Article

China's "Embedded Neoliberal" Home-Based Elderly Care? A State-Organised System of Neighbourhood Governance

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Abstract: Embedding the program of elderly care into community-based service system seems to imply that China is reorganising capacities of neighbourhood governance. The program, created by transformation of neighbourhood governance, represented the state government's frustration with the institutional embodiment of neoliberalism. However, stimulating neighbourhood organisations in elderly care service through involvement of market instruments demonstrated the neoliberal approach. In this study, we provided a research framework in the context of embedded neoliberalism to explore the dilemma of neighbourhood governance in China. By interviewing 100 elderly people in five neighbourhoods in Nanjing, China, we examined the home-based elderly care (HEC) model to analyse the changes in socio-spatial relationships of neighbourhoods. We argued that the state-organised system of market instruments as a form of neighbourhood system weaken the spontaneity of elderly residents in developing social capitals. Moreover, the emerging program is struggling to operate because the devolution of conservative governance capacity from the state to the neighbourhood does not provide resources, leading to the restrained market provision. Thus, this transformation of neighbourhood governance can only be effective if there is a clear complementarity relationship between the role of state and market instruments. The attention of further studies on neighbourhood governance needs to re-examine the reciprocal relationships in the context of declining neoliberalism.

Keywords: neoliberalism; neighbourhood governance; embedded neoliberalism; socio-spatial relations; China

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1. Introduction

The Chinese government has launched a state-led program that is attempting to meet the emerging demands for community-based services for seniors and disabilities. In the event of an emergency, bedside buttons allow seniors who live alone to quickly alert nearby community centres, which can send nurses and offer a range of elderly-care services [1,2]. For at least 20 years, pension policy has been influenced by neoliberal policy economy, leading to a series of market-oriented reforms, including mandatory privatisation and approaches to strengthen individual responsibility for the future of retirement, including increases in income tax to supplement pensions [3,4]. However, neoliberalism, to the extent that it recognises the importance of the role of government, is committed to the principle of negative freedom, which requires a minimal state to protect individuals from coercion [5]. Since the 2000s, the state government has been attempting to accelerate the process of listing pension funds and establish a "private" retirement system to maintain a supply of pensions for the large number of retirees. Extensive studies showed that such "private" pension arrangements were, and continue to be, the institutional embodiment of the neoliberal pension reform [4,6,7]. In contrast to "neoliberal authoritarianism" [8], the various measures adopted by China's pension policy reform indicated a broader

“nationalisation” resurgence, enhancing the social democratic welfare system. The most direct impact of the reform on the retirement system is mainly reflected in the social level, especially in the daily living space of elderly people, namely, the transformation of neighbourhood governance.

The implementation of community-based pension strategy is accompanied by the transformation process of neighbourhood governance in China. Previous studies on pension policy and elderly care services at neighbourhood level in China mainly focused on the definition of concepts [9] and the formulation of indicators of systems and evaluation strategies [10], health status of the elderly [11], and quantitative analysis on the demands of nursing care facilities [12], although there is a lack of attention to the community life of elderly residents. This seems to explain why exclusion of older people remains a fundamental challenge for aging societies in China and beyond. This is because the neighbourhood is an important spatial form to foster social bonding [13]. A small living space such as neighbourhood cherished by residents arguably still plays a role in placemaking [14]. The importance of community has been highlighted in the regeneration of social capital and in the support of localism by neighbourhood governance [15,16]. Sharing and integrating a building upon state-of-the art knowledge is fundamental to addressing the challenging of elderly neighbourhoods effectively and efficiently. With the growing demands of an aging population on social integration, territorialised social practices are crucial because the role of neighbourhood is not only to continue to bond people’s actions, neighbourhood organisations, and policies, but also to promote social capital [17]. However, few studies have explained why the transformation of neighbourhood governance strategies in China still fails to activate the market instruments with the demands of the elderly. Furthermore, it is not entirely clear as to why the embedded neoliberal approaches have not led to the greater involvement of market instruments for social care provision, particularly neighbourhood organisations. How does the state manage to retain control of the elderly care industry, where service provision has been largely privatised? The existing literature emphasised that the relationship between HEC and neighbourhood governance is in the form of “formal” [18] and “informal” [19], but insufficient attention has been paid to the neighbourhood changes. The latter has left a space for coordination that either requires neoliberal or conservative intervention.

We developed a research framework to understand changing neighbourhood governance. The framework was developed from the classical study of *“Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness”* [20]. We adopted three dimensions of social relations, namely, institutional embeddedness [21], interorganisational embeddedness [22], and interpersonal embeddedness [23] to explore both formal and informal community services for elderly people [24]. Furthermore, this study attempted to provide a more nuanced understanding of the restructuring of neighbourhood governance by the “home-based elderly care” (HEC) program, interviewing 100 seniors living in five neighbourhoods in Nanjing, China. While the specificities of seniors should be taken into account, the framework opens up the possibility of understanding in a similar way about other social groups.

This paper is organised as follows. In Section 2, we review the embedded role of state government in elderly care at the neighbourhood level, with the approaches demonstrating a new understanding of neoliberalism. In Section 3, we then introduce the research framework and methodology to interpret a community as a field in various forms of embeddedness. In Section 4, we examine the relationships between the HEC and the participation of neighbourhood organisations in changing neighbourhood governance. In Section 5, we explore which factors influence the operation of HEC for serving elderly people. In Section 6, we discuss the impacts of the HEC program on elderly people’s daily neighbourhood life at the micro level. Finally, in Section 7, we conclude the findings and reflect the impacts on re-examining the role of state government in stimulating and inhibiting the market instruments of neighbourhood governance.

2. China's Neoliberalism and Retreat of the State in Neighbourhood Governance?

The return of state in neighbourhood governance in China is not only resulted by the vacuum of community services between workplaces and their neighbourhoods since the retreat of work unit system [25], but also the role of neoliberal instrument failed to deliver civic engagement [26], leading to the vulnerability of elderly people in neighbourhood life. Moreover, China's one-child policy in the past has increased the pressure on delivering reestablishment of social spaces. The policy has produced significant "social problems and personality disorders in Chinese young generations" [16,27]. The consequences further influenced the emergence of atomistic family in China and subtly challenged the gap of social care provision for older people in China in the context of the rising neoliberalism [28]. As the result, the gap between the neighbourhood policies and the retirement system is embedded by the state-led initiative of "Home-based Elderly Care" (HEC). For a wide range of academic advice, the state-led initiative emphasis on the transformation of neighbourhood system and the role of state government in neighbourhood governance. The initiative attempts to stimulate the market instruments in social care provision, as well as aiming to restructure the intimate social space of the neighbourhoods for seniors. However, we rejected this characterisation of the HEC reform in China because the social-spatial inequalities at the neighbourhood level have significant impacts on social cohesion [29].

In this section, the features of embedded neoliberalism and transformation of neighbourhood governance, as well as social cohesion, are reviewed to identified research gaps.

