they engaged in life-long learning activities after retirement. This portion of episode was regarded as a sub-theme under “positive themes” (hobbies and enjoyment of later life) because the episode carried a message that active engagement in learning in later life can promote the well-being of older people. The second focus of this episode was to accuse the government of not providing adequate resources to subsidize senior education. Resources allocated to senior education are limited. Most courses that were provided for older people were short course. Obviously, this grievance against the government was a sub-theme under “negative themes” (problem of education and related policies). Neither positive nor negative theme was dominant the central theme of this episode, therefore the major theme of the episode was regarded “neutral”.

Episode 10, *The Problem of Elderly Suicide* is one example of the major theme of an episode was classified “negative”. The episode described two stories about two depressed older characters who each had histories of attempted suicides. The episode was coded as having a “negative” theme (adjustment problems) because it explored topics about one of the adjustment problems<sup>102</sup> (elderly suicide) stated in the coding scheme.

Another example of an episode with a “negative” major theme is episode 12, *Provide Older People with the Sense of Belonging*. This episode was divided into three sections and there were three older characters in total. The first section introduced a group of older people protesting at the Office of the Chief Secretary of Hong Kong to fight for retirement protection. This section of the episode was considered as having a sub-theme under “positive themes” (active involvement in society) because the theme was about older people participating in a social movement to strive for economic protection. The second section of the episode was to discuss the insufficiency of the medical system in Hong Kong in catering to older people’s needs. The theme of this section was related to “problems with health care related policies”, which is one of the sub-themes under “negative themes”. The focus of the last section was introducing the lives of many older people who are living alone and are neglected by society. This section of the episode was coded into a “negative sub-theme” (pathos of ageing) because it discussed lonely older people and how they are being neglected. There were two negative sub-themes and one positive sub-theme in this episode. The episode therefore was regarded as an episode

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<sup>102</sup> Examples of adjustment problems might include maladjustment due to widowhood, new living environment or suicidal behaviors.

with a “negative” major theme.

*(2) Economic conditions, self-care abilities and overall personal traits of older characters*

Table 5.2 shows the portrayal of the economic conditions, abilities to self-care and the overall personal trait of the older characters in all of the studied episodes. The economic conditions of the older characters were mainly classified into two types: relatively good and relatively disadvantaged economic conditions. Among the 89 older characters being surveyed, 40.4% of them were depicted as “in relatively good economic conditions”, whereas 47.2% were depicted as “in relatively disadvantaged economic conditions”.

Self-care abilities of older characters as portrayed in the episodes were divided into three types: independent, having minor health limitations and dependent. 67.4% of the surveyed older characters were portrayed as “independent”, whereas 21.3% were “having minor health limitations” and the remaining 11.2% were portrayed as “dependent”.

The overall personal trait of the older characters was classified into three categories: positive, neutral and negative. Data in Table 5.2 indicates that 51.7% of older characters in this study were coded as possessing “positive overall personal trait”; whereas 6.7% and 41.6% of them were portrayed as having “neutral” and “negative” overall personal trait respectively.

**Table 5.2**

Economic conditions, abilities to self-care and the overall personal trait of older characters, 1987-2006 (%)

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Economic conditions	
Relatively good	40.4
Relatively disadvantaged	47.2
No observable details for judgment	12.4
Self-care abilities	
Independent	67.4
Having minor limitations	21.3
Dependent	11.2
The overall personal trait	
Positive	51.7
Neutral	6.7
Negative	41.6
Total	100.0
(N)	(89)

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An older character who was coded as having “relatively disadvantaged economic condition”, being “dependent” and portrayed as possessing a “negative overall personal trait” can be seen in episode 19, *Hong Kong Older People Living in Mainland China Residential Care Homes*. This episode revealed a trend of an increasing number of older people who are choosing to live in mainland China after retirement. All together there were five older characters in this episode. Ms. Poon (character 33) was “in relatively disadvantaged economic condition” as she had not saved enough money in her working years for retirement and she burst into tears while she was talking about her situation. Therefore she was coded as “sad”. However, she was able to rely on her brother living in Guangzhou for her livelihood and medical expenses after retirement, showing that she was “socially involved”. Throughout the episodes, Poon was sitting in a wheelchair and appeared doing

nothing, she was considered as “inactive”, “non-productive” and “dependent”. Of all her traits displayed, the numbers of negative personal traits (“inactive”, “non-productive” and “dependent”) outweigh the one positive trait (“socially involved”), indicating that Poon was portrayed as possessing a “negative overall personal trait”. Poon’s brother (character 34), was not able to afford Poon’s medical expenses because he had to lend money to stand for his own family and his sisters’ spending. He also expressed worry about his sister, Poon’s possible increase in future medication expenditure, indicated that Poon’s brother was coded as “in relatively disadvantaged economic condition” too.

Examples of older characters who were coded as “in relatively good economic condition”, being “independent” and portrayed as possessing “positive overall personal trait” can be found in episode 19, Mr. (character 35) and Mrs. Mak (character 36). Mr. and Mrs. Mak were “in good economic condition” because Mrs Mak in the episode stated explicitly that: “she and her husband earned a high income when they were young”. They were able to fund themselves to live in a residential care home in Guangzhou in which would take care of all their needs until they die. Mr. and Mrs. Mak were also coded as “independent” older characters. They are absent from any chronic illnesses. For example, Mrs. Mak is not only able to do housework, she is also “productive” as she prepares meals for Mr. Mak everyday. Mr. and Mrs. Mak were “active” and “socially involved” as they enjoy singing very much and had friends around to their place to sing with them every week. As there are no signs of “negative personal traits”, the couple was portrayed as possessing “positive overall personal traits”.

Another example of an older character who was portrayed as possessing a “positive overall personal trait” can be seen in episode 19, Mr. Chan (character 37). He has been living in a residential care home in Panyu for a year. Chan can sustain himself as he can afford fees of a residential care home which indicates that he is “in relatively good economic condition”. He has many friends in the residential care home that he is living in and expresses his happiness of life there. Therefore, he was coded as “socially involved” and “happy”. Despite the fact that he is dissatisfied with the meals provided in the residential care home, he complained using a soft and reasonable pitch of voice in front of the camera, showing that he was “good-tempered”. However, Mr. Chan was portrayed as “non-productive” and “inactive” since he did not engage in any productive activities<sup>103</sup> and did not show any imitative to develop any hobbies or joining any activities in the episode. Of all personal traits considered, most of the traits that Mr. Chan portrayed in the episode were “positive” (“socially involved”, “happy” and “good-tempered”), He was therefore, regarded as an older character with a “positive overall personal traits”. Mr. Chan is an example of older characters “having minor health limitations” because he has to use a stick to assist him in walking.

Episode 21, *Who Am I*, comprises stories of three older characters who are suffering from Alzheimer's disease. There were five older characters in total in the episodes (including the spouses of two patients). Character 42, Mrs. Fok is an example of a “dependent” older character. Mrs. Fok has been suffering from dementia since before the age of 60. Two years ago, her sickness became more serious to the point that she is almost unable to speak and walk (“incapable”), she is

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<sup>103</sup> Examples of productive activities, employment, volunteering, caring of grandchildren or providing informal care to disable friends (Hinterlong, Morrow-Howell and Sherraden 2001:7).

also wheelchair bounded and has to rely on her husband to take care of her in daily life (“dependent”).

Another character in episode 21 was an example of an older character with a “neutral overall personal trait” and “having minor health limitations”. Leung (character 45) is suffering from the early stages of dementia. She is however, “active” in seeking mental exercises which are aimed at delaying the deteriorations of mental functioning, which means that she is still able to recognize words, so she was coded as having minor health limitations”. Leung went out with her husband and joined a patient sharing group frequently (“socially involved”). However, she cried (“sad”) when she imagined what her cognitive functions will be in like the future. Due to her sickness, she had not worked nor did any voluntary service (“non-productive”). Overall, she was depicted as possessing a neutral overall personal trait because equal numbers of “positive” (“active” and “socially involved”) and “negative personal traits” (“sad” and “non-productive”) were found.

Episodes 39, *Planning for Death*, introduced funeral arrangement services provided by a non-governmental organization. The organization teaches older people to plan for funeral arrangements and helped them to face their death positively. The sole character in episode 39, Mrs. Leung (character 89) is another example of an older character being coded as possessing a “neutral overall personal trait”. After the death of her husband, Leung was not able to find her son and daughter (“socially isolated”), but she said that she was still “happy” because she had someone to help her in arranging her death plans. She regarded singing as her favorite hobby (“active”). But she did not work or engage in any kinds of voluntary activities in the episode, hence, she was coded as “non-productive”. Given that the

number of “positive” (“happy” and “active”) and “negative personal traits” (socially isolated” and “non-productive”) were equal, Leung was coded as possessing a “neutral overall personal trait”.

Episode 13, *Problem of Relocating Older People from Old Public Housing Estate* is an episode about showing how unsubstantial the relocation allowance for older people is. The episode consisted of three older characters. Ng (character 23) was an example of a character being coded as “in relatively economic disadvantaged economic condition”. She was also being portrayed as possessing “negative overall personal traits” and with “minor health limitations.” Ng was a CSSA<sup>104</sup> recipient (“relatively economic disadvantaged”). She had lung disease and a cataract, but she is still able to self care for herself (“having minor health limitations”). 30 years ago, Ng divorced and her children went to live with her ex-husband so they had very little contact (“socially isolated”). She cried (“sad”) when she discussed her loneliness. Moving to a new apartment would be a great hardship for Ng as she is illiterate and does not know the procedure to follow in order to relocate (“poorly informed”). Yet, Ng was depicted as “good tempered” as she used a surprisingly gentle tone of voice to tell the moderator that no staff from the Social Welfare Department and Hong Kong Housing Authority were willing to provide assistance to her in regard to the relocating matter. In sum, Ng was determined as possessing a “negative overall personal trait” (“socially isolated”, “sad”, and “poorly informed”) as only one “positive personal trait” (“good tempered”) was shown in the episode.

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<sup>104</sup> CSSA refers to the Hong Kong Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme.



### *Other claims-makers' pressures to documentary workers*

The findings of this study suggested that the major theme among the surveyed episodes was found to be relatively dominated by “negative” themes over the decades. In the present study, in-depth interviews with documentary workers provide possible explanation for such findings: Other claims-makers<sup>105</sup> provide pressure to documentary workers in claims-makings. Contextual social constructionists’ analysis of social problems often highlights the importance of collaborations<sup>106</sup> among different claims-makers. Claims-makers help each other in claims-making activities in order to increase their chances of making successful claims.<sup>107</sup> Interviews with documentary workers supplied the researcher (R) with information about the “operations” between different claims-makers.

Documentary worker 1 (DW1), a public services broadcaster worker, disclosed a common phenomenon that claims-makers such as legislators, district councilors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often approach them<sup>108</sup> actively to press their claims. In order to gain documentary workers’ cooperation, some legislators even providing them with related statistics and typifying examples to make it more convenient in the documentary producing process.

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<sup>105</sup> The term “other claims-makers” refers to those “non-media” claims-makers.

<sup>106</sup> Examples of collaboration between different claims-makers include: lobbying organizations who often invite experts to conduct research on the problem that they want to claim and help them to publish on research findings via the mass media in order to justify their claims. On the other hand, the mass media relies on experts’ statistics to make their discussed topic more persuasive and attractive to audiences. Experts, in this regard, also gain privilege by receiving attention from other claims-makers (Best 2001a).

<sup>107</sup> Successful claims are claims that are able to win media coverage, raise public opinion and receive policy makers’ attention; “it may include influencing social policy-perhaps by getting new law passed, or a new program funded”. (Best 2001a:130; Lowney and Best 1995).

<sup>108</sup> From the interview, “them” here refers to those public services broadcaster workers.

R: Have you or your fraternity met someone whom approached you actively and asked you to produce an older-people-themed documentary?

DW1: It's very often Legislators, District Councilors or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who invite us to publicize their topics. We receive many faxes and phone calls from these people everyday.

R: What topics are the most common? Do you adopt their suggestions?

DW1: Sometimes NGOs have conducted surveys and invited us to publish their findings. While other times legislators invite us to discuss topics that are related to the fields they are concerned with. It is hard to tell. It depends on whether their stories interest us. If their stories are trivial or look like a private matter, we just ignore them. But if they provide comprehensive information and their stories fulfill our selection criteria,<sup>109</sup> then we would use them. It also happens if we feel it is difficult to reject them.

R: What do you mean by comprehensive information?

DW1: They often provide us with "one stop catering". They create a story, provide us with statistics and have a few cases on their hands and they ask if we are interested in adopting their suggested topics.

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<sup>109</sup> DW1: "We choose topics from newspapers, but we avoid topics that have already appeared in News Magazine (produced by TVB) because we have the same target audience. We also avoid topics that have already appeared in our (RTHK) productions such as *Headliner*, *Golden age* or *Legco Review* as we only have limited broadcasting time every week, so we do not want topic duplications."

R: Is that common?

DW1: Yes, many of the secretaries of these Legislators have worked in public relations or as reporters and they know well what we is needed for a story. For example, the director of one OP pressure group in Hong Kong, X, and Legislator 1 and 2 have a very good relationship with the media, so they know how to manipulate the mass media to achieve what they want.

R: Do you mean “they” have a very good relationship with you or the entire mass media?

DW1: the whole field, including me.

R: Why do you find it hard to reject them?

DW1: It is because we are in mutually beneficial relationships and we rely on each other.

R: In what way?

DW1: We often seek to interview different people in one documentary topic, so sometimes we have to invite opinions from Legislators. If they have helped me in the past, it is very hard for us to reject them, unless their stories are really frivolous.

**The interview with a documentary worker employed in a commercial broadcaster (DW 2) revealed that the cooperative relationship between different claims-makers’**

are most likely to occur on any Sunday when there are a few news stories in a week. District councilors who have affiliations with some political parties rally together and discuss topics that they intend to bring up.

R: Did you or your fraternity meet someone who actively approaches you, asking for production of any older-people-themed documentaries?

DW2: Most often it is Sunday that is the day of the week with the least news. Some political parties host press conferences and invite us to report their topic in the news or in documentaries. In these kinds of press conferences, a few district councilors were ready to inform us about the issues concerned.

R: Do they have evidence such as statistics to support?

DW2: Sometimes, they do.

R: Do you use the information they provide?

DW2: Of course, I guess no one would reject it as it is convenient.

R: Are the common topics suggested by legislators about the positive aspects of ageing or focused on the problematic aspects of ageing?

DW2: problematic sides of ageing.

R: Do legislators or political parties invite you more often?

DW2: It is hard to tell, it is a dynamic process. Sometime we actively seek their advice. But if they do not know the topic very well, they may introduce us to their networks such as friends or other district councilors. We build relationships in this way. In other circumstances, they need us to increase their visibility.

From the conversation between two documentary workers, two characteristics were found: a) the relationship between documentary workers and other claims-makers<sup>110</sup> are close. They are in a mutual-aid-relationship: documentary workers need stories from other claims-makers to create topics of documentaries. Via the mass media, claims of other claims-makers can spread to the public. b) Claims-making strategies are reflected: claims-makers favor using statistics and typifying examples to persuade audiences. Back to the core question: why were negative themes commonly found in the surveyed episodes? To answer this question, there is need to think about some key questions asked by contextual social constructionists:

“What sorts of claims are made? Who made the claims in the case? How did the claims-makers characterize this problem? What solutions did they propose?”(Best 1995b:7; 2001c: 2)

In addition to these questions, contextual social constructionists also very often try to find out “what claims-makers can win” through claims-making? Would they

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<sup>110</sup> The use of “others claims-makers” is because documentary workers themselves are also parts of the claims-makers. Other claims-makers in this chapter refer to legislators, district councilors and workers of non-governmental organizations.

gain in influence, turf, power, status and even money? (Best 2001a). Hence, if these questions were raised, it was not difficult to have an inference that legislators and district councilors tend to make claims about problems that were encountered by their older supporters or potential older supporters in order to increase their chances to be re-elected in future elections. But why are older supporters are important for legislators and district councilors to win in re-elections? Looking back to the context of Hong Kong, due to the ageing population, a new form of political power has emerged. Research evidence has always suggested that older people tend to have higher political involvement than younger people. Older people are regarded as more influential in terms of political power (Peterson 2000). The larger the size of the older population, the more political influence they have. Votes from older people are crucial to legislators and district councilors' success in elections.

Political involvement of older people can be indicated by their voting participation. For example, the turnout rate of older people in the District Board Election has increased from 44.8% in the 1995 election to 48.2% in the 2003 election (HKCSS 2008:9). Besides, if a comparison of the voter turnout rate of Hong Kong older people in the 1995, 1998, 2000 and 2004 Legislative Council election was made, it would be seen that the rate rose from 37.8% to 50.9% between the 1995 and 1998 elections, and dropped to 45.5% in the 2000 one but re-rose to 52.4% in the 2004 election (Census and Statistic Department 2008b; Kam 2000). These data generally indicate that there were an increasing proportion of older voters in elections. With the increasing proportion, older voters, are becoming the focus of attention among legislators and district councilors. Legislators and district councilors may become particularly aware of older people's needs and demands. As a result, legislators and district councilors tend to be keen on making assertions of

claims on some problems encountered by older voters as these voters might have expectations that claims-makers can help them to solve their problems.

