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Relevance of the “good old days” in designing holistic aged care services

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The issue of demographic ageing is becoming one of the biggest challenges in contemporary societies, and various professional, academic and political fields have been called upon to find solutions for easing the tension demographic ageing creates in aged care. This paper investigates how elderly people’s past experiences can inform the design process for improved aged care. An empirical study was conducted to determine the meanings that Chinese elderly people attach to their past experiences. The study used interviews and focus group discussions with retired people in the city of Zhuhai in southern China. Following the research analysis, we identified three emerging themes from the interviews focussing on elderly people’s past experiences. These experiences were reported by the participants as having important and perhaps specific meanings for them. The important themes identified in this study were related to the experiences of being in nature, sharing time with family and neighbours and spending time practising skills and hobbies. Such experiences strongly reflect the participants’ lifestyle in their cultural contexts. These experiences have the potential to increase the wellbeing of the retired participants. The purpose of this study is to explore the potential of the “good old days” and how design practitioners can apply this concept in their design practices for more holistic and inclusive care of the elderly.

Keywords: ageing and aged people; elderly care; past experiences; service design; good old days

1. Introduction

This paper is based on a study of ageing and aged people to address the relevance of seniors' past experiences and the meanings they attach to these experiences in creating wellbeing in care. The study aims to understand elderly people's needs and desires in order to provide viewpoints for design practitioners to use when creating or improving services in care for elderly individuals. This aim is addressed by the following research questions: What meanings do elderly people give to their past experiences in terms of care at an institution? How can designers utilise elderly people's meaningful past experiences in developing care services to strengthen the wellbeing of ageing populations? The phenomenon of ageing has long been discussed in many professional fields. In gerontology, ideas such as ageing at home (Struyk & Katsura, 1988) and aging in place (Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, & Allen, 2012) emphasise a home-like environment that protects autonomy and enhances quality of life (Williams et al., 2009). Ageing in one's community enables elderly people to maintain their connection to society, including friends and family (Callahan, 1993; Keeling, 1999; Lawler, 2001). Ageing in one's own culture (Fund, 2013) takes another perspective and addresses the value of cultural differences in socioemotional ageing. In other words, individuals from different cultural contexts pursue their own values regarding wellbeing. This highlights how interpersonal relatedness (i.e., social reciprocity and adherence to norms and traditions) and relationship harmony are more important in contexts valuing communality (such as Chinese society) than in societies where individuality is valued more (such as many societies in the Global North). Taking these different dimensions into account is important when designing new solutions with holistic and inclusive perspectives in elderly care services.

In the field of design practice, many independent projects have been conducted. "Life 2.0" aims to generate new opportunities for local interaction by creating new services for elderly people (<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/270965>). The REACH Project aims to develop a service system that will turn care environments into personalisable modular sensing, prevention, and intervention systems that encourage elderly people to maintain their health through various activities (physical, cognitive, mobility, personalised food etc.) (<https://reach2020.eu/>). In most design studies, elderly people are considered co-designers, and their understanding of and capability to create user-centred solutions are utilised. Design for wellbeing (DfW) redirects the focus of product development from technology-based development to participatory product development. The aim of DfW is to enable consumers or users to participate in the design process in order to influence and improve their daily life conditions. This participation takes place along many different dimensions and does not focus only on physical ability (Larsson, Larsson, Leifer, Loos, & Feland, 2005). More recently, a study by Pan, Sarantou and Miettinen (2019) highlights another dimension of participation and cooperation in which the past experiences of the elderly were used to improve their current (service) experiences in elderly care, and it was found that the meanings that elderly people attach to the "good old days" can be transferred into appropriate services and to help them flourish. However, Pan et al. (2019) do not discuss the relevance of the concept of "good" in connection with the phenomenon of the "good old days." That study focussed instead on exploring the connotations of the "good old days" and filial piety in relation to food services at an aged care institution in China.