2.1. Embeddedness and Neighbourhood Governance

One of the most influential of extensive studies on the "socially embedded economy" is Riggie's concept of "embedded liberalism". The combination of economic activity with the state commitment to welfare capitalism is the re-embedding market instruments into society, subordinating them to social goals [30]. Within this interpretation, "embeddedness" is understood as a synonym for social protection and market regulation [31], as well as a process of neoliberalism [32,33], implying that economic activity is an institutionalised social process. In pre-capitalist societies, the market is highly embedded because they are subject to the dictates of society [34,35]. Nonetheless, in non-capitalist countries, the argument is still rather uncomfortable, because the state provides the necessary underpinnings for the development and expansion of market economy [36]. This argument, however, seems at odds with Polanyi's implicit conjecture of a "free-regulating market" because the market depends on, and is therefore embedded in, a state-regulated institution. In socialist countries, Polanyi's point seems to apply to the understanding of Harvey's "neoliberal authoritarianism" [8]. Recent studies have explored the relationship among neoliberalism, social policy expansion, and authoritarian politics in contemporary China [6]. The expansion of social provision since the global spread of neoliberalism may sometimes promote neoliberal projects [37,38], but they increase social insecurity; reinforce, replicate, and construct atomistic society; and promote social control and segregation [39]. These studies suggested that the rise of authoritarian governments in which state government seek to retain power by promoting neoliberal policies. In China, the approaches of neoliberal policy have mainly involved providing social pensions and health insurance to a hitherto excluded population. However, these approaches have weakened the long-standing segregation between urban and rural areas, having mostly added new, underfunded social programs rather than expanding participation in existing ones [6].

Yet can the term "neoliberalism" be used in a Chinese context? The division is between those who argue China is a neoliberal country and those who deny it is not along political lines. The ambivalence suggests that ideological positions aside, there are ample pieces of evidence suggesting that China is neoliberal or not. In this sense, the question of whether China is neoliberal or not remains unsolved and may in fact be unsolvable. It is simply impossible to pin down China's massive and rapidly changing political economy into a distinct and unambiguous label. Macro analysis does not seem to be able to explore why neoliberal political economy is relevant to China. Few studies

have analysed China's neoliberal approach from the micro level, the field of daily life—the neighbourhood. However, the importance of the neighbourhood has always existed in urban policy [16]. With the increasing importance of population mobility, regionalisation of social practice is crucial because neighbourhoods continue to play a role in actions of daily life and imagination, neighbourhood organisation, and government policies [17]. In China, the retreat of the state from housing supply and the emergence of entrepreneurial governance have been arguably characterised as neoliberal urbanism [40,41], echoing a process of “neoliberalism” [8]. In terms of neighbourhood governance, the dismissal of social protection structure, such as work-unit system, seems to imply that the state government began to embrace the free-regulated market and privatisation [42,43]. However, “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations that exist between various locations” grows beyond communities [31].

2.2. Social Cohesion and Building an Age-Friendly Community

In recent years, a policy consensus has been emerging around empowering elderly people to remain active participants in their local communities for promoting social cohesion as part of a shift away from institutionalisation [44]. The studies, focused on western nations, have suggested the significance of market and government intervention in fostering community cohesion [24,45–48]. With the process of neoliberalism and regional socio-economic transformation, social cohesion has become the magic bullet that policymakers believe will save communities from the ravages of the market. However, communities are riven by cracks on multiple axes, and some local divisions are deepened emerged [49]. The negative impacts of neoliberalism on elderly people is partly due to its destruction of the welfare state, which may have direct impacts on their health, as well as being one of the fundamental structural causes of social cohesion [50].

Cognitive habitus is often used to explain the process of achieving social cohesion and bringing social actors to recognise each other. This is a new understanding of citizenship and a description of the social cohesion of neighbourhood governance. Meanwhile, this has important implications for understanding the role of government and market in building age-friendly communities. Piroddi [51] explained how habitus works as a capacity of social cohesion that produce coordinated actions and social reproduction. Habitus as a generative structure indicated a value that emphasised persistent behavioural tendencies and embedded institutional structure division [52]. However, existing studies remain unclear as to the role of habitus in changing neighbourhood governance in socio-economic transition. In terms of neighbourhood governance, cognitive habitus has been interpreted not only on the stances of different groups of residents, but also on the use of a similar set of principles in different stances, which are “applied, by simple transfer, to the most dissimilar areas of practice” [53]. In the process of economic development and social change, the shrinking of family size, the increasing mobility, and the weakening of family relations are the main factors that impact the capacity of neighbourhood governance [54]. In China, the pension service industry at the neighbourhood level is struggling to move forward because the transformation of the role of neighbourhood government failed to activate the market potential [55]. Market suppliers have often attributed this dilemma to the factors of cognitive habitus; however, conclusions are not so simple, although evidence has indicated that the mismatch between supply and demand is an important factor restricting the development of HEC in China. Inadequate demand for care services leads to the policymakers' inability to accurately initiate neighbourhood policies and approaches that are suitable for the demands of seniors in neighbourhood governance. Thus, to innovate neighbourhood governance and provide home-based service in line with the needs of seniors, we must analyse the needs and activity attributes of seniors.

2.3. The State of the Art

The process of China's urbanisation in form of massive suburbanisation has gradually shifted capital accumulation from cities to suburbs, which has led to the decline of the

urban centre. Meanwhile, the elderly people remain in old residential areas in the city due to their habitus of life [56–58]. The rises of private governance due to the commodity housing development led to the retreat of state in neighbourhood governance. The role of the state in maintaining social cohesion and stability is constantly challenged by the market instruments. The emergence of “community building” [14,59] initiative seeks to re-embed the role of government in neighbourhood governance, including the provision of home-based elderly care services (HEC).

An important stream of research on the changing neighbourhood governance highlighted the significance of HEC program on improving social cohesion. However, evidence showed that inequality in supply and access undermined the role of state or market instruments in neighbourhood governance [50,60]. Innovations in neighbourhood governance may therefore involve new forms of social and territorial exclusion. However, when the innovations in a neoliberal authoritarian regime, such as China, are questioned, a new research agenda may highlight the challenges of integrating neighbourhood governance with social rights and citizenship through the new role of the state. In other words, the “neoliberal approach” is underpinned by the backdrop of cognitive and practical norms that are striving to create a new identity and different lifestyle for elderly people. The line of thinking has implications for other countries as well, since many neighbourhood policies are broadly influenced by elderly people’s “best at home” beliefs. Firstly, although the devolution of authority is conducive to social innovation in the form of neighbourhood governance, improving community cohesion through enhanced community services usually has occurred where there was already developed social capital and/or adequate financial resources—whether transferred by state government or collected locally. Apparently, the evidence is insufficient, because in China, devolution often leads to a deterioration in the provision of local community services in the absence of innovation and/or limited financial support by civil society and neighbourhood governments [40,61,62]. Thus, the impact of devolution of authority on neighbourhood governance depends on past welfare practices, levels of state regulation and funding, and endowments of local social and financial resources [63,64]. Secondly, the participation of market instruments and neighbourhood organisations is widely recognised as a neoliberal approach in neighbourhood governance. Their role seems to be a viable alternative to bureaucratic delivery of community services because of their strong reciprocal content [65]. However, the evidence is still ambiguous. Finally, existing research emphasised that the embedding approaches to encourage the participation of residents into neighbourhood governance are divided into bottom-up initiatives [66] and top-down restructuring [25,67]. However, the prior research did not address the question as to whether the return of the state in neighbourhood governance will restrict the survival of residential mobilisation, nor whether the supervision of authority will lead to the uneven development in the scope and quality of HEC’s services.