Furthermore, to understand why NGOs are also eager to “invite” documentary workers to publish their research findings, we refer to Loseke’s (1999:31) assumption to provide us with insight. Loseke asserts that workers working in the “troubled-persons industry”<sup>111</sup> tend to advocate types of social problems in need of their social services because “their job depends on continued success of the social problem.” All these illustrations suggest that claims from these mentioned types of claims-makers tend to establish claims with respect to problematic conditions faced by older people and that may be the reason why “negative major themes” were relatively dominant above all other themes in episodes over the decades.

## **2 “Has the Portrayal of Older People in Public Affairs Television Documentaries Varied over the Two Study Periods?”**

To investigate and understand whether there were differences in the portrayal of older people in the public affairs television documentary in Hong Kong over time, the study period was divided into two periods of time for analysis: period one (1987-1996<sup>112</sup>) and period two (1997-2006<sup>113</sup>). Comparisons were made in two

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<sup>111</sup> The troubled-persons industry includes all those places designed to help victims of social problems or to rehabilitate or punish offenders. For examples, this includes everything from prisons to shelters for battered women, from psychiatric hospitals to programs for children at risk, from midnight basketball to programs of Methadone treatment, to programs for teenage mothers.” (Loseke 1999:31).

<sup>112</sup> Period two started from the establishment of a Central Committee on Services to the Elderly People, it symbolized stage two of the elderly problem in Hong Kong as it has already received government recognition.

<sup>113</sup> Period three started from “the establishment of a new and more specialized body to deal with the problem” (the Elderly Commission) to substitute the old one (Central Committee on Services to the

areas: (1) the major theme of the episodes across periods and (2) the portrayal of older characters in public affairs television documentary across periods.

*(1) The major theme of the episodes across periods*

As mentioned before, the major theme of the episodes were classified with three types: positive, neutral and negative. From Table 5.3, it was found that the major theme of the episodes being coded as “negative” had decreased in period two (52.6% in period one vs. 40.0% in period two). Compared with period one, the major theme of the episodes being coded as “neutral” had not varied much between the two periods (15.8% in period one vs. 15.0% in period two).

**Table 5.3**

Distribution of the major theme of the episodes by period (%)

	Period one 1987-1996	Period two 1997-2006
Positive	31.6	45.0
Neutral	15.8	15.0
Negative	52.6	40.0
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(19)	(20)

*(2) The portrayal of older characters in public affairs television documentary across periods*

To understand how older people were portrayed in public affairs documentary three areas were examined: economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall

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Elderly People), which represented stage three of the social problem by (Spector and Kituse 2001:152).



personal trait of older characters. Economic conditions of older characters were classified into two types: relatively good and relatively disadvantaged economic condition. As shown in Table 5.4, economic conditions of older characters in period two showed a striking improvement. There was an increase in proportion of older characters who were depicted as being “in relatively good economic condition” (18.9% in period one vs. 55.8% in period two). At the same time, the proportion of older characters found depicted as being “in relatively disadvantaged economic condition” also had a significant decrease (67.6% in period one vs. 32.7% in period two).

**Table 5.4**

Economic conditions, abilities to self-care and the overall personal trait of older characters by period (%)

	Period one 1987-1996	Period two 1997-2006
Economic conditions:		
Relatively good	18.9	55.8
Relatively disadvantaged	67.6	32.7
No observable details for judgment	13.5	11.5
Self-care abilities:		
Independent	64.9	69.2
Having minor limitations	16.2	25.0
Dependent	18.9	5.8
Overall personal trait:		
Positive	48.6	53.8
Neutral	2.7	9.6
Negative	48.6	36.5
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(37)	(52)

Self-care abilities of older characters were divided into three types: independent, having minor health limitations and dependent. The proportion of older characters

being coded as “independent” was close in the two decades (64.9% in period one vs. 69.2% in period two). There were more older characters in the analysis found to “have minor health limitations” in period two (25%) than period one (16.2%). Additionally, fewer numbers of older characters were coded as “dependent”, which decreased from 18.9% in period one to 5.8% in period two.

The overall personal trait of older characters was classified into one of three categories: positive, neutral and negative. The findings revealed that there was an increased proportion of older characters who were depicted as possessing “positive” (48.6% in period one vs. 53.8% in period two) and “neutral overall personal traits” (2.7% in period one vs. 9.6% in period two) in the second period of the investigation. With respect to the negative overall personal trait, a more than 10% of decrease in period two was found.

In the present study, the majority of the major theme of the surveyed episodes was “negative”. However, the proportion of the episodes with a “negative” theme had decreased in period two. The findings also revealed an amelioration of economic conditions, abilities to self care and the overall personal trait of older characters in the recent decade. So, what are the contributing factors to these positive changes? There are two factors: (1) shifting in the typifications of older people and later life and (2) the domain expansion of the policies for older people.

*(1) Shifting in the typifications of older people and later life*

According to contextual social constructionists, the analysis of social context<sup>114</sup> is essential to understand the shifting of the typifications of a social problem. An analysis of various government policy addresses found that typifications<sup>115</sup> of older people and later life have gradually changed between different administrations.<sup>116</sup> The government typifications of older people were negative in the 1980s. The following statements were extracted from the 1987 and 1988 policy address and the “White Paper on Social Welfare into the 1990s and the beyond”.<sup>117</sup>

“As time goes by, the proportion of old people in our population will increase. Many people also fear that traditional family ties, on which **the elderly have until now largely depended for support**, are being eroded” (HK government 1987:49).

“There has been increasing public concern recently about the **problems associated with ageing**. Quite apart from financial needs, there are the physical needs of the frail and infirm who can no longer live with their families or on their own” (HK government 1987:49).

“One of the Government’s most important responsibilities is to ensure that our welfare services provide adequate levels of support for the **poor and vulnerable** in our society...But there will always be people in any society who, through no fault of their own, cannot fend for themselves. Our expanding services for the very young, **the**

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<sup>114</sup> Social context refers to “a particular historical moments in particular societies” (Best 1995a:345).

<sup>115</sup> Typifications is used to describe claims-makers’s classification of a problem into a specific spectrum such as “economical, moral or political problem, give descriptions about why the problem exists and attaches solutions with that attribution” (Spector and Kituse 2001; Best 1995b:8, 9). Other aspects of typifications include “images in people’s heads of the types of people and their experiences” (Loseke 1999:25).

<sup>116</sup> Different administrations refer to those of the governors, Sir David Wilson (1987-1992), Mr. Christopher Patten (1992-1997) and Hong Kong’s first Chief Executive, Mr. Tung Chee Hwa (1997-2005).

<sup>117</sup> White Paper: social welfare into the 1990s and beyond was published in 1991.

**elderly** and the physically and mentally handicapped recognize this” (HK Government 1988:67).

“Old age may bring greater **dependency** on the support of others” (HK Government 1990: 30).

As mentioned in Chapter Three, typifications include “images in our heads of the types of people and their experiences” (Loseke 1999:25). As seen from above, older people were typified as problematic (i.e. “frail” or “poor”). The image of older people as “dependent” was widespread. They were regarded as a burden to the family. From these descriptions, the nature of social welfare within Sir David Wilson’s era was aimed only at providing protection for the needy and the vulnerable people (giving charity to the poor). If social welfare for older people was not being regarded as a right for older people, then it implied that welfare spending on older people might largely be contingent to the economic situation of Hong Kong. Thus, in such a way, welfare development for older people in Hong Kong was limited in Wilson’s years. From the policy addressed in 1989 and 1991 for example, there was an absence of discussion of social policy for older people.

However, turning our attention to the last colonial governor, Christopher Patten, it was found that he showed determination to promote the “rights” of older people. By contrast to his predecessor, Governor Wilson, Patten was not evident in singling out a group of frail and miserable older people as his service spots. Instead, the “rights” of all older people were advocated. In the policy address of 1993, for example, the concept of “senior rights” was explicitly stated:

“People have a **right to a dignified and comfortable old age**” (HK Government 1993).

**“A protected old age:** I (Patten) hope to relieve the anxieties which overshadow old age. A long was **to remedy the worst shortfalls in the provision of services for the elderly.** A long way to empower families to provide the warmth and shelter of continued family care for their elderly relatives” (HK Government 1993).

Patten reaffirmed a new typification to the elderly problem: Older people are entitled to be protected by the government. A new typification for later life changed to: “a dignified and comfortable old age”. Following these new typifications, older people should be protected. Therefore different divisions such as Working Group on Care of the Elderly (1993); Ad Hoc Committee on Housing and elderly Services (1994); and Elderly Division in the Health and Welfare Branch (1996) were set up during Patten’s administration to study the shortfalls in the provision of services for older people. The colonial government has not denied that there was a gap between the needs of the older people and the existing provision of social services for older people, but many of the proposed services for older people from the Working Group were not completed before Patten’s leave due to technical problems and lack of suitable sites for the proposals. (HK Government 1994; 1993).

Hong Kong’s first Chief Executive Mr. Tung Chee Hwa started his term in July 1997. Typifications of later life have shown remarkably positive changes. Older people seemed no longer to depend on their families’ support as they were described to be in the 1980s, referenced from his policy addresses in Legislative Council 1997/98 and 2001/02 meetings.

**“To promote the health and sense of worthiness of the elderly,** we will improve medical care, social services and opportunities for the elderly to join in the community life, so that the elderly can lead a more **active and purposeful life.**” (HKSAR Government 1997).

“We endeavour to help the community to better understand the special needs of old age, and to promote healthy aging...**to educate the public on the importance of a healthy and active lifestyle amongst the elderly**. The Elderly Commission is also studying ways to enhance the image of elderly people, including **helping them to pursue lifelong learning and to participate in social activities**” (HKSAR Government 2001).

Older people were re-typified as “active”. They can be active learners and social participants of the community. They are not necessarily associated with different kinds of physical problems. They can age more healthily than their predecessors because the government has tried to educate the public in ways to achieve healthy ageing. From these new typifications and new policy objectives, social policy domains for older people can be said to have expanded.

#### *The domain expansion of the policies for older people*

Theoretically speaking, a successful construction of social policies to tackle a social problem must set out the policies in stages and not implement radical change of policies or to eradicate a problem entirely. In other words, social programs or policies must be designed to lessen a social problem incrementally because if the problem no longer exists, the influence of the claims-makers will also be faded. There will be fewer resources allocated by the government to extend the service scope (Best 2003). To better ensure sustainable developments of the social problem solving industries, some new ideas or policies for a social problem are needed. The process by which claims-makers seek to expand the distribution or scope “of a good, service, or right” gradually refers to “policy domain expansion<sup>118</sup>” (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993).

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<sup>118</sup> Policy domain expansion has been named as “incrementalism” by Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) and policy domain expansion by Best (1990).

Contextual social constructionists place great emphasis on the analysis of social context. The life of a social problem and various social programs as solutions to the problem can vary over time, subject to different contexts. According to Best, a new administration may be dedicated to reducing or expanding the scope of government programs (2003:990). Evidently, apart from new typifications of later life and older people, there was a notable expansion of policy provision for older people since the administration of Mr. Tung Chee Hwa, as compared to the previous governors. In 1997, Tung showed deep concern about older people. He appointed a legislator, Tam Yiu Chung, to set up a new but more specific advisory body, the Elderly Commission (EC), to review the existing policies and services for older people and to gain advice for future policy direction for them. The EC published reports to suggest what was needed for policy frameworks of 2000 and beyond in order to address different coordination problems between different government departments<sup>119</sup> (Chan and Phillips 2002).

Since the Tung's era, pledging "a sense of security, a sense of belonging and a feeling of health and worthiness of older people" has been the main goals of the HKSAR Government. Along with these policy goals, cash was injected to boost care and social services for older people. Social welfare expenditure on the direct

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<sup>119</sup> Some coordination problems in regard to the ways the elderly problem was handled were commonly found between different services professional units and non-governmental organizations around the mid 1990s in Hong Kong, which resulted in service duplication and ineffectiveness. For example, Leathard (2003: 315-316) describes some cooperation problems of long term care services between inter-departments of the government: "community elderly long-term care clients were sometimes receiving seven or eight different types of services from different departments at the same time. Different organizations and professionals currently provide these services. Services thus provided tend to be fragmented and in many cases overlap with elders having to be assessed many times for different types of service, It was therefore very difficult for the elders and their families to understand and make enquiries about their situations and even more difficult for them to participate in the planning, management and delivery of such services".

services for older people<sup>120</sup> in 1997/98 fiscal year was only \$1.5 billion. It was then increased to approximately \$3.66 billion in the 2008/09 fiscal year, achieving a 144% growth (Labour and Welfare Bureau 2008; HKSAR Government 2001). New programs and campaigns for older people were launched to meet the financial, physical, psychological, social and health care demands of them.<sup>121</sup> Social worker 1 (SW1) recognized that the government has placed a greater concern in improving the quality life of older people who are living in the care and attention (C&A) homes in the recent decade.

R: Do you recognize any change in coverage of social services and programs for older people in the recent decade? If yes, in what way?

SW1: I think the services for older people in C&A homes have had more new elements and the overall quality has been enhanced. In the past, we only provided three meals a day and basic health care such as physiotherapy. But some new therapies are available now, including occupational therapy, art therapy and music therapy for older people in order to relieve pain. We also provide hospice care services for them. From these services, we can see that the government now pays more attention to the quality of life of older people. Besides, the working attitude of our staff has become more important nowadays. Our staffs have had the chance to engage in overseas C&A

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<sup>120</sup> The amount of expenditure has excluded public housing and public health care services.

<sup>121</sup> For example, to offer the sense of financial security for older people by introducing Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme in 1998. “The annual Chinese New Year Grant and the Social and Recreational Activities Grant has merged into the regular monthly payment” To promote the sense of belonging for older people by encouraging community and family support through setting up Carers’ Support and Resource Centers; setting priority for family living with older people; reviewing home help services to seek services improvement; placing more resources to subvented residential care places and more “older friendly” rental housing units is available for older people who are not living with their family. To provide older people with a sense of health and worthiness such as setting up 18 Elderly Health Centers; Visiting Health Teams; social centers for older people and encouraging them to participate in volunteer programs (HKSAR Government 2004; 1998; 1997).



home site visits to Japan and Taiwan in order to learn more about overseas social welfare and services for older people.

R: Can you tell me when you recognized these obvious changes?

SW1: Since I started working here (more than 10 years ago). I discovered that the kind of services available for older people has changed gradually. In the past, there was no additional registered social worker stationed in the C&A homes to take care of the psychological needs of the older people who have dementia, but welfare workers took part in consulting services for these older people. Yet, in about 1998, the government allocated more resources for the Hong Kong C&A home. The Government has provided Dementia Supplement, so that the C&A home can have an additional budget to hire registered social workers to help older people with dementia.

**Social workers 3 (SW3) also agreed that there has been an obvious improvement in the coverage of social services and programs for older people now. Social workers 3 pointed out that social services today are more concrete and better organized.**

R: Do you recognize any changes in the image of older people in television documentaries in the recent decade? Why?

SW3: The services nowadays are more diverse and more specific. They have clearer service targets than those in the past. For example, new policies and programs, such as personal emergency link service, central waiting list for subsidized long term care services, and Cheerful Court are designed to improve the social services for older

people. Around the year 2000 and onwards, more and more integrated social services were provided for older people. These services are carried out with better coordination.

From the illustrations above, it is apparent that there were remarkable changes in the service domains for older people. But what helps to justify the scope of social services designed for older people? From contextual social constructionists' views, the answer is "domain expansion" (a new social policy objective). As seen from various policy addresses during the study period, it was found that providing older people with "financial security"<sup>122</sup> and facilitating them to "stay in the community"<sup>123</sup> as long as possible has long been the policy objectives of the past two administrations.<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, the concept of "a feeling of health and worthiness" first emerged in 1997 (HKSAR 1997). "A feeling of health and worthiness" is a new policy direction for the government to improve medical care and opportunities for older people to become active members in the community. Expanded policy domain usually legitimizes additional resources (Best 1990). Programs to promote healthy and active ageing<sup>125</sup> became more diverse than ever

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<sup>122</sup> The concept of financial security has been formally named "a sense of security" since 1997, referenced from the address by the Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa at the 1997/98 Legislative Council meeting.

<sup>123</sup> The concept of staying in the community has been formally named "a sense of belonging" since 1997, referenced from the address by the Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa at the 1997/98 Legislative Council meeting.

<sup>124</sup> For example, in the Address by the Governor, Sir David Wilson at the opening of the 1987/88 session of the Legislative Council said that: "the government has looked at ways of improving social security of the elderly". Wilson also projected to "increase the provision of subvented care-and-attention homes by 1991-1992 from 12 to 28 homes". (Hong Kong Government 1987 paragraph 100 and 106). Another example, in the address by the Governor, Sir Christopher Patten at the opening of the 1993/94 session of the Legislative Council who announced that: "to enable our elderly to remain in the community, close to family and friend is the main aim" of the government (Hong Kong Government 1993 paragraph 91).

