

# Analysis of institutional discourses on smart elderly healthcare in contemporary China

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The ageing process in the People's Republic of China has been abrupt, due to the concurrence of improved living conditions and of the prolonged implementation of birth control policy (Yi, Liang 2019). China's National Health Commission expects the number of people aged 60 and over to rise to more than 400 million by 2035, while the fertility rate does not increase, despite the recent government policies, encouraging the population to give birth to 2 (2016) or 3 children (2021). The traditional model of elderly family-based care is disappearing (HelpAge International 2013) and the "4-2-1" (four grandparents, two parents and one child) family structure leaves heavy burdens to the younger generation. There is moreover a shortage of community or residential care services, along with domiciliary ones (Hung 2023). For these reasons, the central government has fostered research and development of new technologies in elderly health and care services, with a typically top-down approach. The effects of these policies are tangible in the research results (White Paper 2019; Chen et al. 2023) and in the scientific literature (Liu, Chau et al. 2023). Although stressing innovation, the official documents contain also allusions to traditional ethics, in order to encourage families to take care of their older relatives and to build a favourable social attitude towards the elderly, complying with the aims of 'healthy ageing' as intended by UN and WHO.

The paper shall try to answer to the question: which features of traditional culture are represented in the official discourse in high technology elderly care in China? This issue has been quite neglected by researchers so far and there is a gap in scientific literature.

In order to be able to answer to this question, I shall conduct a lexical analysis of 20 to 30 institutional documents fostering smart elderly care, issued in the last decade, and detect the recurrences of terms belonging to the semantic sphere of *xiaodao* 孝道 (filial piety). Interestingly enough, the "14th Five-Year Plan's Development [...] for the aged and Systems of elderly Assistance" (2021) declares that authorities shall 'promote the traditional Chinese virtues of filial piety and respect for the elderly (*xiaoqin jinglao* 孝亲敬老) and reaffirm the fundamental role of the family in elderly assistance', encouraging at the same time the diffusion of smart technologies. This mixture of new technologies and traditional ethics seems quite peculiar to Chinese approach to elderly care.

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