3. The Research Content and Methodology

Nanjing, as one of largest cities in China, has joined the HEC program in an attempt to meet elderly people’s demand for affordable public beds and high-quality commercial care services. Lawmakers in Nanjing recently promoted a law obliging the city government to provide the program for seniors who live alone.

We chose Nanjing as the research city for two reasons. First, Nanjing is a typical case of China’s aging society. The population of those over 60 years old in Nanjing is more than 1.5 million, accounting for more than 21% of the total registered population. The aging of Nanjing is accelerating, and the aging rate will exceed 33% by 2050, which is higher than the national average [68]. Second, urban governance in Nanjing represents the common strategy of “neoliberal authoritarianism” society and is characterised by “strong government and weak society” [69]. However, in the area of neighbourhood governance, the neoliberal approach emerged widely, but there is a role the state behind the scenes. Nanjing was used to be a very compact city before commodity housing development. As a city dominated by the state-owned economy, the massive suburbanisation in Nanjing

has promoted relocation of state-owned enterprises to the suburbs [70,71]. In the past, a large number of employees were forced to give up their jobs in the system because they could not afford the increase of commuting costs, and now they have lost the pension service and welfare of the danwei system since retirement. Recent studies have shown that “community building initiative” has failed to promote the participation of the elderly people in community affairs, and the transformation of neighbourhood governance seems to be in trouble [25].

In terms of case, the investigations focused on the socio-economic attributes of seniors and the demands and supplies of community services. Due to the communication habits of the elderly and the chronic disease of some interviewees, this study adopted face-to-face interviews and questionnaires to conduct the survey. Overall, 100 unstructured and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Where possible, we had conversations with the staff of neighbourhood organisations. It is important to emphasise that triangulation of conversations has become possible because of interests in ongoing research on the social space of community at the micro level, and this survey tended to use cross-sectional methods. We believed that this longitudinal approach helps to uncover long-term trends. In this study, institutional embeddedness refers to the integration of economic behaviour into the order of a social system. Interorganisational embeddedness refers to integrate economic activities into strategic alliances and organisational mechanism. Interpersonal embeddedness refers to multiple social relations embedded in the neighbourhood organisations that conduct economic activities, as well as the impact of social spaces on the identity, interests, capabilities, and practices of the elderly (see Figure 1). We attempted to relate three dimensions of social relations to institutions, community services, and interactions of seniors.

Figure 1. Research framework.

The five communities as cases are the first experimental communities in Nanjing to carry out HEC program. These five communities consist of public housings and commodity housings, and they are all concentrated in the city centre. To ensure the universality of the study at the micro level, we selected five communities as samples to reduce the existence of particularity. All five communities are located in the alleyways in busy urban areas. In the 1990s, the urban development office developed these five large properties to accommodate local veterans and state-owned factories' employees. A university also

bought 12 residential buildings for its employees. They are typical urban communities with diverse social backgrounds of residents. The total area is 20 hectares, and total construction area is 270,000 square meters. In the 1995, as the state-owned factories went bankrupt, and the university bought six more buildings. More young university teachers and employees were settled down here through housing subsidies. After about five years of community stability, China implemented the housing commodification, which had a major impact on these public housing communities. Young, affluent residents have moved to other newly developed communities, leaving their properties to their parents or to the rental market. Initially, the property development company provide property management services for the five communities, while when the neighbourhood committees were established, the communities appointed the private management companies to provide property services. The compact community environment forced the neighbourhood governments to intervene in the management of the communities to meet the needs of an increasing number of elderly residents. The diversified small shops and convenient transportation around the communities seem to meet the needs of elderly residents, but the decline of the communities does not seem to be stopped by the management of property management companies and the embedding role of government. Therefore, we must ask why the embedded mechanism does not enhance the social capital of the elderly. In Nanjing, where community services have been privatised, how can local governments embed their administrative roles in neighbourhood governance?

4. Embedded Governance and Social Space Refactoring

Since the 12th Five-Year Plan, the concept of community elderly care introduced from developed countries has become the magic bullet for China's policymakers to solve the shortage of public nursing beds, and the mechanism has been described as the reform direction to enhance social cohesion. However, the development of the past 10 years has not changed the dilemma of the development of China's pension industry and the actualisation of policymakers' assumptions. In this section, we analyse how the state government in China embedded three dimensions of social relation into the community to actualise the experiment of HEC. We compared policy implementations and specific practices of Nanjing and Shanghai from a macro level to verify the impacts of state role on refactoring community social space.

4.1. Institutional Embeddedness: An Experiment of National Policy

In the period of socialism, the neighbourhood organisations and neighbourhood governments (street offices) played complementary roles in the provision of social welfare, while community management was underdeveloped. Since housing reform, community management as a paid service creates opportunities for the development of property services through the market. Community space was privatised as a residential territorialisation, and property management companies were brought in to take over neighbourhood governance. Although property management has also been marketized, the development of community services is not smooth. Neighbourhood organisations are hard to find in neighbourhoods because residents cannot afford or are unwilling to participate in community activities. After marketisation, professional community service organisations have their own charging standards, and residents often cannot accept community services that are not directly related to their housing. Because social organisations, especially professional pension institutions, are difficult to get involved in community activities and gain benefits, market-oriented strategies leave the development of HEC program a status of limbo. The failure of neighbourhood organisations in gated communities provides an important opportunity for the state to return to its role in neighbourhood governance. In the past, the neighbourhood governments encouraged residents' committees to transfer more community service and management capabilities to property management companies, while the profit-oriented process made it difficult for them to provide non-profit welfare. Therefore, in communities that provide professional property services, neighbour-

hood organisations are a non-existent institution—except for speciality markets conducted in cooperation with neighbourhood government during specific festivals, especially the embedding of pension institutions, which are difficult to achieve. The dilemma of the neighbourhood organisations in the privatised communities indicates that they have to realise specialised community services through state funding.

Since 1996, China's state government has promulgated and established a series of national policies, laws, and regulations to improve the social welfare system due to the shortage of public medical financial funds and affordable slots at public retirement homes. Since 2011, a series of suggestions and policies have been implemented to promote the construction of HEC system (see Table 1). Despite the development of public welfare policies in the past 25 years, the state government has always kept the policy making at the strategic level and left the space of implementation to the local authorities.

Table 1. The policy roles and significances of home-based elderly care in China between 1996 and 2021.