<sup>125</sup> Healthy ageing refers to "people, who have minimal or no medical problems, take few or no prescription medications and remain active socially, physically and intellectually" (Dash and Pittman 2005:10). Active ageing "is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age (WHO 2002:12).

before. Different social programs<sup>126</sup> were set to foster this new policy initiative of helping older people to achieve “a sense of worth and healthiness” in their later life. For example social worker 2 said that since the government advocated productive ageing,<sup>127</sup> the care and attention home in which she is working in started designing programs in regard to this concept every year. The government would fund the program if their proposal was accepted.

R: Do you think that new policy initiatives such as productive ageing help to justify more resources provided by the government?

SW2: Yes, since having this new policy objective, there are projects on productive ageing from social welfare department. Then, staff in our agency plan how to organize activities in this regard and can receive funding from these kinds of projects if the project was approved by the social welfare department.

In the previous paragraphs, attempts have been made to illustrate the expansion of the older people policy domain during the recent decade. Recalling the contextual social constructionist assumptions, expansion of social policy domains helps a social problem to perpetuate its life. In the context of Hong Kong, the establishment of the

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<sup>126</sup> For example, “Elder Academy” is a cross sectoral collaboration project between schools and non governmental organizations (NGO) to cultivate a life long learning environment for older people. This project aims to promote a sense of worthiness among older individuals through giving them chances to learn; and to foster inter-generational harmony by encouraging youngsters to become IT or English teachers for these older students. Older people on the other hand can share their life-experiences with youngsters and mutual understanding can be enhanced (Elder Academy 2008). Another example, “Active Ageing Evening”, which is an event carried out in July 2007 which sought to promote active ageing through the celebration of National Day of the People's Republic of China. In this event, older people demonstrated their vital and versatile facets of old age, some of them were involved in cat walk, dancing and singing; while others performed magic (RTHK 2007).

<sup>127</sup> The concept of “productive ageing” includes any activities (i.e. volunteering, taking care of grandchildren, working, providing informal care for sick or disabled relatives or friends and taking class in work-related education and training) performed by older people having social and economic value, whether paid or not (Hinterlong, Morrow-Howell and Sherraden 2001:7).

Elderly Commission in 1997 and older people policy domain expansion afterwards signified stage three of the natural history of elderly problem. Law (1995) asserted that Hong Kong remained in the second stage of its social problem life history in the early 1990s because there was still no strong complaint towards the established bureaucratic procedures in respect to dealing with the elderly problem. Yet, in the present study, the researcher further suggest that the elderly problem in Hong Kong has evolved to stage three after 1997 due to the reasons mentioned.

It is clear that the elderly problem has evolved to stage three of the natural history model, but why has the television portrayal of older people improved in this stage? More specifically, what are the relationships between policy domain expansion and the positive shifting of the images of older people? The three policy pillar, offering older people with “a feeling of health and worthiness” continues to help promote the concept of productive and healthy ageing of older people. This policy objective also indicates the determination of the government to promote positive images of older people and to create an ageless society. Older people, as suggested by this policy initiative, do not necessarily need to be dependable as they can be active members of our community and continue to make contributions towards society. Social worker 2 (SW2) informed the researcher that even though many of the older people who are living in the care and attention (C&A) homes were physically weak or have some kind of cognitive problems, they can still be productive. C & A-Older people can go to schools and other elderly centers to perform gymnastics.

R: As I know, those living in care and attention homes are relatively frail older people, in what way, then can they be productive?

SW2: Programs that are organized differ every year. For example, it is an Olympic Year last year, so we asked those relatively healthy older people to perform gymnastics. Then we invited these older people to perform gymnastics in other elderly centers and schools. In this program, older people taught younger people to do gymnastic moves. After that, students also performed magic for our older people and taught them how to perform magic. Older people and students exchanged mementos afterwards. In this way, both younger and older can be happy together. We want to promote the self-confidence of the older people and foster students to care more about older people in the community through this program.

Another interview from social worker 3 (SW3) also supports the idea that the effect of older people policy domain expansion improved the images of older people. The social worker recognized the change in image of older people in mass media after the government had launched productive ageing programs. Social worker 3 commented that older people's image had shifted from service receiver to provider of services.

SW3: Even though I have not paid specific attention to television documentary images of older people, the mass media depicted images of older people in general as service receivers in the past, but now they are depicted as provider of services. The government issued social programs to advocate productive ageing, which built awareness in the older population to do voluntary service in the community. On top of this, many older people nowadays know how to use new technology, they are able and willing to learn how to use a computer, which in turn creates an image of an active ager. Mass media images of older people might reflect social programs for older people initiated by the government.

Apart from the productive ageing concept that fosters social participation of older people, social worker 3 added that computer use among older people has helped them in building an active ager image. In fact, the organization of a program named as “Computer for All Ages”<sup>128</sup> is the government’s input to help older people to create an image of a capable older person. Older people can not only “continue to learn, they can also teach” (Brick 2002:7). The widening provision of social policies and programs for older people gives them opportunities to age actively and with dignity; extending their capacities and offering platforms for them to show their competence or to contribute to the community. As a result, the social status, overall well-being of older people and their images are promoted. For these reasons, it is not surprising that the portrayal of older people in recent documentary episodes have shown improvements in economic conditions, self caring abilities and the overall personal trait.

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<sup>128</sup> “Computer for All Ages” is a program designed to teach older people “in day care center and senior’s clubs to use computers. These older people then use their skills to write their life stories, play games with their grandchildren, and search the internet for information. Most of the tutors are elderly volunteers, who only recently learned how to use computers themselves, and who demonstrate the fact that not only can older people continue to learn, they can also teach” (Brick 2002: 7).

## **Chapter Six**

### **Variations in the Portrayal of Older People in Public Affairs Television**

#### **Documentary: Broadcaster, Gender and Period of Production**

This chapter reports the major findings of the second and third research questions of the present research.

This chapter is presented in three major sections. The first addresses the first part of the second research question: “Are there any differences in the portrayal of older people between public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting?” The second section tries to answer the first part of the third research question: “Are there any gender differences in the portrayal of older people in the documentaries?” The third section attempts to compare the portrayal of older people in public affairs television documentary episodes in the two periods of analysis. In other words, it aims to answer the second part of research question two and three.

#### **1 “Are There any Differences in the Portrayal of Older People between Public Service Broadcasting and Commercial Broadcasting?”**

To understand any differences in the portrayal of older people between public service broadcasting, Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) and one of the commercial broadcasting in Hong Kong, Asia Television Limited (ATV), comparisons were made in two areas: (1) the major theme of the episodes by broadcaster and (2) the portrayal of older characters in the episodes.

*(1) The major theme of the episodes presented by broadcaster*

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the major theme of the episodes was classified into three main types: positive, neutral and negative. Table 6.1 shows the distribution of the major theme of the episodes produced by RTHK and ATV. For RTHK documentary episodes, the majority of episodes (53.3%) had a “negative” major theme, whereas, 40% and 6.7% of the episodes had a “positive” and a “neutral” major theme respectively. Concerning the ATV documentary episodes, the highest proportion of episodes were being coded as containing a “negative” major theme (41.7%). The second largest proportion of ATV episodes were coded as containing a “positive” major themes (37.5%) and the major theme of the remaining episodes were “neutral” (20.8%).

**Table 6.1**

Distribution of the major theme of the episodes by broadcaster, 1987-2006 (%)

	RTHK	ATV
Positive	40.0	37.5
Neutral	6.7	20.8
Negative	53.3	41.7
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(15)	(24)

*(2) The portrayal of older characters by broadcaster*

To understand how older people were portrayed in public affairs documentaries produced by different broadcasters, three areas were examined: economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal trait of older characters.



Economic conditions of older characters were classified into two types: relatively good and relatively disadvantaged economic condition. Table 6.2 shows that more RTHK older characters (48.7%) were “in relatively disadvantaged economic condition” as compared to those ATV older characters (46.2%). However, a higher proportion of RTHK older characters (43.2%) than ATV older characters (38.5%) were coded as “in relative good economic condition”. It was also found that a higher proportion of ATV older characters (15.4%) than RTHK older characters (8.1%) were undetermined to fit into any kind of economic condition (“no observable details for judgment”).

Self-care abilities of older characters were divided into three types: independent, having minor health limitations and dependent. It was found that a higher proportion of RTHK older characters were portrayed as “independent” compared with those of ATV (75.7% for RTHK vs. 61.6% for ATV). Yet, more RTHK older characters were portrayed as “having minor health limitations” (24.3% for RTHK vs. 19.2% for ATV). None of the RTHK older character were portrayed as “dependent” in this study. By contrast, 19.2% of ATV older characters were portrayed as “dependent”.

The overall personal trait of older characters was classified into three categories: positive, neutral and negative. It was found that the majority of RTHK older characters (64.9%) were portrayed as possessing a “positive overall personal trait”, but there were only 42.3% of ATV older characters being portrayal in this way. A higher proportion of ATV older characters (48.1%) than RTHK older characters (32.4%) were portrayed as possessing “negative overall personal trait”. Not many of older characters were portrayed as possessing a “neutral overall personal trait”

though, with 9.6% and 2.7% for ATV and RTHK older characters respectively.

**Table 6.2**

Economic conditions, abilities to self care and the overall personal trait of older characters by broadcaster, 1987-2006 (%)

	RTHK	ATV
Economic conditions		
Relatively good	43.2	38.5
Relatively disadvantaged	48.7	46.2
No observable details for judgment	8.1	15.4
Self-care abilities		
Independent	75.7	61.5
Having minor health limitations	24.3	19.2
Dependent	0.0	19.2
The overall personal trait		
Positive	64.9	42.3
Neutral	2.7	9.6
Negative	32.4	48.1
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(37)	(52)

*Public affairs television documentary portrayal of older people by broadcaster*

Recalling Table 6.1, there was a higher proportion of public service broadcasting documentary (RTHK) episodes, being coded as containing a “negative major theme” as compared to that of the commercial broadcasting production (ATV) episodes. Nonetheless, it is not persuasive to draw a conclusion that RTHK producers were more inclined to produce negative older-people-related-themes because the population of the RTHK episodes was very small (N=15) during the period of production. Therefore, it is not easy not to derive a definitive analysis. Furthermore,

if an analysis on the portrayal of older characters by different broadcasters was made (see Table 6.2), the findings suggest that, despite a higher proportion of the major theme of the RTHK episodes being considered as “negative”, the proportion of positive portrayals of RTHK older characters in economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal trait were surprisingly higher than that of the ATV episodes. These findings indicated that although quite a number of RTHK episodes discussed about negative older-people-related-themes, the portrayal of the individual older characters in each of the episodes are not necessarily in ways that focus largely on negative depictions. A higher proportion of RTHK older characters were portrayed as in “relatively good economic condition”, having “better abilities to self-care”, and possessing “positive overall personal trait” as compared to those ATV older characters.

One explanation of the more positive portrayal of RTHK older characters may be due to differentiations in accountability and organizational objectives between public service and commercial broadcasting. RTHK, as a public service broadcaster, is accountable to the Hong Kong Government although it is editorially independent (Lee and Yu 2006). As RTHK depends on public funding for its operation, it is likely to be responsive to the demands of the public. The objectives of RTHK are to “serve, educate and provide quality productions” and to maintain its “impartiality”. “Impartial and quality production” means media productions should not present biased views. Instead, the presentations of any issue should be “more than two sides” (RTHK 2009). Documentary worker 1 (DW1), a public service broadcaster worker illustrated to the researcher (R) how they<sup>129</sup> maintain impartiality whenever

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<sup>129</sup> Form the interview, “they” here refers to public services broadcasting workers

producing older-people-themed episodes. He also emphasized the importance of balanced viewpoints from different people and stressed that public service documentary workers do not add additional sound effects or lighting to stimulate audiences' emotions.

R: Do you think that there might be some differences in the portrayal of older people between the public service broadcaster and commercial broadcaster? Why or Why not?

DW1: I think that the image of older people in the public service broadcaster is more objective... (this will be illustrated in later part of this thesis-p.116)

C: What do you mean by objective?

DW1: We attempt to maintain impartiality and neutrality in our production. We only decide the reporting perspectives after balancing all the views from different people. In the documentary producing processes, we seek objective and balanced comments from different people by frequently questioning or confronting their view points whenever we are suspicious of their arguments, and we also ask for evidence of their conclusion. We bear in mind that we should not distort their messages nor portray older people in ways that victimize them. We do not manipulate sound effects or lighting to affect the feeling and mood of our audience.

To recap, RTHK aims to produce programs without distorted features of the subjects and to provide the public with balanced viewpoints. They also have to maintain a balance of interests between different social and political parties in the

Hong Kong society as they are publicly funded. The performance of RTHK is measured in part by public polls, audience surveys, the Television Appreciation Index Survey, public consultations, listeners' panels, TV advisory panels and focus groups (Legislative Council 2006). Hence, RTHK documentary workers might be more attentive to depict older people in non-judgmental ways. Moreover, another objective of RTHK is to "cater the needs of minority interest groups" which is fundamentally different from that of the commercial sector companies to maximize audienceship as to reap advertising revenues. As such, a publicly funded broadcaster does not need to worry so much about its size of audience and commercial income; it does not have to need to maximize audiences by adopting tabloid<sup>130</sup> portrayal style in its productions.

In comparison, a commercial broadcaster is a business company, accountable only to its management and ultimately its shareholders with an overall goal of making a profit (Wieten, Murdock and Dahlgren 2000). Documentary workers in a commercial broadcaster might have to adopt strategies such as using "extreme or horrifying examples<sup>131</sup>," to typify<sup>132</sup> the magnitude of a social problem or have to manipulate

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<sup>130</sup> This term is used in journalism to describe news topics reported in ways that emphasize the entertaining aspects such as using sensational and vulgar language, visual stimulations, sloganised headlines and reduction in complexity of the story so that viewers' strong emotions are evoked. (Carver and Pikalo 2008; Keeble 2005).

<sup>131</sup> Using extreme or horrifying example is a "standard journalistic technique, it serves as to rivet audiences' emotion and played an important role in the political, social and institutional success of a social problem. It can applied to describe any reporting that evoke the audiences the feelings of horror, shock, revulsion, sadness, anger, tragedy, or any strong negative feelings. Negative emotions may be aroused by detailing gruesome facts of injuries; inhuman treatment or dramatic details of a specific individual case and retain the audiences' attention for the rest of the story"(Johnson 1995:17-23). Media workers also like to focus on "life-and death issues, tales of heroism or villainy to typify the problem to gain attention, sympathy and action" (Best 1990:79).

<sup>132</sup> To classify a condition or a problem into a specific spectrum such as an "economical, moral, political problem, give descriptions about why the problem exists and attaches solutions with that attribution" (Best 1995b:8-9).

sound effects to construct gripping stories that broaden the audience base and gain commercial revenue. The following dialogue between the researcher (R) and one of the commercial broadcasting documentary workers (DW2) introduced some typical tactics of commercial broadcasting documentary workers. DW2 first denied that they are motivated to add additional sound or lighting effects in order to make portrayal of older-people-themed-stories more colorful, thereby causing audiences to remain watching their production. However, documentary worker 2 even said that adding “creative treatments” to episode themes that are related to negative ageing experiences is inevitable.

R: Do you think that there might be some differences in the portrayal of older people between the public service broadcaster and commercial broadcaster? Why or Why not?

DW2: I do not think our productions are different from that of the public service broadcaster in terms of the portrayal of older people. But our time and resources are less than those of the public service broadcaster in comparison... (this will be illustrated in later part of this thesis–p.117) In order to maximize our production speed, we ask an older person questions directly such as: “What makes you happy or unhappy? Can you act that out in front of the camera?” If an older person can not think of what makes him/her happy, we may think of some examples that are best to express the concerned topics of the episodes and ask the older person to act them out directly.

R: How do they act them out? Can you give some examples?

DW2: For example, discussing what makes happy older person, we request the older person to play with his/her grandchildren in the park together. But if the topic is about poor older people, we may ask an older person to eat bread in front of the camera. And we use aside to stress that the older person has to eat bread to substitute a meal.

R: When you produce an older person themed documentary, are you pressured to depict older people in a way that show them as miserable to make the audiences feel compassion for them in order to make the story more colorful and increase the audience numbers?

DW2: No, we are not pressured to do so. The kind of portrayal is subject to the topic, and there is no universal method of portrayal. For example, if the topic is about happy older people, then there is no point for us to portray them as miserable, right?

R: You are right! Topics centered on older people would include positive and negative aspects.

R: Do you or your colleagues use special sound effects or lighting effects to portray miserable or happy older people?