National Policies	Major Roles in Elderly Care	Significances
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly, 1996 [72]. 	In response to the increasing number of retirees and the shortfall in public health funding.	Preliminary formation of China's legal system of the protection of rights and interests of the elderly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinion on Accelerating the Socialization of Social Welfare, 2000 [73]. 	Establish a social insurance system for the elderly and provisions for children to support senior parents.	Formation of the concept of community-based services for seniors and those with disabilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinion on the Comprehensive Promotion of Community Nursing Service for the Elderly, 2008 [74]. 	Establishing a comprehensive network of home-based services at the county (city, district), township (subdistrict), and community (village) levels.	Clarify the roles of government-led neighbourhood governance and elderly care services.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twelfth Five-Year Plan for the Development of China's Ageing Programme, 2011 [75]. 	To encourage the development of the pension insurance, to improve the medical insurance system, and to expand social assistance and the social welfare system for seniors.	Establishment of an elderly care mechanism based on family care, supported by community services, and supplemented by social care.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation Opinions of the Ministry of Civil Affairs on Encouraging and Guiding Private Capital to Enter the Field of Elderly Services, 2012 [76]. 	The implementation of government subsidies, market procurement, commercial coordination, and government certification to promote the development of pension industry and relevant market allocations.	Private capitals were encouraged to involve in neighbourhood governance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation of the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development, 2015 [77]. 	To promote efficient allocation of market and government resources, to establish a sustainable social security system, and to implement the "two-children policy".	Marketisation of elderly care services in increasing the supply and products through services purchase and equity cooperation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Financial Support for the Implementation of Pilot Reform Work on Home and Community-based Elderly Services, 2016 [78]. 	Development of a multi-tiered elderly care service system based on home-based pension, supported by neighbourhood government, and supplemented by commercial institutions.	To consolidate the basic position of home and community services in China's elderly care system through government-led and market-coordinated approaches.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China's 14th Five-Year Plan, 2021 [79]. 	To develop an inclusive service system for seniors, to embed a coordination system between home- and community-based institutions into neighbourhood, and to combine medical and recreational care services for seniors; "one-child policy" is abandoned.	Coping with the aging problem has become a national strategy in China. The state government has returned to neighbourhood governance.

The devolution of authority is mainly due to the shortfall in pension funds, which restricts the embedding of national policies into local implementation. At present, welfare lottery is the main source of social security funds. The pension funds of local governments are partly raised through the participation of private individuals or organisations in the “community building initiative”, which are mainly used by local governments to purchase necessary medical services for urban vulnerable groups. Secondly, the total amount of fines paid to the government for violating the “one-child policy” is nearly RMB 20 billion every year in China. The money was supposed to cover the shortfalls in pension fund, but the whereabouts of the funds were never disclosed by the state government. The number of state officials overseeing the implementation of the “one-child policy” at community level had swelled from 45,000 in the 1970s to 50,000 in the early 2000s. The policy in the past has become the lifelong job of these officials, and the abolition of the more than 40 years of sustained fertility policy in the 14th Five-Year Plan in 2021 has caused their panic effect. Therefore, the state government has to consider the future employment arrangements of these officials before revising its policy. Neighbourhood organisations once set up to implement the policy but “kidnapped” the current policies delivering on community nursing service, which also solidified the policy making at the national level and made it difficult to adjust.

Although China has promoted the concept of HEC since 2008, the state government has yet to recommend specific local measures. At the macro level, the strategy of transferring capacity to local governments reflects the continued concerns of the state government regarding the concrete the implementation HEC, as the state government was still testing the pros and cons of regaining dominant role of neighbourhood governance in the context of housing privatisation. Meanwhile, even in cities with similar level of economic development, such as Nanjing and Shanghai, the two local governments still adopt differentiation of supervision capacities to test the enthusiasm of market instruments. In addition, due to the constraints of Chinese property laws and community forms, embedding nursing institutions in the gated communities not only requires the support of property owners of community, but it also needs to go through the complex approval of the land management department, which is considered impossible for neighbourhood organisations and private institutions. For example, the neighbourhood government can only apply to the planning department for approval before building a community care facility through housing expropriation. On the one hand, the complexity of administrative procedures makes it difficult for the neighbourhood government to use official procedures to settle service places for pension institutions. On the other hand, the source of funds for housing expropriation depends on their public funds.

“Part of the funds for promoting ‘community building initiative’ comes from the allocation of the municipal government, and a larger part comes from the taxes paid by the property management companies in the neighbourhood. However, some residents in the old communities are unwilling to pay the management fees, which leads to the long-term absence of formal property management in their communities” (a director of street office, 8 July 2021)

4.2. Interorganisation Embeddedness: As an “Agent on the Ground” of the State Government

In order for the governance obstacles to promoting the HEC program to be smoothed out, the return of the state government in neighbourhood governance is not directly involved, but instead it is done through the establishment of independent service delivery and evaluation agencies. Such an agent is considered to be an “agent on the ground” of the state government, known as “home for elderly care” in Shanghai and “retirement station” in Nanjing. The agencies are founded by the municipal government and provincial health commission. Meanwhile, both cities have set up a three-level management structure. For example, in Shanghai, the role of the municipal government is to supervise transmission of policies to the district governments. The administrative examination, approval, and evaluation are carried out by the district government. Finally, HEC provides its services through

“home for elderly care”. In terms of national supervision, Nanjing and Shanghai municipal governments have promulgated measures to regulate the development of HEC program, with the purpose of supervising commercial pension enterprises in line with the national “community building initiative”. On the one hand, both municipal governments have attempted to encourage commercial sectors to participate in community services through local policies, and on the other hand, have ensured low service prices and professional services standards through non-market behaviours (see Table 2). Meanwhile, in addition, the “agent on the ground” in Nanjing set up a three-tier operation structure, which is similar to the “manager–specialist–staff”. Each sector is trained in relevant professional knowledge and skills for recognised certificates in order to provide community services. The “retirement stations” in Nanjing have integrated most of the elderly nursing homes, including 1213 public and private nursing institutions and 256 social groups, forming a growth alliance of pension industry organisations. The alliance has formed a member structure that is composed of volunteers from public and community hospitals, staff from local health industry enterprises, and public officials from neighbourhood government. The form of alliance increases the dominance of neighbourhood government in the standards of community service delivery. For instance, the staff need to obtain certificates through the training of “retirement stations” in order to provide pension services (see Table 3). However, due to the differences in economic development and urbanisation in different regions, there is a mismatch between market supply and government demand. Because the measures of the “agent on the ground” undermine the normal allocation of market instruments, it is difficult to generalise the results of local experiments to the national level. Thus, distrust of the free-regulated market further hinders the understanding of the differentiated needs for the HEC program in different Chinese cities at a national level.

Table 2. Quality evaluations on HEC program in Nanjing and Shanghai.

City	Evaluation Indicators	Evaluation Methodology
Nanjing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicators of “client satisfaction” Indicators of “family satisfaction” Rates of “closure of valid complaints” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation, Field visits Inspection and assessment
Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical indicators These include whether professional equipment, medical facilities, and uniform are conFd in the service process. Soft indicators These include whether the staff have the initiative to solve the life demands of the elderly and the capacity to provide accurate service duration in the service process. Feedback indicators These include whether service staff have visited elderly in a timely manner to check the health condition and the frequency of providing services for free. Safe indicators These include whether the elderly feel safe and whether the service staff remain polite during the service. Communication indicators These include whether the service providers communicated with seniors and put the elderly’s interests first. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The methods of collecting feedback by neighbourhood government These include making field visits and phone call surveys, writing a letter to the interviewee, distributing an online survey, setting up a complaint and inquiry number, and processing data analysis. Methods for the evaluation of service providers by neighbourhood government These include reviewing staff’s service logs, analysis of service institutions’ income and expenditure statements, and checking service quality. Third-party inspections and unannounced visits

(Source 1: see Nanjing Pension Service Regulations, access date: 3 December 2021. http://www.jsrd.gov.cn/zyfb/dffg1/202001/t20200115_519067.shtml. Source 2: see Shanghai Pension Service Regulations, access date: 3 December 2021. <http://shzw.eastday.com/shzw/G/20201231/u1ai20764571.html>).