DW2: Yes, if we want to mould happy older people, we focus on their smiling action. For miserable older people, we add some music to convey a sense of sorrow; we use dim lighting and we tune the shot into a slow walking motion of older people. Sometimes, if older people react slowly, they can not adapt to our time constraints and we can not get what we need in the story (miserable characteristics of older people are amplified). Then we have to add some effects between the shots to

compensate for what they could not express clearly in front of the camera. Our role is to stress the magnitude of the story, to present their miserable characteristics more explicitly in order to capture the audience's attention for the remaining parts of the story. If we do not use these effects, audiences might be bored and simply change to other channels, so these elements are unavoidable.

Apart from employing extreme typifying examples and dramatic filming techniques to grab the audience's attention, interviews with documentary workers 1 and 2 both suggested that differentiations in the adequacies of resources is perhaps another factor for the depiction of older people who appeared more positive in public services broadcaster produced documentaries:

R: Do you think that there might be some differences in the portrayal of older people between the public service broadcaster and commercial broadcaster? Why or Why not?

DW1: I think the image of older people in public service broadcaster is more objective. Because what we have is time. The differences between the public service broadcaster and the commercial broadcaster are that we have much more time (8 weeks) than commercial broadcaster (5–6 weeks) for our production process. We have more time to do pre-shooting research. Therefore, we can minimize the risk of jumping to over-simplified conclusions due to the inadequacy of time. Also, we are free from editorial pressure, we are not required to fit the audiences' taste, yet those producers in commercial broadcaster, are the opposite, and might have to think about how to produce “noised” episodes.



R: Do you think that there might be some differences in the portrayal of older people between the public service broadcaster and commercial broadcaster? Why or Why not?

DW2: I do not think our productions are different from that of the public service broadcaster in terms of the portrayal of older people. But our time and resources are less than those of the public service broadcaster in comparison. We only have three to four weeks for our production. Our schedules are very tight. Most of the time, pre-shooting research and shooting are done within the same day. We do not have time like those who are working in the public service broadcaster that they can spend a few days to talk to the older person and capture different livelihood facets of him/her.

Public services documentary worker (DW1) emphasized that they have plenty of time to make one story and do pre-shooting preparations. Quite the opposite, commercial documentary worker (DW2) expressed their urgency in their schedule, they only have 50% of the production time (4 weeks) of that of the public services broadcaster (8 weeks) and let alone have the time for pre-shooting research. Documentary worker 2 admitted that due to the time limitation, it is not possible for them to spend a few days to closely follow with older people.

## **2 “Are There any Gender Differences in the Portrayal of Older People in the Documentaries?”**

To answer this research question, three domains were examined: economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal trait of older characters.

Economic conditions of older characters were classified into two types: relatively good and relatively disadvantaged economic condition. Table 6.3 shows that 48.7% of older male characters and 32.7% of older female characters were depicted as being “in relatively good economic condition”. The table also indicates that more older female characters (50.0%) were depicted as being “in relatively disadvantaged economic condition” as compared to their male counterparts (41.0%). 10.3% of older male characters and 13.5% of older female characters in this study were absent from any observable details for the researcher to judge the kind of economic conditions they are in.

**Table 6.3**

Economic conditions, abilities to self-care and the overall personal trait of older characters by gender, 1987-2006 (%)

	Older male characters	Older female Characters
<b>Economic conditions</b>		
Relatively good	48.7	32.7
Relatively disadvantaged	41.0	50.0
No observable details for judgment	10.3	13.5
<b>Self-care abilities</b>		
Independent	79.5	58.0
Having minor health limitations	10.3	30.0
Dependent	10.3	12.0
<b>The overall personal trait</b>		
Positive	64.1	44.0
Neutral	5.1	6.0
Negative	30.8	50.0
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(39)	(50)

Self-care ability of the older character was classified into three types: independent, having minor health limitations, and dependent. About 80% of the older male characters in this study were depicted as being “independent”, but only 58% of older female characters in comparison. Around one-tenth of the older male characters and one-third of older female characters were depicted as “having minor health limitations”. The proportion of older male characters and older female characters being portrayed as “dependent”, was 10.3% and 12% respectively.

The overall personal trait of the older characters was classified into three categories: positive, neutral and negative. As indicated in Table 6.3, the majority of older male characters (60%) were depicted as possessing “positive overall personal trait”, whereas around 30% were depicted as having a “negative overall personal trait”. The rest (5.1%) of older male characters were coded as possessing “neutral overall personal trait”. 50% of the older female characters in the analysis were depicted as possessing “negative overall personal trait”, whereas 44.0% and 6.0% of them were depicted as possessing “positive” and “neutral” overall personal trait respectively.

In summary, older male characters in the present study were somewhat better depicted than their female counterparts in all areas of study, including economic condition, self-care ability and the overall personal trait. “Gender inequality” may be able to account for these disparities. In the following, the researcher attempt to use “gender inequality” as a core argument to illustrate how this determinant might affect the lives older male and older female as well as their television depictions, using economic condition as a case study in particular.

### *Gender inequality*

Gender inequality provides an alternative explanation for the gender difference in the portrayal of the economic conditions of the older people in television documentaries. In Chinese tradition, men were commonly held to be the breadwinner of the family, whereas women were housewives who were in charge of the household work and child-care. Women, basically, were less economically active than their husband. Not every woman had a full-time paid work during their younger ages. For example, there was only 43.6% of Hong Kong women engaged in paid labor in 1976 (Census and Statistics Department 1976). Even if some of the women had participated in the labor force, income disparity between male and female workers in lifetime is apparent. For example, during the parenting years of the present cohort of older people, the female-male earning ratio was 0.60.<sup>133</sup> In other words, the average monthly earning of women was usually only 60% of men's (Chung 1996). Besides, it is evident that a higher proportion of female rather than male older workers were engaged in jobs earning \$2000 or less in 2006 (8.2% for older female workers vs. 4.3% for older male workers), whereas there was a higher proportion of older male workers would had a monthly income if over \$6000 (see Table 6.4).

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<sup>133</sup> Chung (1996) found that the female-male earning ratio of Hong Kong people who were 35-39 years old in 1976 was 0.60.

**Table 6.4**

Working Older People<sup>134</sup> by Monthly Income from Main Employment and Sex, 2006

Monthly Income from Main Employment (HK\$)	Working Older People			
	Male		Female	
	Number	%	Number	%
< 2,000	1923	4.3	1090	8.2
2,000 – 3,999	4622	10.4	2510	18.9
4,000 – 5,999	10141	22.9	3374	25.5
6,000 – 7,999	7352	16.6	1736	13.1
8,000 – 9,999	4155	9.4	1016	7.7
10,000 – 14,999	6165	13.9	1543	11.6
15,000 – 19,999	2518	5.7	567	4.3
≥ 20,000	7385	16.7	1414	10.7
Total	44261	100.0	13250	100.0
Median monthly income from main employment (HK\$)	7,000		5,000	

(Census and Statistics Department 2008a:53)

Furthermore, the data of the Census and Statistics Department (see Table 6.5) suggested that employed women have a greater tendency than employed men to be engaged in lower paid occupations such as clerical and elementary positions, with the ratio being 2.7:1 and 1.7:1 respectively. Female workers were also less likely than their male counterparts to take up higher paid managerial (1:2.4) and professional positions (1:1.7). On top of this, the table also shows that there were male-female income disparities<sup>135</sup> in nearly all occupations. Consequently, female workers were not only earned less than male workers, they were also not able to accumulate pension as great as male workers did. These differences in occupational inequalities

<sup>134</sup> The figure excludes unpaid family workers.

<sup>135</sup> “Male-female income disparities” is a term used to describe the earning gaps between males and females (Kendall 2007).

between genders are the combined result of gender inequality in education<sup>136</sup>, interrupted or part-time work histories due to family responsibilities<sup>137</sup> and occupational gender role stereotypes.<sup>138</sup> In long term, earning inequality by gender determines the material conditions of people in their later lives (Arber, Davidson and Ginn 2003).

As explained above, gender inequality is a recognized social phenomenon in Hong Kong. This social phenomenon might thus affect the perceptions of documentary workers about the lives of many older people and eventually affect their decision on gender difference in their portrayal. In other words, with gender inequality, the portrayal of older women as more economically disadvantaged than older men seems reasonable. The same logic may also apply to the male-female differences in health conditions or even extend to their self-care ability as they have different access to resources.

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<sup>136</sup> Due to the preferences for sons (over daughters) culture of many Chinese families, girls often did not have the same access to education opportunities as boys before the implantation of the nine-year compulsory education policy in 1978. The proportion of older females with no schooling or only pre-primary education was significantly higher than older males (83.8% vs. 64.8%) (Census and Statistics Department 2008a).

<sup>137</sup> Women are usually found to “withdraw from the labor force to get married and /or have children. Some of these women might “re-enter the labor force after their children have grown to an age when they are deemed to need lesser maternal care and attention” (Lee, 2001:40). Interrupted work histories of women The importance of family responsibilities of women was influenced by the socialization (the process of people learning “gender appropriated roles”) Human being are socially expected to behave according to some widely held assumptions such as being “masculine” means to be tough, active, independent and adventurous. By contrast, being “feminine” is associated with female’s inborn role as wife and mother, being caring, passive, dependent, delicate and emotional. With respect to gender at work, men typically work outside the home settings and women, the opposite typically dedicating most of their effort at home doing nurturing activities (Holmes 2009).

<sup>138</sup> Occupational gender stereotype cause men and women to “not consider certain occupations because they are nontraditional for their” “appropriated gender roles” (Gray 2008:19). For example women are expected to give priority to household and child care work such as nursing, teaching and cleaning (Stanfors 2006). Men are expected to do jobs (i.e. such as being construction workers, policemen, firefighters, doctors and engineers) that show one’s physical strength, aggressiveness, ability to undertake risks (Furchtgott-Roth and Stolba 2001). Occupational gender stereotypes prevent the invasion of women into certain higher paid positions (i.e. The Hong Kong Fire Brigade only began to recruit women in 1993 (Women’s Commission 2008).) and perpetuate gender inequality in income (Kendall 2007). As a result, not many women are engaged in jobs that are considered as “male-dominated jobs” (Anderson and Taylor 2007).

**Table 6.5**

Employed people by occupation of main employment and sex; and their median monthly employment earnings, 2006

Year and Occupation	Number of people (In thousand)		Amount (In thousand)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2006				
Managers and administrators	241.5	100.3	30	26
Professionals	149.1	84.7	30	28
Associate professionals	365.0	291.3	15	15
Clerks	142.0	388.5	9.5	9
Service workers and shop sales workers	251.3	263.3	10	6.5
Craft and related workers	249.9	9.0	9.5	8
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	201.4	21.6	9.5	5.5
Elementary occupations	235.7	399.3	6.8	3.4
Others	4.6	2.4	/	/

Census and Statistics Department (2008b:105; 137).<sup>139</sup>

### **3 “Has the Differences in the Portrayal of Older People between Public Service Broadcasting and Commercial Broadcasting Varied over the Two Study Periods?”**

To answer this question, comparisons were made in two areas: (1) The major theme of the episode by broadcaster across periods and (2) economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal trait of older characters by broadcasters across periods.

<sup>139</sup> The data in Table 6.5: Employed people by occupation of main employment and sex; and their median monthly employment earnings was first developed based on “International Standard Classification of Occupations (1988) with local adaptations for Hong Kong in 1993 (Census and Statistics Department 2008b).

*(1) The major theme of the episodes by broadcaster across the two periods*

The major theme of the episodes was mainly classified with in three categories: positive, neutral and negative. As shown in Table 6.6, RTHK showed a considerable decrease (80% in period one vs. 40% in period two) and ATV showed a slightly decrease (42.9% in period one vs. 40% in period two) on the major theme of the episodes being coded as “negative” in period two. Moreover, both of the episodes produced by RTHK (20% in period one vs. 50% in period two) and ATV (35.7% in period one vs. 40% in period two) in the second period of study found an increase in the major theme of the episodes being coded as “positive”. An increased proportion of episodes with a “neutral” major theme was found in RTHK (0% in period one vs. 10% in period two), but that is not true for ATV (21.4% in period one vs. 20% in period two) episodes.

**Table 6.6**

Distribution of the major theme of the episodes by broadcaster and by period (%)

	Period one 1987-1996 (RTHK) The Hong Kong Connection	Period two 1997-2006 (RTHK) The Hong Kong Connection	Period one 1987-1996 (ATV) Chasing Current Affairs	Period two 1997-2006 (ATV) Chasing Current Affairs
Positive	20	50	35.7	40
Neutral	0	10	21.4	20
Negative	80	40	42.9	40
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(5)	(10)	(14)	(10)



(1) Economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal trait of older characters by broadcaster across periods

The economic conditions of older characters were mainly classified as two types: relatively good or relatively disadvantaged. As seen in Table 6.7, there were a large increase in the percentage of RTHK (0.0% in period one vs. 64.0% in period two) and ATV (28.0% in period one vs. 48.1% in period two) where older characters were depicted as having “relatively good economic condition” in period two. There were also a decrease in the proportion of ATV (60.0% in period one vs. 33.3% in period two) and RTHK (83.3% in period one vs. 32.0% in period two) where older characters were depicted as being “in relatively disadvantaged economic condition” in period two.

Self-care abilities of older characters were divided into three categories: independent, having minor health limitations and dependent. As for the proportion of older characters with an “independent” depiction of self-care abilities, an increase was found in ATV characters (56.0% in period one vs. 66.7% in period two) but a decrease was found in RTHK (83.3% in period one vs. 72.0% in period two) characters in the second period of study as compared to the first period. The proportion of ATV characters being coded as “dependent” has decreased in period two (28.0% in period one vs. 11.1% in period two). No RTHK character in this study was coded as “dependent”. The proportion of older characters “having minor health limitations”, in both ATV (16.0% in period one vs. 22.2% in period two) and RTHK (16.7% in period one vs. 28.0% in period two) episodes increased by the second study period.

**Table 6.7**

Economic conditions, abilities to self-care and the overall personal trait of major characters by broadcaster and by period (%)

	Period one 1987-1996 (ATV) Chasing Current Affairs	Period two 1997-2006 (ATV) Chasing Current Affairs	Period one 1987-1996 (RTHK) The Hong Kong Connection	Period two 1997-2006 (RTHK) The Hong Kong Connection
Economic conditions				
Relatively good	28.0	48.1	0.0	64.0
Relatively disadvantaged	60.0	33.3	83.3	32.0
No observable details for judgment	12.0	18.5	16.7	4.0
Self-care abilities				
Independent	56.0	66.7	83.3	72.0
Having minor health limitations	16.0	22.2	16.7	28.0
Dependent	28.0	11.1	0.0	0.0
The overall personal trait				
Positive	44.0	40.7	58.3	68.0
Neutral	0.0	18.5	8.3	0.0
Negative	56.0	40.7	33.3	32.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(25)	(27)	(12)	(25)

The overall personal trait of older characters was classified into three categories: positive, neutral and negative. According to Table 6.7, a lower proportion of ATV characters in period two were depicted as possessing “positive” overall personal trait (44.0% in period one vs. 40.7% in period two). Also, in period two, an increase was found in the proportion of older characters with “neutral depiction of overall personal trait” (0.0% in period one vs. 18.5% in period two). A decrease was found in ATV characters with “negative overall personal trait” (56.0% in period one vs. 40.7% in

period two). For RTHK characters in period two, there was about a 10% increase in the proportion of positive depiction of the overall personal trait when compared to period one. None of the RTHK characters was depicted as possessing “neutral overall personal trait” in period two and the proportion of characters with a “negative depiction of overall personal trait” also did not vary much (33.3% in period one vs. 32.0% in period two).

#### **4 “Has the Gender Differences in the Portrayal of Older People in the Documentaries Varied over the Two Study Periods?”**

To find out if the gender differences in the portrayal of older people in the documentary change over time, three areas were examined: economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal trait.

##### *Gender differences in the portrayal of older people in public affairs documentary across the two periods*

Table 6.8 compares economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal trait of older male and older female characters in the two study periods. Economic conditions of older characters were classified into two types: relatively good and relatively disadvantaged economic condition. It was found that there was a remarkable decrease in the percentage of the depiction with respect to the “relatively disadvantaged economic condition” for both older male (66.7% in period one vs. 25.0% in period two) and older female characters (68.2% in period one vs. 39.3% in period two) in period two. Also, a higher proportion of both older male (26.7% in period one vs. 62.5% in period two) and older female characters (13.6% in period

one vs. 50.0% in period two) were depicted as being “in relatively good economic condition”.