Table 3. Comparison of organisational forms of home-based service for seniors in China.

City	Governance Mechanism	Personnel Structure	The Qualification
Shanghai	Municipal government: Transferring national policies to serve local areas. District government: policy delivering. Neighbourhood organisation: service delivering.	Public official, professional trainer, nursing worker	Require relevant health knowledge and nursing skills with recognised certificates.
Nanjing	A growth alliance formed by public and private institutions that delivers health and elderly services. “Retirement station” distributes resources between each member.	Public official, medical worker from hospitals, nursing staff from enterprise	Certificate of government-funded “retirement station”.

(Source 1: see Nanjing Pension Service Regulations, access date: 3 December 2021. http://www.jsrd.gov.cn/zyfb/dffg1/202001/t20200115_519067.shtml. Source 2: see Shanghai Pension Service Regulations, access date: 3 December 2021. <http://shzw.eastday.com/shzw/G/20201231/u1ai20764571.html>).

4.3. Interpersonal Embeddedness: Underpinning the Possibility of Social Cohesion

Community is an important place for the elderly to participate in social activities; therefore, the way in which community cohesion is maintained affects the possibility of seniors not being marginalised by society. Reduced access to information due to health condition and illness is not only a feature of social marginalisation, but also a reason for the need for interpersonal communication and social activities. However, in the survey, we found that although the elderly people’s initiative to participate in social activities was inhibited by their own poor health status, another reason might be related to the gated form of the community. Such speculation can be seen from a street director’ answer.

“Through the way of financial subsidies, we hired property management companies and set up access control systems for several old communities within the jurisdiction. Although the content of neighbourhood governance has been reduced, we have received a lot of complaints from elderly residents, who complained that the original pedestrians have become internal roads of other communities, and now they can walk to the square they used to go to” (8 July 2021)

Since China is a country lacking in various laws and regulations, it is possible to carry out a major social governance reform without relevant laws to sever as a guiding principle and motivation for the reform. As far as policy making is considered, the thinking of policy making still reflects the patch dependence of “administrative measures”, which is manifested as the obstacles to interpersonal embeddedness caused by the physical space composition of the existing community. Emphasising the capacities of government role in neighbourhood governance may lead to the loss of “contractual” welfare, which is manifested in the state government’s attempt to strengthen the connection between its role and the elderly people through the construction of gated communities, while ignoring the attributes of community space in promoting social integration and enhancing the participation of elderly residents in social activities. In a community service system that barely makes ends meet, the interpersonal embeddedness is usually achieved only by the day-to-day interactions between caregivers and the elderly. For example, in Shanghai, the HEC program currently provided basic subsistence services, including meals and cleaning, medical, and recreational services. On the other hand, cultural and sports resources are difficult to be integrated through local associations for the elderly, community schools, sports centres for the elderly people and other institutions. However, as the state policy does not have specific strategy for the development of social activities for elderly people, local “community building initiative” does not include contents of family relations and the encouragement of the construction of three-generation houses. At the same time, interpersonal embeddedness in Nanjing also has the same dilemma, mainly reflected in the possibility of elderly people participating in educational activities. For example, of the five courses offered at three community colleges in Nanjing, entry requirements are limited not only by the number of students but also by the maximum age, and the courses are still in short supply. Behind the restrictions are the safety responsibilities of the

neighbourhood governments. An official in charge of a community college in Nanjing said frankly, “Because we are public welfare institutions, the courses are mainly at art such as painting, recitation and calligraphy. The curriculum can avoid injuries to the elderly students in the teaching process, and whether they can promote their sense of community cohesion is not our main concerns” (8 July 2021). In short, although the state government in China has been attempting to strengthen the nature of community embeddedness and diversify development of elderly care services, neighbourhood governments have focused on providing basic life services due to the preferential market instruments and general policy explanation, and interpersonal embeddedness between neighbourhood organisations and seniors has not yet been formed (see Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison of social activities in Chinese communities for the elderly.

City	Roles of Community Centres	Types of Social Activities	Diversification of Activities	Other Factors
Shanghai	Event organisers	1. Basic care 2. Cultural and sport activities	No diversification of activities	None
Nanjing	Unpaid venues to support spontaneous activities	1. Basic care 2. University classes for the elderly	No diversification of activities	None

(Source 1: see Nanjing Pension Service Regulations, access date: 3 December 2021. http://www.jsrd.gov.cn/zyfb/dffg1/202001/t20200115_519067.shtml. Source 2: see Shanghai Pension Service Regulations, access date: 3 December 2021. <http://shzw.eastday.com/shzw/G/20201231/u1ai20764571.html>).

5. Connotation of HEC Program in China: Estrangement and Empowerment

5.1. The Separation between Community Management and Commercial Services

To explore whether institutional embeddedness of neighbourhood governance can effectively serve the late life of elderly residents, the key is to explore whether the system matches the socio-economic attributes of the elderly people. In this section, we surveyed the cases to explore the connotations of the state-led elderly care program. We interviewed 100 senior residents to find out the impacts of the embedded services on the community field. These five communities are located in the urban area of Nanjing with similar fees of care services. The interviewed elderly people were mainly between the ages of 65 and 94 and lived alone. Although they had varying degrees of health distress, they were basically able to provide self-care or semi-selfcare, which means that they have a greater demand to form social relationships and participate in social activities than healthy seniors (see Figures 2–4).

Figure 2. Age and gender of the interviewees.

Figure 3. Health status of the interviewees.

Figure 4. Education level of the interviewees.

The rationale of consolidating the role of neighbourhood government in HEC program is to rebuild a field of neighbourhood, which can be described as the relationship between the state and citizens, similar to the relationship between leaders and subordinates in socialism, with community officials being familiar with the elderly residents. The emerging features demonstrated the creation of new social relations in the midst of ever-changing conflicts and competition of neighbourhood governance. However, it is not easy to implement the program within the existing neighbourhood jurisdiction, especially in the old residential compounds in the urban centre with severe resource constraints. In order to improve the efficiency of services, the neighbourhood governments have to integrate the smaller communities as large one for sharing the facilities and resources. State-led elderly care programs, however, have come at the cost of reduced autonomy for local territorialisation, especially because of the merged communities, whose officials are appointed from elsewhere. For example, Nanjing's "retirees' station" is an unelected institution that carries out tasks assigned by the municipal government. The role of neighbourhood organisations has become complicated, making older people in the community unfamiliar, and the unfamiliarity may lead to the decline of reciprocal social capital. As a legacy of collective property rights, ordinary residents of old residents were not involved in decision making

of “community building”. In Nanjing’s old communities, although retired residents and neighbourhood organisations have strong social cohesion, the children of retirees do not participate in community management. Since the development of housing commodification, young people with higher incomes move into other commodity housing areas, leaving a vacuum of community management between their elderly parents’ residences and their own.