**Table 6.8**

Economic conditions, abilities to self care and the overall personal trait by gender and by period (%)

	Period one 1987-1996 Older male characters	Period two 1997-2006 Older male characters	Period one 1987-1996 Older female characters	Period two 1997-2006 Older female characters
<b>Economic conditions</b>				
Relatively good	26.7	62.5	13.6	50.0
Relatively disadvantaged	66.7	25.0	68.2	39.3
No observable details for judgment	6.7	12.5	18.2	10.7
<b>Self-care abilities</b>				
Independent	73.3	83.3	59.1	57.1
Having minor health limitations	20.0	4.2	22.7	35.7
Dependent	6.7	12.5	18.2	7.1
<b>The overall personal trait</b>				
Positive	60.0	66.7	40.9	46.4
Neutral	6.7	4.2	0.0	10.7
Negative	33.3	29.2	59.1	42.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(15)	(24)	(22)	(28)

Self-care abilities of older characters were divided into three categories: independent, having minor health limitations and dependent. Concerning self-care abilities, the majority of older male and older female characters in period two were depicted as “independent”. There was a 10% increase of older male characters who were as “independent” in period two (73.3% in period one vs. 83.3% in period two). The percentage of older female characters being coded as “independent” was similar

in the two periods (59.1% in period one vs. 57.1% in period two). It was found that a lower percentage of older male characters (20.0% in period one vs. 4.2% in period two) and a higher percentage of older female characters (22.7% in period one vs. 35.7% in period two) were depicted as being “having minor health limitations” in period two. There was an increase in the percentage of older male characters (6.7% in period one vs. 12.5% in period two) and a decrease in the percentage of older female characters (18.2% in period one vs. 7.1% in period two) who were coded as “dependent” in period two.

The overall personal trait of older characters was classified into three categories: positive, neutral and negative. Considering the overall personal trait of the older characters, there were both a mild increase in the percentage of older male characters (60.0% in period one vs. 66.7% in period two) and older female characters (40.9% in period one vs. 46.4% in period two) who were coded as possessing “positive overall personal trait” in period two. Besides, a lower percentage of both older male (33.3% in period one vs. 29.2% in period two) and older female characters (59.1% in period one vs. 42.9% in period two) were coded as possessing “negative overall personal trait” in period two. It was also found that a lower percentage of older male characters (6.7% in period one vs. 4.2% in period two) and a higher percentage of older female characters (0.0% in period one vs. 10.7% in period two) were depicted as having “neutral overall personal trait” in period two.

With regard to Tables 6.6 to 6.8, the findings show certain consistencies in the portrayal of older people in period two as they shifted from negative to more positive when compared to the findings in Chapter Five. The findings suggested that

this trend was not limited to the variable, “period” only, but can also be applied to the other two variables: “gender” and “broadcaster”. In general, both older male and female characters showed improved trends in the depiction of their economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal trait from period one to period two. Of the portrayal of older characters by different broadcasters in the recent decade, the findings indicated that there was an improved depiction in most of the mentioned areas. Thirdly, the major theme of the episode by both broadcasters showed a decrease in the proportion of a “negative” theme from period one to period two.

Because the population of the present study is 39, if further divisions were made based on the two other variables (“period and gender” and “period and channel”), the population would become too small and the findings produced may not be deterministic. Hence, the findings of Table 6.6 to 6.8 were just suggestive. As the explanations of why older people have an improved image in period two have already been given in Chapter Five, the researcher will not discuss the findings of Table 6.6 to 6.8 in detail in this chapter to avoid repetition of analysis from Chapter Five. The creation of these tables aimed to provides further reference for readers as to how older people are portrayed by different broadcasters and whether there are gender differences between older people and if these have varied over decades.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusions

This chapter is divided into four main parts: a summary of the findings, implications, limitations and recommendation for future study.

#### 1 Summary of the Study

This study primarily aims to explore public affairs television documentary portrayal of older people in Hong Kong. It consists of three major areas of investigation: the trends and changes in the portrayal of older people; the differences in the portrayal of older people between public service and commercial broadcasters, and the differences in the portrayal of older people between different genders.

In general, negative major themes were found to be dominated in the study period. As discussed in Chapter Five, this may be due to claims-makers' pressures on documentary workers. Despite over half of the older characters as being portrayed as being "in relatively disadvantaged economic condition", quite a number of them were portrayed as independent and possessing positive overall personal traits thought out the study period. Concerning the media portrayal of older people in different periods, a higher proportion of older characters were presented as wealthier, less dependent, and less amount of them were possessing negative overall personal trait in the recent decade. There were also fewer negative major themed episodes found in period two<sup>140</sup> as compared to the period one.<sup>141</sup> From these findings, it is

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<sup>140</sup> Period two refers to the period between 1987 and 1996, representing stage two of the natural history of the elderly problem in Hong Kong.

apparent that there was an improvement in the overall portrayal of older people in documentary series over the most recently studied ten year period. The positive changes in the television images of older people can be explained by the shifting of how later life and older people were typified in Hong Kong and the expansion of social policy domains for the older population.

Furthermore, differences were found in the portrayal of older people by the two broadcasters. The findings suggest that the images of older characters in the documentary episodes produced by the public service broadcaster (RTHK) were more positive than those in the episodes produced by commercial broadcaster (ATV) in economic conditions, self-care abilities and the overall personal trait. One possible explanation of these differences is due to the differences of organizational objectives and mission between public service and commercial broadcasters. Public service broadcasters tend to have the major aim of informing and to an extent, educating the public, so they do not require adopting extreme social problem typifying techniques to gain the public's attention. They do not need to attract revenues from advertising. By contrast, a core objective of commercial broadcasters is to gain profit. Therefore, such broadcasters probably aim to produce documentaries with high ratings so as to attract audiences and larger audience figures, to attract advertisers.

Thirdly, to understand the gender difference in the portrayal of older people, comparisons were made in the above three mentioned areas. Older male characters were basically portrayed as being better-off than older female characters in regard to

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<sup>141</sup> Period one refers to the period between 1997 and 2006, representing stage three of the natural history of the elderly problem in Hong Kong.



economic conditions. They were also better depicted with respect to self-care abilities and the overall personal trait. A higher proportion of older male characters in this study were portrayed as better-off compared to their female counterparts. This could be due to gender inequality.

In short, with the combination of the research designs, the main objectives of this study were to a large extent achieved, in that public affairs television images of older people throughout the study period were uncovered. The researcher was also able to provide possible explanations of the changes of the television portrayal of older people in the two study periods and the government's policy reactions to the 'elderly problem' in Hong Kong. Apart from this, variables in this study such as broadcasting type (public service broadcasting or commercial broadcasting) and gender were clearly defined and the differences were substantiated.

## **2 Implications**

The implications of this study comprise two major parts: theoretical and practical implications.

### *Theoretical implications*

An analysis of the interviews with documentary workers<sup>142</sup> substantiates the dynamic and cooperative relationships between different claims-makers in the

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<sup>142</sup> The term "documentary workers" is shorthand used to describe staff engaged in documentary productions. Examples of these staff included documentary producers, editors and photographers. As the interviewees stated explicitly they do not want their job position disclosed, the research used this term to hide their job titles.

claims-making process. It is also evident that claims-makers have tendencies to promote claims related to their own interests. Besides, the present study also highlighted the variable nature of social problems for the reason that all social problems are human constructions. What people at a particular time and in a particular society did not consider a putative condition as a social problem in the past, can be changed to a serious social problem that currently raises vigorous discussions.

From a review of government documents presented in Chapter Five, re-typifications<sup>143</sup> of older people and later life have emerged in the past decade. As such, an older people's policy domain expansion was also attached, showing some characteristics of stage three of the natural history of a social problem. The elderly problem of Hong Kong in different social contexts evolved over time. The differentiations of typifications played a role in affecting the government's reactions to tackle the elderly problem in different administrations. The enlargement of social policies for providing older people with "health and a sense of worthiness" justified new social programs. The scope of social services has become more diverse than ever before.

However, the enlarged and diversified social service scope does not necessarily lead to the image of "welfare dependency"<sup>144</sup> of older people as the new typification of older people emphasizing their usefulness to society. With such a new typification, older people are shaped as individuals who are able to devote

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<sup>143</sup> Re-typifications mean new typifications: new "images in our heads of types of things, experiences and people" (Loseke 1999: 25).

<sup>144</sup> "Welfare dependency is the term used to describe the proportion of people working and paying taxes in proportion to those who are not in employment". People who are not employed dependent on the support of working population and become the burden of the society (Moore 2002: 326).

contributions to society such as volunteering or taking care of their grandchildren in their later life rather than being passive and dependent members of the society who need assistance. More specifically, the room for developing social services to help older people to become active member of society is bigger than in the past and replacing the outdated concept of giving charity to the needy that tend to constructs older people as a miserable and vulnerable group. For this reason, the perceptions of some documentary workers about the lives of many older people today might have improved compared to those of their predecessors. Thus, the ways that older people were represented may have been affected and the television portrayal of older people in the present study had positive changes in the recent 10 years. Regardless of whether the actual livelihoods, health conditions and personal traits of older people in society have really changed, the effects of the government and perhaps other institutions to improve the image of older people was seen.

In addition to the potentially dynamic relationship between claims-makers, documentary worker also provided the researcher with an understanding of the roles of the mass media. Reminiscing about the response of DW1 on being asked about if public service broadcasting documentary workers would passively adopt all claims-makers' suggestions. DW1 said that their decisions were mainly based on whether the content of claims fit their media selection criteria or not. In this light, the mass media are not purely a passive agent transferring all of the claims made by other "non-media" claims-makers. Media claims-makers on the other hand are also active claims-makers who are able to create meanings and establish conclusions and/or provide solutions to an issue or a social problem on their own.

Additionally, the constructionists' conceptualization that the mass media often

employs extreme examples to typify social problems was verified by the conversation with documentary worker of a commercial broadcaster. A commercial documentary worker revealed that focusing on the tragic features of older people is common when documentary topics are about negative themes. However, this concept cannot be applied to public services documentary productions. Public services documentary workers by contrast tend to seek greater neutrality in portraying older people. The constructionists' analysis has its limitation in this regard as the theory assumes that the entire mass media as one of the claims-makers would use extreme typifying examples to portray older people regardless of the nature of the TV broadcaster. In fact, in the interview with public service documentary worker the worker suggested that not all media workers used dramatic typifying example to illustrate a social problem.

### *Practical implications*

The first implication arising is a need for the government to allocate resources to carry out programs to promote media literacy<sup>145</sup> as public affairs television documentaries can be regarded a very important vehicle and platform for claims-makers to publicize their claims. As social problems are social constructions, what audiences see on the television screens are all about matters of selection. Hence, when audiences are watching public affairs documentaries, they need to have

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<sup>145</sup> The concept of "media literacy" consists of three elements: "institution, text and audience. Institutions imply the study of how media texts are produced, the political and economic contexts from which they emerge, the messages their producers intend them to convey. Texts suggest the languages' of the media: how they represent the world, how they use particular structures or grammars to form these representations, how they are composed. Audiences are, of course, the counterparts of producers, traditionally seen as consumers of media texts, and can be studied in terms of their social uses of the media, their tastes and pleasures and their interpretive strategies" (Burn 2007: 3).

the critical mind to evaluate the representations and messages received from public affairs programs to detect if there are any biased portrayals. Audiences might ask themselves: what sorts of claims are being made and who can benefit from such claims? Civic education programs such as media literacy contest or “year of media literacy” can be organized by the support and liaison of different parties, such as various inter-and intra-government departments, NGOs and schools.

The second implication is about the assessment of images of the new older generation. Young and middle aged people today are well-educated and more technologically literate than the current old age cohort and this factor will increase in importance in the future as the middle aged cohorts reach older age. With advancements in technology, circulation of information about health and pre-retirement preparation is improving. More people in this cohort are adapted to social change and have greater awareness of their health. They are living in a society where concepts of active and productive ageing were disseminated by the government. Increasing numbers of people today have investment habits and demand better services and products. When these people grow older, they are often still healthy and active. It is more likely that they will be able to secure their livelihood and support themselves financially after retirement. They are likely to have higher purchasing power and be more willing try new things compared to their predecessors. Perhaps, retirement will be a time for enjoyment and a chance for continuing education in the views of many of these people. Almost certainly, the status of the new older generation will be higher and their images in the mass media will be more positive as they will have better adjustment to later life and they will be

potential customers of the huge silver market.<sup>146</sup>

Thirdly, with respect to the divergence in the depiction of older people between the public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting, the implications of this research question is that it provides a new variable to look at images of older people. Influenced by the commercial consideration, documentary producers in the commercial broadcaster mold older figures in a way that public attention can be captured<sup>147</sup> because they have to compete for viewers in order to assure advertising revenue. The choice of television broadcaster is a new variable affecting the depiction of older characters. Yet, further investigation is needed to confirm whether this finding is a result of contingency.

Additionally, gender as a variable in the present study seems to predict somewhat the economic conditions and self-care abilities of older female characters with which are similar to those found in literature associated with older women with lower socio-economic status and more functional limitations than males of the same age and status. Nonetheless, since the Hong Kong government started to provide nine year compulsory education in the late 1970s, the education level of females in the current cohorts has been significantly improving. The proportion of females aged 15 or above who have attained secondary and higher education has more than doubled over the past 30 years, with 32.2% in 1976 to 71.2 % in 2006 (Census and Statistics Department 2007b). Contrasting with the past, women in Hong Kong, nowadays

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<sup>146</sup> Silver marker refers to “the market segment more or less broadly defined as those people aged 55 and older” (Ong and Phillips 2009; Kohlbacher and Herstatt 2008:xi). These are affluent older people, “home ownership is high among them, and they have substantial saving and relatively high disposal income”. Importantly, they put their money into consumption (Coulmas 2007:75).

<sup>147</sup> For example, some miserable feature (i.e. poor and sick) of an older person might be highlighted.

receive more education than previous generations. Women are less likely to stay at home and many of them are engaged in the paid labor force. The labor force participation rate of women increased from 36.8 in 1961 to 49.5% in 1981 and to 51.6% in 2001. The latest female labor participation rate is 53.1% in 2007 (The Hong Kong Council of Social Service 1997; Census and Statistical Department 2008b; 20081). As many women were able to access education as men did, a growing number of women are doing professional occupations these days. The economic status of them has improved. The gender gap in material conditions of older people is thus expected to be narrowed down in the future.

Last but not least, differences in older men and older women's abilities to self-care may also lessen among the future cohorts of older people. Today in Hong Kong, there is growing information available on women's health promotion programs such as breast and cervical cancer screening and more women are able to diagnose their illnesses at the earlier stages. These health problem prevention practices are proactive and aim to improve public health as well as to reduce the disparities of health status and functional abilities between males and females. For example, there is evidence that chemotherapy used to treat breast cancer is likely to result in osteoporosis and bone loss; and it is the major cause of loss of functional ability among many older women (Vehmanen et al. 2001; Roach 2000). In this sense, early detection of breast cancer can lower the chance of getting osteoporosis and loss in mobility in some ways. Also, as noted above, there is an increasing number of women joining into professional jobs now, it is believed that more health care professionals such as doctors, clinical health researchers, professors and policymakers are women. This may result in a breakthrough of health care knowledge, technology and policies for women. All of these, in turn are likely to

promote positive outcomes to future older women's health (Bird and Rieker 2008) and also functional abilities.

### **3 Limitations to the Study**

In the present study, a number of practical and methodological limitations should be acknowledged, as in any empirical research.

The first limitation of the present study is missing data. Originally, the researcher had planned to investigate all free-of-charge public affairs television documentary episodes<sup>148</sup> from 1987 to 2006. However, due to the unavailability of data, only episodes produced by RTHK and ATV were analyzed. Documentary series of TVB were excluded as the company was not able to assist in providing the relevant material. Another limitation to this study is that twenty two ATV episodes were found to be missing during the study period. Though it is uncertain how many episodes among the missing items were older-people-themed, it is reasonable to assume that only a small portion of them would have been about topics associated with older-people's themes. As the missing items were not focused on a particular year and the number of missing items only constituted less than 2% of the ATV episodes, it is not likely to have produced biased effects in the study.

The third limitation is concerned with categorizing the major theme of the episodes. Merely counting the number of sub theme(s) so as to classify the nature (i.e. positive, neutral or negative) of the episode might be in risk of omitting the consideration of the duration of different sub-theme(s).<sup>149</sup> Recognizing this

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<sup>148</sup> These include episodes produced by RTHK, ATV and TVB.

<sup>149</sup> Omitting the duration of the different sub-theme here refers to the length of different contents. For



potential problem, in the pilot test, the researcher tried to code the episodes by both counting of the number of sub-theme(s) and the length of time of different sub-theme(s). Nevertheless, due to the structure of the episodes, this combined counting method was not applicable because all episodes in this study were basically structured into two main parts.<sup>150</sup> In most of the episodes, two parts of the episode were both focused on the same sub-theme(s). If the content of the episode contained more than a single sub-theme, the content was mixed and operationally difficult to clearly define the length of different sub themes. While for the rest of the episodes, each part of the episode was focused on one or two sub-theme(s), but the sub-theme(s) ended by the part that the sub-theme(s) was structured in. Thus, the length of the sub-theme(s) in the first part and the second part of the episode are almost the same, usually of less than half to one minute duration difference, which makes the conclusion about which sub-theme(s) is dominant not easy to determine.

The fourth limitation of the current study is that older characters in the episodes could not be sub-divided into different chronologic categories. That is, it was not possible to analyze them by, say, younger, middle and oldest-old age groups. It is a well-established fact that there are individual differences in health statuses and functional abilities among different older age groups (Berkman and Ambruoso 2006; Kinsella and Phillips 2005). However, the analysis of older characters based on age was not achievable because the ages of over one-third of the studied characters were uncertain. Neither narrators nor the older characters themselves have disclosed their

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instance, an episode might have one negative and one neutral sub-theme(s), so the categorization would be negative. However, if the counting of the length of time (i.e. the negative sub-theme lasting for 2 minutes, but the neutral sub-theme lasting for 28 minutes) of each sub-theme(s) was added, the finding may differ.

<sup>150</sup> Normally each part of the episode is around 8-13 minutes equally (the whole episodes runs about 16-26 minutes; the duration of each episode usually has a slightly difference as the coverage of the researched episodes include different broadcasting and across different periods of study).

age, which make the sub-grouping impossible. Comparison of different old age groups is only workable if the ages of the subjects were fully provided.

The last limitation is about the generalizability of the study and findings. As the focus of this research is specifically on the depiction of older people on television but not in other mass media sources, the findings may not be generalizable to the entire mass media.

#### **4 Recommendations for Further Study**

There are three major recommendations for further study. This is not a comprehensive future research agenda but rather some practical recommendation as to how the current study could be developed in further research. Firstly, the scope of the future research could be extended, for example, a study of not only older-people-themed episodes is important but episodes that are not using older people as a central theme could also be considered. This is suggested as different-themed episodes could vary in their nature of portrayal of age groups. Documentary workers might be more conscious of their portrayal of older individuals in programs and episodes specifically on older-people's themes, possibly in order to disseminate the kinds of societal concerns or messages that they intended to illustrate. Older people, as the main topic of the episode might be portrayed as either particularly "modeled" or even "deviated". Conversely, public affairs television documentaries that use other topics or subjects as their central themes might include fewer "creative" treatments on the depiction of older people as documentary workers might be less attentive in portraying the minor or supporting characters (older people) in the episodes. If different themed episodes were both

explored, different kinds of findings might be produced in which further comparisons were allowed.

The second recommendation is to investigate the portrayal of older people in other media sources over the same study period such as magazines, children's books or newspapers in order to conduct a large-scale and more wide-ranging research. This would enable a comparison amongst media sources. Research on a variety of media sources may help the researcher to generate a more conclusive assertion about whether the depiction of older people in the mass media over the past decades has really changed to be more positive or not.

Third, the study of images of older people mainly by content analysis is only one way of studying images of older people, some other studies have also investigated their imagery on older people themselves or other people as viewers' perceptions and attitudes. It is easy for people to have the assumption that negative images of older people might induce negative perceptions and attitudes in viewers and vice versa. However, such an assumption has not been substantiated in this research. Hence, if the current study can be expanded, an experimental design project about influences of local documentaries on viewers' attitudes towards older people could be one of the considerations. For example, half of the episodes represented positive images and the other half represented negative images. Pre-tests and post-tests were assigned to the viewers to check whether the portrayal of positive and negative images of older people on television affect the public's perceptions and attitudes or not. Nevertheless, measuring people's attitudes might be the expertise of social psychologists, hence, collaborative efforts with psychologists could be valuable and would provide interdisciplinary insights.

## Appendix I

### A Summary of Sampled Episodes and a General Profile of the Older Characters

This section deals with the summary of each of the episodes. Secondly, some background information about the situation that each of the older character is also described. There are 39 male characters and 50 female characters in total. In the following, each of the characters in the episodes have been assigned a number. These character numbers, episode date, as well as the concerned episode theme are also indicated.

Episode (1) *Conflicts in Co-residence* 《同住難》 1988-1-17 (RTHK)

Summary:

The episode discussed the deficiencies of the new housing policy introduced in 1979.

Character 1, male:

Mr. Lai was one of the victims in a violence case. He was attacked by his apartment-mate with a knife resulting in hand, leg and head injuries. He lived in Sha Kok Estate, Sha Tin.

Character 2, male:

Mr. Yip needed to get up early each morning to work when his apartment-mate was still in sleeping everyday. One of the older people in the apartment, Mr. Lau, was often awoken by the noise made by Yip. Yip-Lau relations were cold, as if

they did not know each other.

Character 3, male:

Mr. Lau was 73 years old; he was in the catering business before retiring. He was a Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme recipient. He was scared of Skinny Yip as he was threatened by Yip with a knife in a fight.

Character 4, female:

Ms. Three was 84 years old and she was a CSSA recipient. She had known his apartment-mates before they moved into the same apartment. As the other two were in poor health condition. Ms. Three was responsible for doing most of the housework.

Character 5, female:

Ms. Lai was 86 years old. She used to be resident housemaid. She now lives with Ms. Three and Ms. Yung. However, she doesn't get along very well with her co-inhabitants. She was a CSSA recipient.

Episode (2) *Content is Better Than Riches* 《知足常樂》 1988-5-22 (RTHK)

Summary:

This episode focused on two optimistic older men, who were having a tough life in other people's views. It also aimed to illustrate that even though there are hardships during the stage of ageing, one can still live a happy life.

Character 6, male:

Mr. Cheng was a 70 years old painter who earned a living by making carbon

pencil drawings. He had four children, three of them had married and moved out. One of his sons had mental problem and did not have a full-time job. Mr. Cheng was the breadwinner of his family. However, his income was roughly \$4000 per month, so it was barely enough for the family monthly expenses.

Character 7, male:

Mr. Lam, 71 years old, was a carpenter. His wife had passed away more than a decade ago. He was retired and now picked up scrap papers and metal cans to sell. He had seven children, five of which were married and moved out. His youngest son was mentally handicapped, while his youngest daughter was been suffering from neurasthenia and Mr. Lam had to take care of her everyday needs.

Episode (3) *Enjoyable Later Life?* 《安享晚年》 1989-5-11 (RTHK)

Summary:

The episode investigated the daily operations of three unregistered private-owned and on government-funded residential care homes to disclose the difficulties for those private-owned residential care homes to maintain quality of service while ensuring profitability at the same time. The program showed the urgency for the government to buy bed places from those private-owned residential cares home.

Episode (4) *Wild Camp for Older People* 《老人大露營》 1990-10-17 (ATV)

Summary:

The story was about how hundreds of older people had a two days one night wild camp in a Sheung Shui secondary school.

Episode (5) *Voluntary Workers Provide Home Repairing Services for Elderly People*

《老人被義工服務》 1992-3-25 (ATV)

Summary:

This was a story about groups of voluntary workers from different backgrounds (including electric-mechanics, nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists) providing free home repair services to older people. Voluntary workers came to older people's homes to see what can be done for them in order to facilitate their movement.

Character 8, female:

Ms. Kowk had been living in this apartment with a group of friends for more than twenty years and they were all between their 70 or 80 years old.

Character 9, female:

Chan was a relatively wealthy older woman whose daughter moved to the United States with her husband. She was frequently visited by a female voluntary worker, who was a daughter-like figure to her. She loved to chat with the voluntary worker.

Episode (6) *Rich in older persons' life* 《老人之充實生活》 1992.4.22 (ATV)

Summary:

The episode told two stories about the retirement life of two older people to illustrate the older people can also enjoy a rich and meaningful life.

Character 10, male:

Mr. Wong was 75 years old and he was a sailor when he was younger. He loved to build ship models as a hobby. His children had moved out and he was living alone. He did not have much savings. His dream was to hold an exhibition to show paper models built by him.

Character 11, male:

Mr. Kwan was 70 years old and worked in a Chinese restaurant. Kwan lived with his wife. He bought an apartment when the price was low and also invested in the stock market, resulting in earning several hundreds of thousands of dollars. With his financial planning, he did not have to worry about his finances in retirement life. He liked to participate in voluntary works.

Episode (7) *Older Voluntary Worker Award Scheme* 《老人義工獎勵計劃》  
1993-2-18 (ATV)

Summary:

By using two examples, this episode illustrated how older people participated in voluntary work, and how this can be beneficial to them as well.

Character 12, female:

Ms. Ho was 70 years old, she had been a volunteer in a social centre for the elderly for ten years. She thought that doing voluntary work could maintain friendships and thought that it is very meaningful to serve other older people. She was awarded a Diamond Award in Older Volunteer Award Scheme by the Hong Kong Christian Service .



Character 13, female:

Ms. Chan was awarded a Diamond Award in an Older Volunteer Award Scheme by Hong Kong Christian Service. She provided weekly service of measuring blood pressure for older people. Chan said voluntary work made her healthier and happier.

Episode (8) *Older People Health Plan* 《老人保健計劃》 1993-4-1 (ATV)

Summary:

The Hong Kong Christian Service setup an older people healthcare scheme in order to help the older population prevent health problems. However, the organizer had only limited resources; therefore it was very difficult for them to expend the scheme. The organizer of the scheme wished that the government could provide assistance for the scheme.

Episode (9) *Outreach Service for Elderly People* 《老人外展社工隊》 1993-6-24  
(ATV)

Summary:

Two voluntary associations provided outreach services for older people. The episode used two cases to show that a lot of older people need aid but they do not know where to seek help.

Character 14, female:

Lee was 89 years old, she had dementia and paranoia and had no ability to take care of herself. She relied on her husband to take care of her in daily life.

However, her husband was hospitalized because of lung disease. She didn't know she was entitled to apply for CSSA. She was only receiving Old Age Allowance (OAA) from the bank, but that sum of money was not enough. As a result, she begged for a living. Social workers discovered her condition and tried to help her in locating her husband in a hospital and brought her to be reunited with him. Unfortunately, her husband was soon died from lung cancer. She had been living alone since then. Social workers visited her regularly to bring her meals, help her to clean the apartment and take a shower.

Character 15, female:

Ms. Chan was over 70 years old. She lived in an old building in Tuen Wan. She rented a bed apartment to live in and the condition of the place was bad. However, she was being forced to move out by her leaser. Her leaser used various means to force her out, including cutting the phone line and the electric supply and letting a dog excrete next to her bed. She could not find a place to move into and was worried about her safety. Luckily, outreach social workers brought her to see a rent officer and explained to the leaser that forcing a leaser to move out was illegal.

Episode (10) *The Problem of Elderly Suicide* 《老人自殺問題》 1993-11-11 (ATV)

Summary:

The elderly suicide problem in Hong Kong has become serious. The episode interviewed two experts to disclose the deficiencies of the Hong Kong health care services provided for older people with mental problems.

Character 16, male:

Mr. Siu immigrated to Hong Kong from mainland China in 1949 to earn a living. He had been living alone for more than 40 years and did not have many friends. His last job was being a security guard for a building and in which he only earned \$2000 per month. He got fired because of weak eyesight and only had \$10000 left at that moment. He jumped from sixth floor of a building in an attempt to end his own life.

Character 17, male:

Mr. Kwan was 67 years old, he suffered from incontinence and had difficulty in moving. He attempted to commit suicide. Since then, he had been hospitalized and was receiving counseling.

Episode (11) *Older People Dancing at a Festival* 《老人舞蹈節》 1994.1.13 (ATV)

Summary:

This was a story about two wheelchair bounded older people joining a dancing competition, showing that disabled older people can still have a colorful life.

Character 18, female:

Ms. Lee was a hundred year old, she had been living in Zaak On care and attention home for five years. She suffered from Alzheimer's disease and cataracts before entering the care and attention home. She was invited to play wheelchair-dance in Dancing Festival for Hong Kong older people.

Character 19, male:

Mr. Chow was 77 years old, he had no children and was living in a care and attention home. He participated in wheelchair-dance in the Dancing Festival for Hong Kong older people.

Episode (12) *Provide Older People with the Sense of Belonging* 《老有所依》

1995-3-20 (RTHK)

Summary:

This episode consisted of three sections. The first section was about a group of older people demonstrating at the Office of the Chief Secretary of the Hong Kong government to fight for retirement protection.

The second section discussed the insufficiency of the Hong Kong medical system in catering to older people's needs.

The last section focused on the lives of some older people living alone and how they were neglected by society.

Character 20, female:

Ms. Tong was 70 years old and lived in Sau Mau Ping Estate. She was a member of the Elderly Rights League.

Character 21, female:

Ms. Fong was 70 years old and had to work six days a week in a labor intensive job.

Character 22, female:

Ms. Sin had participated in the Elderly Rights League before suffering from a stroke. She had subsequently been diagnosed as having a tumor in the bladder so she became less active in the League activities.

Episode (13) *Problem of Relocating Older People from Old Public Housing Estate*

《舊型公屋重建老人搬遷問題》 1995.8.27 (ATV)

Summary:

This was a story showing the insufficiency of the relocation allowance for older people needing relocation. These older people did not know the procedures that needed to be followed in order to relocate, and they sought help from voluntary workers.

Character 23, female:

Ng divorced 30 years ago and her children had been living with her ex-husband. Ng was 73 years old and living in Tsz Ching Estate when she was told to move to a new estate. She had suffered from lung disease and cataracts sometime ago. Moving to a new apartment would have been a great hardship for her.

Character 24, female:

Yuen 's husband had passed away when she was young, she was now 74 years old. Yuen only had a 60 year old brother in Hong Kong, who was not in good health. She was illiterate and did not even know how to find people to do interior decoration in her new apartment. She was afraid that it would be hard for her to adopt a new life in the New Territories because she did not have any friends there

and feared that no one would even notice if she died, like a case she had heard about.

Character 25, female:

Yuen was 83 years old; she was worried about moving and was suffering from insomnia. She did not want to lost contact with her friends living around her.

Episode (14) *Is the CSSA Sufficient For the Lives of Elder People?* 《公援能否養老》  
1995-10-1 (ATV)

Summary:

Some older people who do not receive help from the CSSA, but it does not mean they are enjoying a comfortable life. The episode discussed how the CSSA could not cover all the people in need. The episode advocated the need of retirement protection for all older people.

Character 26, female:

Ms. Kong was in a pressure group to lobby Universal Retirement Protection for older people. Apart form that, she enjoy participating in different activities organized by the elderly center.

Episode (15) *Older People in Ma On Shan enjoying the Christmas* 《馬鞍山老人過聖誕》  
1995-12-24 (ATV)

Summary:

A group of voluntary worker delivered Christmas gifts to retired miners each year.

It was sad that the number of receivers of the gifts decreased each year as some of them passed away.

Episode (16) *Should the Government be Responsible for the Death from the Cold Older People Living Alone?* 《獨居老人凍死政府應否負責》1996.3.3 (ATV)

Summary:

Some of the older people living alone died in the cold weather in the 1996 Lunar New Year. Social workers said the government should have taken responsibility of those incidents because they had neglected the problem. The narrator of the episode commented that welfare policies for older people in Hong Kong were not good enough.

Character 27, female:

Ms. Ho was 89 years old. She had arranged to be hospitalized because she was blind in one eye and the condition of her another eye was getting worse as well.

Character 28, female:

Ms. Chen's home was in poor condition and she did not have money to fix it. She complained of the problem to the Hong Kong Housing Department.

Character 29, male:

Mr. So was in his 70s. He spent his nights on the street on the coldest days.

Character 30, male:

Mr. Kwong said that the government did not concern themselves with the life of a

drifter and this problem was exemplified by no blankets being distributed to them on the coldest days.

Episode (17) *30% of Hong Kong residential care homes are going out of business*  
《本港三成老人院面臨結業威脅》 1996.8.4 (ATV)

Summary:

Some owners of privately owned residential care homes complained about the governments' policies on residential care homes. They said the criteria to get approval from the government was too harsh. A lot of privately owned residential care homes were not qualified because of these harsh terms.

Episode (18) *The "Happiness" of Moving to a New Apartment* 《喬遷之喜》  
1996-9-22 (RTHK)

Summary:

There were around 30000 older people living in public housing, and roughly one third of them were living in soon-to-be leveled public estates, which were more than 30 years old. It was a story about older people living by themselves and the trouble of relocation.

Character 31, female:

Au Yeung was 89 years old. She lived in Tsz Wan Shan Estate. Her husband passed away eight years ago and she had been living alone since then. When she found out that the region where she was living was about dismantled for redevelopment, she requested to relocate to the same region.



Character 32, female:

Ms. Tu was 84 years old. She has lived in Tsz Wan Shan Estate for 30 years. She was a housemaid for 40 years. She stopped doing this job because her older sister, who had been living with her, suffered a stroke. Her sister passed away two years ago and has been retired since then.

Episode (19) *Hong Kong Older People Living in Mainland China Residential Care Homes* 《港人入住國內安老院》 1996.11.24 (ATV)

Summary:

This episode revealed a trend that an increasing number of older people chose to live in mainland China for retirement.

Character 33, female:

Ms. Poon lived in a residential care home in Guangzhou. She suffered from nervous and bones sickness, causing lost of strength in her limbs. She had been working for several decades, earning several hundred dollars monthly and had not much savings. Since she did not marry and had no children, she went to Guangzhou to reunite with her brother, Mr. Poon. Mr. Poon paid her fees for the residential care home.