In terms of age and gender, we found that seniors living alone were mainly between 75 and 94 years old, and there was no significant difference between male and female. This means that both the professionalism of nursing staff and gender factors determine the operability of care services. However, it is not only in the public health system in China that men have far fewer caregivers than women, but also in nursing care institutions of the community. The weakness caused by gender factors not only increases the expenditures of institutions, but also reduces the trust of male elderly people on the program. *“They usually have no problem feeding me, but when I need to take a shower, it awkward. She is worried about me falling in the bathroom, but she is also worried that I won’t be able to finish the shower alone”* (an elderly male A, 15 May 2021). The difficulty of service delivery due to gender factors is not only reflected in the shortage of nursing staff, but also due to the limited budget of the neighbourhood government. As the budget for purchasing the services is funded by the municipal public welfare fund, the service charge is RMB 1000 per month, which is considered far below the market price. In Nanjing, the average price of a public bed is RMB 2000 per month. Meanwhile, the extra income is considered insufficient to maintain the operation of the nursing institutions. Each neighbourhood government in Nanjing has a budget of only RMB 300,000 per year to purchase commercial services. A director of a nursing institution complained that, *“We have a heavy workload and the budget is exhausted just by inviting community doctors to arrange home visits, pay for ambulance calls and staff salaries”* (8 July 2021). In addition, jobs in home-based elderly care services are low-paying and require professional skills. *“Working in the community is not well paid and not a full-time job compared to working in a private and public nursing home, so there are no extra benefits for our staffs”* (8 July 2021). *“In order to increase my extra income, I have to work as a food delivery in the community”* (a social worker of retirees’ station, 8 July 2021).

As can be seen from Figures 3 and 4, the elderly people with chronic diseases or unhealthy and low education level account for the majority of the interviewees. This suggests not only the human cost to care facilities of continuously monitoring the health of older persons, but also that these older persons may develop more trust in informal care. Although the neighbourhood government has suggested the installation of panic buttons at bedsides in the homes of the elderly and those in poor health conditions, not everyone is receptive to the proposal. *“I would prefer the carers to sleep in the room next to mine at night, so I feel more secure”* (an elderly female A, 15 May 2021). *“If they (the carers) could spend more time with me watching TV during the day, that would be the biggest demand for elderly people like me who live alone”* (an elderly male B, 15 May 2021). At present, due to staff shortages and limited budgets, nursing institutions and “retirees’ stations” are attempting to enhance the elderly’s trust in HEC program by involving informal care, such as encouraging the elderly’s children to visit elderly people’s homes occasionally. However, the delivery of informal care is not the government’s responsibility to supervise, and the commercial services cannot supplement because of the government’s price fixing measures. As a result, the program often relies on social workers to fill the vacuum in care services. *“Not all the children of the elderly know what the program are doing and what we struggle with. They might think we can do a lot of things for their parents, but it takes every part of the system to be attentive and subtle”* (a director of retirees’ station, 8 July 2021). As a result, the elderly living in the community not only failed to actualise the family-based elderly care by embedding the government role in the “community building initiative”, but also destroyed the effective concentration of social capital, leading to the imbalance between supply and demand.

5.2. The Atomisation of Family Relations and the Return of the State

We found that the massive suburbanisation in Nanjing has reduced the intensity and length of the relationships among the family members, leading to a trend of atomisation. The atomisation of the family relations removes the constant presence of children. The estrangement between children and the elderly provides neighbourhood government to fill the vacuum of children's role. In the survey, although some elderly had more than two children, this did not mean that their children were able to enrich the contents of elderly care. Although the state government stipulates in "Marriage Law" and the "Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly" that children have the obligation to support their parents, the regulation is only limited to financial support. Meanwhile, the adjustment of the employment spatial layout of Nanjing leads young people to move out of urban centre for better working and living conditions, leaving their parents in the old residential communities in the urban central areas. Thus, policymakers were also attempting to maintain social stability by strengthening the presence of neighbourhood governments to share the responsibility for supporting young people's parents. The conflicts between linear policy making and complex urbanisation development results in fact that the embedded program and nursing home do not present the substantial difference of social space because the main way to promote elderly care services is the bureaucratisation of neighbourhood government. The filling of bureaucrats has increased the proportion of administrative workers in neighbourhood organisations, helping to maintain the presence of state government, such as retiree station in Nanjing, as agents of the state on the ground. On the one hand, the return of the state reduced the impropriety of commercial services, but it has also further accelerated the estrangement of family ties, because as a legacy of socialism, the elderly in China retain a sense of trust in the state. Young people, on the other hand, have the illusion that their parents' needs are being met by the involvement of government in community services.

In order to explore whether the interorganisational embeddedness can fill the care services needed by elderly residents, we conducted the analysis of the connection between the elderly people and their families to help us to verify to what extent the return of the government can activate the role of market instruments. More significantly, analysing the frequency of contact between children and the interviewed elderly people helped us understand how the state has filled the vacuum in privatised services and changed it into a process of a state-organised system. In Figures 5–7, it can be seen that the frequency of children's visits to the elderly's home was irregular, mostly two to three times a month, with a short stay each time. The visiting usually takes only about half an hour to an hour. The purpose of the visit was also largely limited to providing economic and supplies support. Most children brought food and daily necessities to the elderly. *"The visiting is not very regular, basically once per month, with 3 children adding up to once to twice a month"* (an elderly female B, 15 May 2021). *"My oldest son lives in Jiangning (a new town in Nanjing), and he used to come to see me once a month, but now his wife is pregnant, and he seldom comes"* (an elderly female C, 15 May 2021). *"The purpose of my daughter's visit is to bring some daily necessities. She usually only stays for half an hour and then leaves. In fact, I really hope she can stay longer to chat with me"* (an elderly male C, 15 May 2021). *"Instead, Xiao Wang (the pseudonym of a carer) is the one I talk to most. He talks about topics I care about"* (an elderly male D, 15 May 2021). The complete separation of the living spaces between the elderly and their children leads to a misalignment of their priorities, which, combined with the increased cost of commuting, has ultimately led to a decline in intimacy and family relations between the elderly people and their children. In the case of alienated family relations, the children often have a misplaced perception of the psychological needs of their parents, that is, they attempt to express their filial piety through financial support.

Figure 5. Number of children of the interviewees.

Figure 6. Frequency and purpose of visits by children of the interviewees.

Figure 7. Visiting hours of children of the interviewed elderly people.

However, the survey also found that about 75 percent of the interviewees had low expectations for the family relations. They were generally satisfied or satisfied with the frequency and purpose of their children's visits, while only 25 percent were not satisfied with the current state of children visits. On the one hand, we perceived that this is related to the changes in the social relationships of the elderly caused by the embedding of government in neighbourhood governance.

"In order to avoid social isolation of the elderly in the community who live alone, we organised rallies and speeches for them once or twice a week, on the one hand to publicise safety knowledge and on the other hand to publicise the achievements of 'community building'. They can just come and listen and get some daily necessities for free" (a director of street office, 8 July 2021)

Strengthening the state's care for the elderly in their later life reflects the attempts of state government to replace the alienation of family relationships resulting from the atomisation of the family relations through the HEC program. In sharp contrast to the high satisfaction level, on the other hand, the results also reflected the low expectation of the elderly people for their children. Regarding the emerging atomisation of society and the rise of individualism in China, the elderly show very low expectations of filial piety from family members. However, the return of the state provides not only moral comfort, but also a set of social values and a mechanism for community services. The regular meetings and speeches held by the neighbourhood governments actually provide a sense of presence for the empty-nesters and even vacuous young people. Therefore, the elderly's expectation of family relationship is not affected by the approaches and contents of providing elderly care services. Instead, the embedded role of neighbourhood government reconstructs the social identity of seniors in the field of community. Emerging in the operation of neighbourhood governance as a supervisor, the role of the state government on the one hand strengthens the public's trust, and on the other hand, it also enables marginalised elderly people to find social cohesion again. While the side effects of low expectations are that the state is unable to reactivate the social value of seniors and change the pyramidal social structure, and this low expectation is also an important factor in the marginalisation of the old neighbourhoods. *"I don't want to . . . Just come and visit me when they can. My daughter runs a company and lives in the suburbs. She seems so busy"* (an elderly female D, 15 May 2021). *"My place is small, so my children don't want to come"* (an elderly male E, 15 May 2021).

The scenarios of interviewees indicated that a field formed by HEC program is presented as a situation in which the elderly expect their children. The vast majority of interviewees desired their children to visit once a week, yet such low expectations were not met. It follows that the social needs of elderly people seem to be highly scalable and elastic. Therefore, we suggested that elderly people actually demand ethical relationships, although the demand may seem trivial because they do not state their desire. Moreover, it is easy for community services to overlook the need for ethical relationships among the elderly group, or to assume that the need has been met.

5.3. Enhancing the Family Relations by Rebuilding Social Capitals

Embedded HEC program in Nanjing is characterised by the neighbourhood governments providing professional community services and humanistic care for seniors through cooperation with social capitals. On the one hand, social capitals form the entrusted agency relationship with the neighbourhood governments through governmental purchase, entrustment, or lease. On the other hand, the effective operation depends on the integration between elderly people and their families. The mechanism lies not only in the supply network constructed by the government and the market, but also in the effective interaction between social capitals and seniors. The trust capital constructed by each other is the key to whether the service can be well delivered, which is reflected in whether the community services and contents meeting the physiological and psychological needs of the elderly group. The mechanism attempted to increase the social capitals of elderly people through enhancing neighbourhood cohesion, but the reality of the discovery is another story. We

found that interviewees were more inclined to family relationship rather than system for whether they trust the operating mechanism, which shows that it is insufficient for neighbourhood organisations and nursing institutions to rely only on government endorsement and corresponding supervision and service standards.

The embedding of interpersonal relationship is mainly reflected in whether the return of state in HEC program can maintain social cohesion, and the trust capital generated is usually an important form of expression. We attempted to explore whether the embedding of HEC program enhanced the sense of social cohesion of the elderly people, so as to test the government's approach to neighbourhood governance. We found that the enhancement of trust is a social capital formed by constant interaction with neighbours and family. In terms of the retiree's station in Nanjing, the degree of satisfaction with its service varies among respondents. As a hub between the municipal government and various neighbourhood organisations, the embedded nursing institution has realised the creation of community space. However, the service contents still need to seek the cooperation of market instruments to achieve. In a community with a high degree of satisfaction, street office, nursing home, and neighbourhood organisation usually extend the professionalism of their services, such as organising parent-child activities or cooking competitions regularly on weekends. *"The purpose of the activities is to enhance the interaction and understanding between seniors and their formal caregivers, thus enhancing social trust in the scheme"* (A director of retiree's station, 8 July 2021). The activities aimed at enhancing family relationships are more likely to improve the elderly's expectation of life satisfaction in later life, thus enhancing the elderly's trust in neighbourhood organisations. More importantly, in the collective activities under the operation of social capitals, the elderly also indirectly enhances the trust of the state to return to the role of neighbourhood governance through the informal interaction of children and relatives. However, in communities with low satisfactions, although community services are managed and regulated, the service contents lack relevant informal approaches for neighbourhood organisations to re-establish connections between elderly people and their families and neighbours.

Most elderly people said they never had opportunities to visit their children's homes. The form of managed services reduced the burden on children to take care of their parents, but also creates the illusion of rich service contents. Moreover, when asked if they would be willing to live with their children for some periods, one interviewee said that, *"Choosing home-based services is just a compromise to the financial status and different lifestyles of two generations"* (an elderly female E, 15 May 2021). In the severe shortage of public nursing beds and the increasingly estranged family relationship caused by atomisation of society in China, ordinary elderly residents cannot change their living environment, and affordable pension plan has become the only choice. Furthermore, the definition of home varied among the elderly group. Some elderly people thought that their children's home was their property even though the down payment on the house or the children's new residence for marriage is covered by their savings. In the state-led reconstruction of community services, the social capital of elderly people is an integrated social network of neighbours, friends, and caregivers. Although the embedded community elements are spatially dense, their inherent strength of ties are less than that of parent-child relationships. The five communities are constantly improving their formal and informal services, but *"... the emotional bond of the family is an important indicator for testing home-based services for seniors"* (a director of retirees' station, 8 July 2021). However, the neighbourhood governments have attempted to cultivate a new social network of the elderly group, that is, to build an informal social relationship between elderly people and neighbourhood organisations. We argued that the continuation of traditional social networks, especially parent-child relationships, helps foster the role of neighbourhood organisations to compensate for the failure of residential autonomy in China.

6. Discussion

In this study, the cross-connection analysis is helpful to explore the effect of social space reconstruction on the re-socialisation of the elderly. Such a methodology is not only conducive to long-term exploration of changes in social spaces at community level, but also helps in analysing the impacts of the embedded HEC program on changing of social identity of seniors at a more detailed scale, so as to explore the long-term impacts on the enhanced presence of state in neighbourhood governance. An initial investigation of neighbourhood governance was conducted through reviewing local policies of the HEC program in Nanjing and Shanghai in response to the policy to promote “community building” [14,59,80]. We compared and summarised the local policies, which is helpful in terms of exploring the common dilemma of embedded program at community level.

In the case of Nanjing, although the elderly residents receiving nursing services at home had not separated from the original living environment and life connection, their habits were continuous in existing social networks, which made the seniors tend to maintain uninterrupted contact with their families, rather than emerging social spaces. In the field of community, the enhancement of one relationship leads to the decline of another. The embedded government-led program transforms the lifestyle of empty-nesters, and homes are endowed with third-party attributes of residence by embedded social networks. As an affordable supplement to market supply, the HEC program not only presented the transformation of organisational structure and governance capacity at the community level, but also reflected the mechanism transformation on neighbourhood governance. On the one hand, restricted by spatial factors such as community facilities, residential form, and medical accessibilities, elderly residents with spatial embedment cannot cut off the connection with the declining living environment. The relationship between the elderly residents and the neighbourhood governance based on social space and its interest mechanism makes the “family bond” significant. On the other hand, in contrast with gated communities, the demand of residential autonomy is underdeveloped significantly; more importantly, the difference in values between the two types of residential forms provide possibility of practice and institutional space for reconstruction of social networks.