Character 34, male:

Mr. Poon was the brother of Poon and his wife was a resident of Guangzhou. His income mainly came from the pension of the People's commune. But the pension was not enough to cover the expense of Pun and his own family expenditure at the same time.

Character 35, male:

Mr. Mak and Mrs. Mak had been living in a residential care homes established by the Guangzhou city government for six years. Mr. Mak loved reading books and magazines and singing.

Character 36, female:

Mrs. Mak was 73 years old, she lived in a residential care homes with Mr. Mak in Guangzhou. They had no children.

Character 37, male:

Mr. Chan had been living in a residential care home in Panyu for a year. He had children in Hong Kong but he does not want to become a burden on them so he decided to live in a mainland residential care home.

Episode (20) *Sunset Lyric* 《縱是落日》 1997.2.10 (RTHK)

Summary:

By telling the stories of three older people, the episode illustrated that being old does not mean having to be sad. Older people can have a happy life as well.

Character 38, female:

Ms. Mak was 74 years old and living in home for the aged, she was illiterate when she was younger but learnt how to write after she moved into the home. Mak met a new friend, Lee, there. They hung around together and even dressed a like.

Character 39, female

Lee's husband passed away four years ago. She suffered from glaucoma, resulting in serious deterioration of eyesight in the same year. She met Mak Shuk Ching in the home for the aged and they became friends.

Character 40, male:

Mr. So was a good friend of Mak and Lee. He was responsible for feeding the goldfish and growing plants in the home for the aged.

Episode (21) *Who am I* 《我是誰》 1997-5-12 (RTHK)

Summary:

The story of three older people suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Character 41, female:

Mrs. Yeung was 80 years old and she started showing symptoms of amnesia about ten years ago. Her family were not aware of the seriousness of the symptoms and as a result, she asked to see a doctor several years after the first sign of the symptoms. The diagnosis was that she was suffering from dementia. She also hurt her back last year and had to be hospitalized. After being discharged from the hospital, her dementia became more serious.

Character 42, female:

Mrs. Fok was 66 years old and suffered from dementia before she was 60 years old. Two years ago, her sickness became so serious to the point that she was almost unable to speak and walk and had lost control of excreting. She then had to

rely on her husband to take care her everyday needs.

Character 43, male:

Mr. Fok was 70 years old and he had to take care of his dementia-suffering wife.

He put his wife in a wheelchair and took her for a walk everyday.

Character 44, male:

Mr. Yueng was responsible for taking care of his dementia-suffering wife. He was often got annoyed at the repeated actions of his wife and never understood why she behaved like this.

Character 45, female:

Leung was 73 years old and she often copied newspaper articles in order to preserve her reading ability.

Episode (22) *Older People Going to University and Problems of Establishing Education Courses for them* 《老人上大學情況與辦老人教育之困難》1997.9.28 (ATV)

Summary:

This episode had two foci. The first focus was to show that older people can have a sense of self-worthiness by life-long learning after retirement. The second focus of this episode was to blame the government for not putting adequate resources to subsidizing senior education. Education provided for older people was mostly in the form of short courses and resources for senior education are limited.

Character 46, female:

Tsang was more than 60 years old and worked in the textile industry before retirement. In order to learn English, she traveled from Tsing Yi to Jordan to go to a school. She said her horizons had been broadened since she started learning English. She often studies with her friends at home. Her children paid the tuition fees for her.

Character 47, male:

Mr. Au had children who received higher education. He is now studying in a school providing tertiary education for older people. He made friendships in the school and thought that learning would get rid of the feeling of loneliness.

Episode (23) *Pray for your own fortune* 《自求多福》 1997-10-12 (RTHK)

Summary:

In the 1997 policy address by the Chief Executive, Tong stressed that social welfare for older people, the CSSA scheme was raised to \$2040 in effect from April 1998. Was the CSSA allowance sufficient to support their livelihood? The narrator of the episode said that a lot of older people chose to live in the mainland because of the money problems.

Character 48, female:

Ms. Chan was 84 years old and she had lived in Hong Kong Chi Lin Nunnery for three years. She retired at 73 years of age and applied for CSSA after that. She had high blood pressure and needed to take medicine regularly. Her nephew in China suggested that she move back to her hometown in China to live, but she did

not want to become a burden to her nephew, so she decided to stay in Hong Kong. Chan suffered from lung disease last year and she eventually moved to mainland China to live with relatives.

Character 49, female:

Ms. Lee often traveled between Hong Kong and Fo Shan. Lee suffered from cataracts and her livelihood relied on the monthly \$2060 CSSA. She moved to a home for the aged in China six years ago. However, she does not dare leave Hong Kong for more than 180 days a year as it is a condition entitling the CSSA allowance. She said the CSSA was not enough to cover her expenses in mainland China and Hong Kong and therefore she had to seek help from her relatives.

Character 50, female:

Ms. Ma had lived in Yuen Long for ten years and had bad eyesight. She decided to move back to hometown Shunde to reunite with her brother.

Character 51, female:

Ms. Lai was over 80 years old, her hometown was Dongguan. She suffered from cataracts and neck pain which she had an operation for two years ago.

Episode (24) *The Elderly People Welfare Government Policies Address a Lacks of Vision* 《質疑施政報告老人福利政策乏遠見》 1997-10-19 (ATV)

Summary:

This episode consisted of three sections. The first section discussed the economic hardship faced by two older people by showing the insufficiency of the CSSA to

cover their living expenses.

The second section of the episode investigated the amendment of the residential care homes ordinance.

Character 52, male:

Mr. Lai was a CSSA recipient but he did not think that the CSSA was enough to cover his daily expenses. He was forced to be frugal in order to cover his basic expenses.

Character 53, male:

Mr. Mak was a frugal man as he only consumed two meals a day, instead of three. He did not think the increase in CSSA allowance could help him much, as it took some time for the policy to be implemented.

Episode (25) *The Controversy of Outsourcing Older People's Catering?* 《照顧老人膳食將由快餐店代替之爭議》 1997-10-19 (ATV)

Summary:

Home Help Service Scheme played an important role in older people services. They delivered meals, tidied up their homes and fed them with medicine. Some people in society advocate the government to let commercial organizations to replace traditional home help service assistants. This episode presented the pros and cons of such a suggestion.

Episode (26) *Discussing the Services of Hong Kong Residential Care Homes* 《本港安老院服務探討》 1998-3-15 (ATV)

Summary:

The numbers of places in the residential care home are not enough for the huge demand of older people. The government delayed building more residential care homes with the excuse of land limitation. However, the government lent the empty space near the doctor hostel of Princess Wales Hospital to a private company to establish high-grade residential care homes, allowing those who could afford it to reside there.

Character 54, female:

Ms. Li was 73 years old and had some difficulties in movement. She needed to take care of her husband, who also suffered from some kind of physical difficulties. She was a CSSA recipient and had applied to live in a residential care home for about three years, but the request was yet to be approved.

Episode (27) *The Effectiveness of the Government Old Age Grant is Doubtful* 《政府發放老人補助金作用成疑》 1998.8.30 (ATV)

Summary:

The Government's allowance for Alzheimer's disease was far too little to cover the expenses of older people with this disease.



Character 55, male:

Mr. Sun had a wife who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. He was the caregiver of his wife.

Episode (28) *Dance Tune of Life* 《生命舞曲》 1999-2-22 (RTHK)

Summary:

The story used dancing in the music as a metaphor to stage of ageing, saying that even though the music is about to end, we should still dance happily and give our best effort as long as the music lasts.

Character 56, male:

Mr. Law was 71 years old and had a good relationship with his wife, Mrs. Law. They loved dancing. They raised seven children and taught dancing to other older people in elderly center after retirement.

Character 57, female:

Mrs. Law is a good dancing partner to her husband, Mr. Law. They often danced in parks.

Character 58, male:

Mr. Cheung was 81 years old. He had been in the education field for more than fifty years. He was a secondary school principal before retiring. He had two children, one had emigrated and another had married a man. His wife had gone to the United States to help take care of their grandchildren. He had struggled as to whether he should go to the US too, but eventually he decided to stay in Hong

Kong.

Episode (29) *One Hundred and Three Years Old* 《103 歲》 2000.1.9 (ATV)

Summary:

The episode told the story of a man who was 103 years old called Chan. This was the story of how Chan contributed to charity.

Character 59 male:

Mr. Chan was a director of Tong Wah Group of Hospitals. He married at the age 25 and his wife passed away two years ago. His home was Dongguan in China. He served in the military when he was younger and then became a businessman. He now spends several days a week participating in a charity. Chan won the Award of Conifer in a competition.

Episode (30) *Learn how to live after you're 80s* 《八十歲才學做人》 2000.5.14 (RTHK)

Summary:

In Hong Kong, elderly abuse is not punished by law; the episode interviewed three older people who were abused.

Character 60, female:

Yau had been a widow since she was young, she raised three children single handedly. She lived with her youngest son for some time but she was not getting along with her daughter-in-law very well. To prevent getting her youngest son

into a dilemma, she then moved to live with her eldest son. Her eldest son was over 60 years old and was an alcoholic. Yau's eldest son sometimes would hit Yau when he was drunk. Yau sought help from social workers. Social workers transferred her to an emergency placement.

Character 61, male:

Mr. Tsui was over 70 years old and suffered a stroke five years ago. He then sought help from his daughter. He wandered the streets for more than 10 hours everyday and ate both meals at an elderly center since he considered himself a burden on his daughter. Tsui's sister visited him every week from Shatin because she was afraid that no one was taking care of him. On one occasion, he encountered a social worker on the street and expressed that he was not happy living with the family. He was then arranged to live in residential a male residential home.

Character 62 female:

Chan was over 80 years old. She had been living with her son's family for several decades. Her father provided financial support from the United States until his death, more than a decade ago. She had to rely on her son since then. Her son did not allow her to eat with the family by saying that she did not pay for the meal. She then applied for the CSSA and thought that the CSSA would help her out of this situation and would ease the tension with her son. However, her son's attitude did not change and he still kept scolding her. The requirements to be a CSSA recipient have changed since 1999. A CSSA recipient had to be living by themselves, so she decided to move out and live alone finally.

Episode (31) A “Sense of Security” for older people? 《老有所養》2001-7-22 (ATV)

Summary:

The story was about several abused older people.

Character 63, male:

Mr. Chan had problems with movement. He did not work and lived with his wife.

His son and daughter-in-law often hit him because they blamed him for having to pay various bills for him. He had a history of attempted suicide.

Character 64, female:

Mrs. Chan lived with Mr. Chan and faced the same harsh treatment from their son.

She thought of committing suicide.

Character 65, male:

Mr. Leung was near by 80 years old and lived alone. He and his children jointly applied for public housing. He was only given by \$300 from his children. As a result, he had to figure out how to support his everyday needs by himself. He went to Shim Shui Po everyday to collect and sell scrap paper to earn some extra money. He seldom talked to his children and they did not have meals together.

Episode (32) *Going back* 《歸去來兮》 2002.1. 6 (RTHK)

Summary:

The episode introduced the first a non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) providing residential care services in the mainland. It started at the

beginning of last year, gives older people an alternative choice when looking for residential care homes.

Character 66, male:

Mr. Wong had three sons and he worked in property management until retirement five year ago. He lived with his eldest son in public housing and his wife had passed away. He chose to live in a residential care home in China eventually and occasionally traveled to Hong Kong to see his grandchildren and buy medicine. The residential care home which he lives in is located at Zhaoqing city near the countryside of Gaoyao.

Character 67, male:

Chun was Mr. Wong's roommate and friend. He moved to the same residential care home three months ago. His son and daughter-in-law needed to work everyday. He worked for a transnational company before his retirement. Some of his family members are in Hong Kong and the United States.

Character 68, male:

Ms. Yeung suffered a stroke two years ago and has had difficulty in movement since then. He did not have enough money to live in a residential care homes run by the private sector, and it took two years before he was being assigned to a subvented residential care home in Kam Tin. Ms. Yeung refused to accept this offer and brought her husband to a residential care home in China instead.

Character 69, female:

Mrs. Yeung traveled to China to bring Mr. Yeung back to Hong Kong to see a

doctor.

Character 70, female:

Ms. Lee was 97 years old and the eldest resident in her residential care home. She was one of the most active residents there. She never received formal education in her life, but she could recognize words.

Character 71, male:

Mr. Luk had heart disease and suffered a stroke twice. His five sons were very busy working and had no time to look after him. He had planned to live in a Zhaoqing residential care home. However, the doctor he saw told him that he needed to have a pacemaker installed and if the pacemaker malfunctioned, he needed to be sent to the hospital within minutes. As a result, he could not live in China anymore.

Character 72, male:

Mr. Wan was among the first residents living in the Zhaoqing residential care home. Wan moved back to Hong Kong several months ago as there was not sufficient medicine supply in the mainland. He is now queuing for a subvented residential care home.

Episode (33) *Population Aging* 《老齡化》 2002-6-9 (ATV)

Summary:

This episode consisted of three sections. The first section of the episode was described economic hardship faced by two older characters which highlighted the

controversies of the possible social policy on means-test system of OAA. The focus of the story was illustrations of some older people with not much savings and who in the future would no longer be entitled to have OAA if a means tested mechanism was applied. The livelihood of older people with some savings may be even harder than currently if the policy was eventually lunched. The second section of episode focused on an older woman who was relatively economically affluent, she enjoyed learning English, Cantonese opera and calligraphy. The third section of the episode showed that later life can be meaningful. This section of story introduced some older characters who were professionals when they were younger, or who grouped together and visited older people living alone frequently.

Character 73, male:

Mr. Chan was 68 years old. He lived with his wife and they support themselves by selling general merchandise such as light bulbs, torches at Temple Street. They were unqualified to apply for CSSA because they owned an old apartment, so they were forced to become illegal hawkers in order to earn a living.

Character 74, female:

Ho was 74 years old. Her husband had passed away during wartime. She had been a housemaid for several decades. She had no children and lived alone in a government public estate which was specially designed for older people.

Character 75, female:

Hung was 70 years old. Her husband had passed away two years ago and all of her children had grown up and had their own families. Some of her children had

emigrated to other countries. Now she was living alone in an 800 square foot apartment in Heng Fa Chuen. Despite this, Hung was not bored as she enjoyed learning English, Cantonese opera and calligraphy.

Character 76 male:

Mr. Leung was 67 years old and was the chairman of the Retired Persons Association. He had been retired for ten years and he used to be a police inspector. He joined a group of retired professionals to learn dancing, singing and drama together. They visited some older people living alone frequently. Leung went to the office of the association three days a week to handle administrative work.

Episode (34) *My Son is Sixty Six Years Old* 《我兒六十六》 2002.8. 4 (RTHK)

Summary:

This was a story of 86-year-old mother and her 66-year-old son. The mother-son relationship was close.

Character 77, male:

Mr. Lai was 66 years old and worked until he was 60 years old. He lost his job after his employer moved the factory to mainland China and he was given some severance payment. He then worked as a cleaner for about a year but he quit the job because it was too toilsome for him. He then decided to retire and now spends all his time taking care of his mother.

Character 78, female:

Au was 86 years old, and was the mother of Lai. She had been made a widow



very early in life. She suffered a stroke two years ago and she had several functional limitations. Mr. Lai accompanied her on her walk everyday.

Episode (35) *Soft Protest* 《溫柔的請願》 2003.3.17 (RTHK)

Summary:

Before the announcement of new policy address, a group of older people took to the street to protest against the cut in CSSA allowance and fight for universal retirement protection.

Character 79, female:

Tam was 77 years old and had no children. She had been living alone since her husband passed away. She retired at the age of 65 and now is the chairperson of the Elderly Right League. She has been struggling for the rights of older people.

Character 80, female:

Ms. Leung used to protest on the streets with Tam. She also enjoyed doing voluntary work. However, she could not continue doing all these things after she suffered some spinal problems.

Character 81, male:

Mr. Chan was 80 years old and suffered from arthritis. He took care of his mother until her death. Now he has no family and relies on the CSSA scheme for his livelihood. He protested on the streets with other older people before the policy address. He protested for the decrease in allowance of the CSSA scheme and fought for universal retirement protection.

Episode (36) *Care About the Elderly in your own Family, then Extend your Care to others* 《老吾老以及人之老》 2004-4-25 (RTHK)

Summary:

This episode consisted of three sections. In the first section, scholars criticized the lack of universal retirement protection and said it was a policy mistake of the Hong Kong government saying it ignored its social responsibility.

The second section discussed the medical service in Hong Kong saying it lagging behind the rate of ageing.

The last section introduced new activities funded by the government aimed at improving the image of older people.

Character 82, female:

Leung was 87 years old. She had been living alone for most of her life as she did not have any children. She used to do temporary jobs so she had no pension. All she had was several thousand dollars compensation which she got when she left the job. She worked until she was 75 years old before becoming a CSSA recipient.