In response to existing studies, our analysis was mainly to explore why the embedding role of government still leads to the failure of the HEC program in China, because the previous evidence did not properly show the results of the public response, and we believed that the relevant research needed to be further promoted. The results of this study showed that even a lack of competition in community service industries has a negative impact on the supply and demand of elderly care services. Even academics on the left conceded that elderly people could benefit from market approaches to eliminate overpricing and suboptimal performance, including an acceptable market competition, but this should not be interpreted as an endorsement of *laissez-faire* [81,82]. Disturbingly, although later life is supposed to be one of life freest moments, a retirement system that relies entirely on voluntary exchanges to coordinate financial transactions may not optimise the freedom of older people and their families. However, for the *laissez-faire* school of research, our findings do not seem very similar to what they advocate. Neo-liberals claimed that the consolidation of state power will inevitably lead to generalised deregulation and realise the benefits of economic development through the establishment of agent on ground of state institutions in the market [83]. However, no matter how persuasive the prediction of the allocation of market instruments in the academic literature is, there are good reasons to question its credibility [84]. In this study, empirical evidence showed that the return of the government role in neighbourhood governance in China changed the pension dilemma of elderly people due to economic insecurity. The libertarian school underestimates the “legacy effect” of a powerful state machine through political rent-seeking because their huge market share and dynamics have the capacity to act to manipulate the development of HEC program. This showed that although the role of the agent on the ground in neighbourhood governance relies heavily on the power of the state to obtain the dominant

position in providing community services, even without the favouritism of the state, they still pose a threat to the allocation of market instruments.

7. Conclusions

This study examined the operation mechanism of home-based services for seniors that are being promoted in China. The state government attempts to strengthen “community building” to realise the accumulation of social capital in the pension industry. We found that since the rises of housing privatisation, the endowment institution—a social organisation originally configured by supply and demand and market instruments, with operators and caregivers under the supervision of the state agency at street level—has transformed its functions and is now completely dependent on government funding. We argued that conservative neighbourhood governance policies and the underdevelopment residential autonomy make it imperative for the state to return to a prominent position in providing care services for seniors, but it also brings a heavy burden to the allocation of market instruments. Meanwhile, the HEC program in China is differently from the integrated approach offered by the market. This is a more territorialised form of state agency that operates at the neighbourhood level. Whenever possible, state agencies have emphasised the use of market instruments and market operations, while the co-existence of specialisation and “bureaucratic” (in the sense of formality) agencies and nursing services provided by different companies has seriously hindered the development of reciprocal neighbourhood activities. Estrangement and empowerment are side effects of embedded neoliberal approaches. While the narrative of neoliberalism anticipates the retreat of the state following the massive-scale commercialisation of community services, there is existing well-documented trend towards the consolidation of the state’s presence in neighbourhood governance in China [14,25,85]. Commodification and continuation of state control seems to describe different aspects of China’s urban transformation.

How do these two contradictory processes, the role of the state and the formation of the spontaneous social space, embed in actual neighbourhood governance? Rather than simply placing them in concepts such as “embedded liberalism” [30] and “embedded neoliberalism” [8], this paper attempted to describe how they collectively achieve the restructuring of the social capital of the community through a “coherent” process. Rethinking the concept of “embedded neoliberalism” involved governance after “art of governmentality” [86], a more practical attempt is to embed the discourse and practice of neighbourhood governance in China and in turn transform neoliberalism from a relatively closed dogma, with specific individuals, the government, and interest groups permeating and absorbing the entire spectrum of political life in a concept of hegemonism. In the process, the concept itself has undergone considerable evolution, but here we offer a close-up look at the neighbourhood level.

The atomisation of the family provides an opportunity for the state to restructure the social capital of the elderly. HEC program as a part of state-organised system of neighbourhood governance have been asked to take over this role. This could mean opportunities to develop reciprocal activities that increase trust in the government’s role in promoting nursing services at the neighbourhood level. We found that perhaps the elderly people have low expectations of retirement life, or they are not dissatisfied with the current retirement environment. However, in reality, they witnessed the atomisation of society. They may be helpless, because the “modern family relationship” described by Zimmerman [87] is under the impact of “neoliberalism” and the restructuring of social relations with interests instead of family ties as the core [88]. Yet, what is found here is not a lingering atomisation of society. At the micro level, the state government attempts to infiltrate neighbourhood organisations to reconstruct the social space. However, the gaps left by commercial operations are not filled by embedded role of state government or the involving market instruments. This is because the high cost of caring for the elderly makes them helpless to accept marginalisation. The social capitals of elderly people based on family relations did not promote the continuation of the existing field at community

level, and the embedding roles of state further weakened the possibility of strengthening family bounds among the elderly. Alienated family relationships are “inevitably” filled by the professionalisation of neighbourhood organisations.

This can be compared with other nations with developed neoliberal market approaches, such as Japan; the embedding role of neighbourhood government in Japan is characterised by policies, funds, and participation of various neighbourhood organisations [89,90]. Firstly, at the level of policy and management, the long history of legalisation construction of the pension industry by local governments has provided institutional guarantee for the home-based elderly care. In terms of funds embeddedness, stable capital sources can be obtained through the insurance system. Secondly, at the level of organisational embeddedness, the neighbourhood government encourages a variety of private enterprises to participate in service provision and establishes access mechanism for professional personnel training. The role of the government is limited to supervising the quality of service without involving access conditions. Finally, at the level of embeddedness of social integration, the role of community pension institutions also includes the organisation of diversified social activities and the excavation of the re-employment potential of the elderly people. In China, the embedding role of government is mainly due to maintaining community stability and filling the gaps in commercial services. However, the role of the Japanese government more accurately reflects the expectation of the society for the elderly people to reintegrate into social life and finally achieve the process of resocialisation.

As a bridge between the elderly and their children, the preferences of community services could be embedded through policy implementation to improve their social attributes. Firstly, a profile of the elderly at the community level should be established, including their working background, physical condition, mental condition, and personality of the elderly, as well as the cognitive, communication, and social interaction conditions, so as to assist community workers in carrying out appropriate assessments. Secondly, the living and psychological needs of the elderly should be fed back to their children in a timely manner to help them understand the various physical and psychological characteristics of their parents during old age. By organising diverse activities, the elderly group can have more communication with the society and provide various ways to help them establish simple social networks. Owing to the special physical and psychological factors, the elderly group is more sensitive to the rapidly changing society, and the significant overlap in living spaces tends to make the social network of the elderly unstable. Therefore, the social participation of the elderly has a significant impact on the reconstruction of the community social space and the possibility of the elderly’s resocialisation.

From daily neighbourhood lives of the elderly, we begin to understand the transformation of neighbourhood governance in a post-socialism context [91]. The underdevelopment of HEC program in China is not only a legacy of policies that interferes with population growth, but, more importantly, the prevailing market approach that replaces reciprocal relationships in the context of declining neighbourhood resources. China’s state-led “pension experiment” has been very conservative, creating a state-organised system of rent-seeking market privileges. Therefore, in China, neoliberalism is not a satisfactory approach of retirement system, but makes seniors residents more dependent on the strengthening of neighbourhood governance by the state.

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