Episode (37) *Charming Older Adults* 《魅力長者》 2005-2-26 (ATV)

Summary:

This episode consisted of three sections. The first section introduced the “Beauty Contest for the Seniors” (新世代長者魅力大賽) organized by the Social Welfare Department to help older people to recover their confidence and let the younger people see the strength and charm of older people.

The second section of the episode introduced social services provided for older

people with depression. Another focus of this story was about how older people overcome depression.

Character 83, male:

Mr. Lee aged 84, was living with his wife. He was the oldest contestant in the “Beauty Contest for the Seniors”. He was a resistance fighter during World War II. Before retirement, he had been an assistant of the clergy in Church.

Character 84, female:

Mrs. Cheung had been suffering from depression since her son had passed away in a skiing accident. However, she was good at painting and joined the “Charming Elderly Contest”.

Character 85, female:

Au was 82 years old. Her husband passed away due to emphysema. Her son and daughter-in-law were working in mainland China so she lived alone. She had suffered from depression before but she had recovered afterwards.

Character 86 male:

Mr. Chow was 73 years old and was a worker in the garment industry. He suffered from a stroke twice, a few years ago. Half of his body was paralyzed and therefore he moved into residential care home three months ago.

Episode (38) *Arranging the Funeral* 《後事》 2006.4.22 (ATV)

Summary:

A NGO, breaking the boundary of Chinese tradition, discussed their funeral arrangements and helped older people face their death positively.

Character 87, female:

Mrs. Chan was 91 years old and had no children. She lived alone and often visited the elderly center and church in order to meet with friends. She wanted to be cremated when she passes away.

Character 88, female:

Chan was 69 years old and her husband had passed away more than 20 years ago. She had had her funeral arranged so that their son did not have to worry.

Episode (39) *Planning for Death* 《無後顧之憂》 2006.4.22 (RTHK)

Summary:

A NGO, breaking the boundary of Chinese tradition, discussed their funeral arrangements and helped older people face their death positively.

Character 89, female:

Leung was 71 years old, she was CSSA recipient and had lymphatic lung cancer. She lived alone because she divorced in mid-life and her daughter disappeared after graduating from university, so now she had no family. Planning for death helped her remove her worries about death.

Appendix II  
Data Collection Form

Producer: \_\_\_\_\_ Broadcasting date: \_\_\_\_\_ Episode no: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of episodes topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Episode theme:

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Number of major older characters: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Number of major older characters portrayed: \_\_\_\_\_

Introductory speech:

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Summary:

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Context: \_\_\_\_\_

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Concluding speech:

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The name of major older character \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_

General profile of the character: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Economic conditions:

- Relatively good \_\_\_\_\_
- Relatively disadvantaged \_\_\_\_\_

Self-care abilities:

- Independent \_\_\_\_\_
- With minor health limitations \_\_\_\_\_
- dependent \_\_\_\_\_

Positive personal traits:

- active \_\_\_\_\_
- socially involved \_\_\_\_\_
- productive \_\_\_\_\_
- good tempered \_\_\_\_\_
- happy \_\_\_\_\_
- well-informed \_\_\_\_\_
- capable \_\_\_\_\_
- Total number of positive personal traits \_\_\_\_\_

Negative personal traits:

- inactive \_\_\_\_\_
- socially isolated \_\_\_\_\_
- non-productive \_\_\_\_\_
- bad-tempered \_\_\_\_\_
- sad \_\_\_\_\_
- poorly-informed \_\_\_\_\_
- incapable \_\_\_\_\_
- Total number of negative personal traits \_\_\_\_\_

The overall personal trait:            positive,                            neutral,                            negative

## Appendix III

### Transcription of Interviews

Interview with social worker 1(SW 1)

Interview with documentary 1(DW 1)

Interview with documentary 2 (DW 2)

Remarks: The researcher (R)

Interview with SW 1(32 minutes)

R: Do you recognize any change in coverage of social services and programs for older people in the recent decade? If yes, in what way?

SW1: I think the services for older people in C&A homes have had more new elements and the overall quality has been enhanced. In the past, we only provided three meals a day and basic health care such as physiotherapy. But some new therapies are available now, including occupational therapy, art therapy and music therapy for older people in order to relieve pain. We also provide hospice care services for them. From these services, we can see that the government now pays more attention to the quality of life of older people. Besides, the working attitude of our staff has become more important nowadays. Our staffs have had the chance to engage in overseas C&A home site visits to Japan and Taiwan in order to learn more about overseas social welfare and services for older people.

R: In what ways the services of Hong Kong RCHE can be improved?

SW1: For example, services for older people in C&A homes in Japan are more comprehensive, and the relief services in Taiwan are also good. Through site visits, we can learn and improve the quality of service for older people in the Hong Kong C&A home.

R: Can you tell me when you recognized these obvious changes?

SW1: Since I started working here (more than 10 years ago). I discovered that the



kind of services available for older people has changed gradually. In the past, there was no additional registered social worker stationed in the C&A homes to take care of the psychological needs of the older people who have dementia, but welfare workers took part in consulting services for these older people. Yet, around 1998, the government allocated more resources for the Hong Kong C&A home. The Government has provided Dementia Supplement, so that the C&A home can have an additional budget to hire registered social workers to help older people with dementia.

R: Do you recognize any changes in the images of older people in television documentary in the recent decade? Why?

SW1: Um...I think it varies between different mass media sources, different programs might portray older people differently. It depends on the kind of messages they want to convey. In my memory, there is a case discussing the Old Age Allowance and some TV programs depicted older people as being miserable. For example, an older person had to sell cardboard and his/her family members were indifferent to that older person. Older people in some mass media are portrayed as underprivileged. But some other programs, I have forgotten the name of the program...portrayed older people as active and happy, they are also portrayed as active by engaging in voluntary services and are willing to help their neighbors.

R: Then, apart from mass media, have you discovered any changes in the public's attitude towards older people?

SW1: I think there is an improvement in the younger generation's sense of respect

towards older people.

R: Regarding the younger generation's sense of respect towards older people, what do you mean by in comparison with the past it has improved?

SW1: I think the difference is about the education of the younger generation of the past and now...there are different schools coming to our C&A home for visits every month. I have found that many of these students who come here to visit are willing to approach the older people.

R: Which kinds of students came to do visiting?

SW1: Students from universities, secondary schools, primary schools and even kindergartens all come here to visit. Nowadays, schools often require their students to visit here as a kind of experience of meeting older people or as a kind of extra-curricular activities for them. Um...I discovered that many students came here and showed respect to the older people living here, and students are not rude to them. Students may be naughty in schools, but when they came here, for example, they know: this person is very old, he/she is over 80 or 90 years old, we have to respect them.

R: What accounts for these changes?

SW1: Education and culture of our society. Some adult children of older people living in our care and attention home often teach their kids to respect older people.

R: As you mentioned, the younger generation's sense of respect towards older people is greater nowadays...so do you mean that you recognized a change in these past few years or...?

SW1: Um...in my memory, in the past, only secondary school students have this sense of respect, but now even kindergarten children know how to respect older people, they know how to get along well with older people. They view older people in more positive ways.

Interview with DW 1 (51 minutes)

C: Do you have any preference when selecting the sex of older characters in older people themed productions?

DW1: The selection of sex depends on whether the topic is focused on a particular gender. We do not have any preoccupation for which sex to choose, we interview both older males & older females.

C: Where did you locate older characters for the documentary?

DW1: This is subject to the nature of the character and the topic. If we are going to find older people with health problem, we go to residential homes. If we want to have poor older people, we go to elderly centers. And if we seek to find happy and active older people, we search on the web or use our personal network, where they usually have higher visibility.

C: Why you think that those in the elderly center are poor?

DW1: Um...I have had experience of going to the elderly center and discovered older people lining up to use the computer and gym equipments. If they were rich, they would have their own, rather than using public one. We asked social workers to refer some cases to us and they know which older people have financial problems.

C: How did you determine older-people-themed-topics of documentaries?

DW1: We have a lot of editorial freedom. The decisions about the choices of topics are primarily based on the editor's interest. We also pick up topics that the public is concerned about. The editor makes the final decision.

C: How do you define "topics that the public is concerned about"?

DW1: We choose topics from newspapers, but we avoid topics that have already appeared in *News Magazine* (produced by TVB) because we have the same target audience. We also avoid topics that have already appeared in our (RTHK) productions such as *Headliner*, *Golden age* or *Legco Review* as we only have limited broadcasting time every week, so we do not want topic duplications."

C: What do you mean by "topic duplications"?

DW1: For example if *Golden age* already covered topic X this week, then we would not discuss topic X in *The Hong Kong Connection*.

R: Have you or your fraternity met someone whom approached you actively and asked you to produce an older-people-themed documentary?

DW1: It's very often Legislators, District Councilors or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who invite us to publicize their topics. We receive many faxes and phone calls from these people everyday.

R: What topics are the most common? Do you adopt their suggestions?

DW1: Sometimes NGOs have conducted surveys and invited us to publish their findings. While other times legislators invite us to discuss topics that are related to the fields they are concerned with. It is hard to tell. It depends on whether their stories interest us. If their stories are trivial or look like a private matter, we just ignore them. But if they provide comprehensive information and their stories fulfill our selection criteria<sup>151</sup> then we would use them. It also happens if we feel it is difficult to reject them.

R: What do you mean by comprehensive information?

DW1: They often provide us with “one stop catering” They create a story, provide us with statistics and have a few cases on their hands and they ask if we are interested in adopting their suggested topics.

R: Is that common?

DW1: Yes, many of the secretaries of these Legislators have worked in public relations or as reporters and they know well what we is needed for a story. For example, the director of one older people pressure group in Hong Kong, X, and Legislator 1 and 2 have a very good relationship with the media, so they know how to manipulate the mass media to achieve what they want.

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<sup>151</sup> The selection criteria of the public service broadcasting can be seen from DW1’s opinion: “We choose topics from newspapers, but we avoid topics that have already appeared in *News Magazine* (produced by TVB) because we have the same target audience. We also avoid topics that have already appeared in our (RTHK) productions such as *Headliner*, *Golden age* or *Legco Review* as we only have limited broadcasting time every week, so we do not want topic duplications.”

R: Do you mean “they” have a very good relationship with you or the entire mass media?

DW1: the whole field, including me.

R: Why do you find it hard to reject them?

DW1: It is because we are in mutually beneficial relationships and we rely on each other.

R: In what way?

DW1: We often seek to interview different people in one documentary topic, so sometimes we have to invite opinions from Legislators. If they have helped me in the past, it is very hard for us to reject them, unless their stories are really frivolous.

R: Do you think that there might be some differences in the portrayal of older people between the public service broadcaster and commercial broadcaster? Why or Why not?

DW1: I think the image of older people in the public service broadcaster is more objective. Because what we have is time. The differences between the public service broadcaster and the commercial broadcaster are that we have much more time (8 weeks) than commercial broadcaster (5-6 weeks) for our production process. We have more time to do pre-shooting research. Therefore, we can minimize the risk of jumping to over-simplified conclusions due to the inadequacy of time. Also, we are

free from editorial pressure, we are not required to fit the audiences' taste, yet those producers in commercial broadcaster, are the opposite, and might have to think about how to produce “noised” episodes.

C: What do you mean by objective?

DW1: We attempt to maintain impartiality and neutrality in our production. We only decide the reporting perspectives after balancing all the views from different people. In the documentary producing processes, we seek objective and balanced comments from different people by frequently questioning or confronting their view points whenever we are suspicious of their arguments, and we also ask for evidence of their conclusion. We bear in mind that we should not distort their messages nor portray older people in ways that victimize them. We do not manipulate sound effects or lighting to affect the feeling and mood of our audience.

C: Can you elaborate more about balancing comments?

DW1: We will not intentionally depict older people in a sympathetic way, in order to have policy orientation because we also have to balance the interests of tax payers.

C: While you are producing an older people themed documentary, do you ask opinions from other people such as professionals or legislators? If yes, in what ways do their opinions affect the content of your production?

DW1: Yes, but actually the opinions of these people do not affect our content much, because if their opinions are lopsided, we give up using their opinion eventually. For



example, legislators may have a hidden agenda in their conversation. My colleagues often remind me not to give them a chance to “promote” themselves. So even if we have already shot them, we may not include them in the episode.

C: How about experts’ ideas? Do you use their comments and research findings to support your arguments in the episodes?

DW1: In fact, we do not often approach them. Even if we did, we merely use their research findings, but not their comments about how to deal with the problem. Normally, we do not show their face on the screen; we use it to deliver the research findings as we seek not to enhance the authoritativeness of these experts. And if we discover that the research findings of a NGO or experts are doubtful, we normally have three kinds of treatments: a) we use their findings or comments, but we also reveal the discrepancies, b) we use their findings, but we will stress “one organization/scholar pointed out that...”, which mean that these findings do not represent our views or c) we exclude their parts from the episode.

Interview with DW 2 (43 minutes)

R: Do you have any preference in the selection of sex of older character among older people themed production?

DW2: We are not partial to any sex. Otherwise, our production will be biased.

R: Where do you locate older characters for the documentary?

DW2: We find them in the residential care homes, community centers and from our social networks.

R: How do you determine older-people-themed-topics of documentaries?

DW2: We choose popular topics of discussion these days.

R: How do you know which topic are popular?

DW2: We monitor all media to see which topics are the hottest. We collect opinions from our friends and we listen to what the public is discussing while riding public transport. News topics that discuss accidents and deaths of older people living alone are most often considered as popular by us.

R: Do you or your fraternity ever meet someone who actively approaches you, asking for the production of any older-people-themed documentaries?

DW2: Most often it is Sunday that is the day of the week with the least news. Some political parties host press conferences and invite us to report their topic in the news or in documentaries. In these kinds of press conferences, a few district councilors were ready to inform us about the issues they are concerned with.

R: Do they have evidence such as statistics to support?

DW2: Sometimes, they do.

R: Do you use the information they provide?

DW2: Of course, I guess no one would reject it as it is convenient.

R: Are the common topics suggested by legislators about the positive aspects of ageing or focused on the problematic aspects of ageing?

DW2: the problematic sides of ageing.

R: Do legislators or political parties invite you more often?

DW2: It is hard to tell as it is a dynamic process. Sometime we actively seek their advice. But if they do not know the topic very well, they may introduce us to their networks such as friends or other district councilors. We build relationships in this way. In other circumstances, they need us to increase their visibility.

R: Do you think that there might be some differences in the portrayal of older people

between the public service broadcaster and commercial broadcaster? Why or Why not?

DW2: I do not think our productions are different from that of the public service broadcaster in terms of the portrayal of older people. But our time and resources are less than those of the public service broadcaster in comparison. We only have three to four weeks for our production. Our schedules are very tight. Most of the time, pre-shooting research and shooting are done within the same day. We do not have time like those who are working in the public service broadcaster that they can spend a few days talking to the older person and capture different livelihood facets of him/her. In order to maximize our production speed, we ask an older person questions directly such as: “What makes you happy or unhappy? Can you act that out in front of the camera?” If an older person can not think of what makes him/her happy, we may think of some examples that are best to express the concerned topics of the episodes and ask the older person to act them out directly.

R: How do they act them out? Can you give some examples?

DW2: For example, discussing what makes happy older person, we request the older person to play with his/her grandchildren in the park together. But if the topic is about poor older people, we may ask an older person to eat bread in front of the camera. And we use aside to stress that the older person has to eat bread to substitute a meal.

R: When you produce an older person themed documentary, are you pressured to depict older people in a way that show them as miserable to make the audiences

feel compassion for them in order to make the story more colorful and increase the audience numbers?

DW2: No, we are not pressured to do so. The kind of portrayal is subject to the topic, and there is no universal method of portrayal. For example, if the topic is about happy older people, then there is no point for us to portray them as miserable, right?

R: You are right! Topics centered on older people would include positive and negative aspects.

R: Do you or your colleagues use special sound effects or lighting effects to portray miserable or happy older people?

DW2: Yes, if we want to mould happy older people, we focus on their smiling action. For miserable older people, we add some music to convey a sense of sorrow; we use dim lighting and we tune the shot into a slow walking motion of older people. Sometimes, if older people react slowly, they can not adapt to our time constraints and we can not get what we need in the story (miserable characteristics of older people are amplified). Then we have to add some effects between the shots to compensate for what they could not express clearly in front of the camera. Our role is to stress the magnitude of the story, to present their miserable characteristics more explicitly in order to capture the audience's attention for the remaining parts of the story. If we do not use these effects, audiences might be bored and simply change to other channels, so these elements are unavoidable.

R: While you are producing older people themed documentary, do you ask opinions

from other people such as professionals or legislators? If yes, in what way their opinions affect the content of your production?

DW2: Yes, we “beg” for the help of academics, we need their comments and professional advice. They have the right to refuse us if they do not have time. They have professional knowledge that we do not possess. We also interview legislators because they may be involved in the topic that we survey.

R: Do you adopt all their interviews regardless of the quality of their content?

DW2: Hmm...yes...we have limited time, what we have already shot, we adopt, we cannot afford to waste anything, we have time and cost considerations.

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