This paper takes the 2018 study one step further by exploring how elderly people's past experiences can inform the design processes for improving aged care. It focusses in particular on the concept of "aging in culture" in China, which is a specific research context as "respect and care for parents and the aged" (Sung, 1995, p. 240) have deep roots in Chinese culture. This respect and care impact social relationships among communities and the awareness of hierarchies within these relationships (Ingersoll-Dayton & Saengtienchai, 1999). Current challenges for elderly people and their care services in China are particularly related to indigenous traditions, beliefs and morality. Moreover, there is a challenge in providing holistic care services that consider the intersections of the past and present from the elderly people's point of view. This paper argues that by analysing the meaning of past experiences and traditions in their particular cultural context and utilising this knowledge in design processes, aged care practices can be developed to be more holistic and inclusive.

Empirically, the study is based on design ethnography, including semi-structured interviews and participatory focus group workshops with retired people carried out in the city of Zhuhai, a region with a strong economy, but one that is still influenced by the traditions and cultural values that reflect the interlinkages of past and present, bringing specific nuances to ageing in this context. Design ethnography gives design researchers a deep understanding of the past experiences of elderly people; thus, this research method may be appealing to designers creating more compelling solutions in aged care. The purpose of this study is to evoke the notion of the "good old days" to help design practitioners apply this concept in their design processes in elderly care.

2. Theoretical framework: “Good old days” and design research with ageing communities

2.1 “Good old days”

The term “good old days” was coined by Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer (1669–1752) in 1688 to refer to a new and fatal disease characterised by the pain felt by people who were not in their native land and who yearned to return home, fearing they would never see it again. Different terminologies have been used in practice, such as reminiscence (Cook, 1998), nostalgia (Nilsson, Johansson, & Håkansson, 2003) and sentimentality (Stoyanova, Giannouli, & Gergov, 2017), to describe the challenge of demographic aging in contemporary society.

In research, the most common term used to refer to the “good old days” is nostalgia. Since 1979, researchers in marketing (Havlena & Holak, 1991), advertising (Zhao, Muehling, & Kareklas, 2014) and branding (Kessous, Roux, & Chandon, 2015) have become increasingly interested in nostalgia, but in design research, the concept has been less studied and utilised. Most studies utilising “good old days” regarding the ageing population in design research are in architecture or urban planning (Simpson, 2012), but fewer exist in service design. In any case, “good old days” as nostalgia or past experience is viewed as an evocation (Davis, 1979), a mood (Belk, 1990), a preference (Holbrook & Schindler, 1991), an emotional state (Stern, 1992) or an affective reaction (Divard & Robert-Demontrond, 1997). Stoyanova et al. (2017) noted that nostalgia is related not only to past memories of the homeland, but also to the past in general. Stoyanova et al. (2017) explain that nostalgia is an attachment to the past (Jobson & Wickham-Jones, 2010) and a preference for the experiences (Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012) and places (Chan, 2011) of the past. Holbrook and Schindler (1991) define nostalgia as a positive attitude or favourable affect towards people when one was younger (i.e. in early adulthood or in childhood). Positive experiences from the past shape how people determine themselves and create, for example, security and self-acceptance (Stamatov, 2010).

However, we must be aware that nostalgic experiences rarely recur. People are motivated to savour their past by prolonging the time they reminisce about their old days. (Huang, Huang, & Wyer, 2016). The word “nostalgia” has two roots: *nostos*, meaning to return home and *algos*, referring to suffering or grief (Havlena & Holak, 1991). All in all, as Szuba (2016, p. 7) concludes, nostalgia is “not really about wanting to return to a certain time or place, but about wanting to create a certain mood or state of mind.” In other words, it is not about when and where you were, it is more about what you are looking forward to and why.

Although the term “good old days” does not have a solid definition, we use the abovementioned and plural dimensions to explore its meanings in elderly care. In addition, it is considered a phenomenon in providing better-informed care that meets the needs and requirements of senior citizens at various stages in their life journeys. It is about focussing on positive memories and affects from the past that can be converted into care practices in the present.

2.2 Design research in aged care

Design in aged care utilises multiple approaches to develop user-friendly services for elderly people in care settings. We particularly rely on service design approaches that are situated in human-centred design and empowerment, which in practice means that the users, or in this case the elderly, are included in service design outcomes, such as service journeys that aim to address the needs identified by the elderly to improve their quality of life through services they deem important and appropriate. Empowerment can refer to strengthening elderly people’s agency and supporting their dignity, which can then guide design with and by elderly communities for the care services that would enable them to live the life they desire. Studies on design practice in institutional care have also emphasised the meaning of physical and psychological environments for the elderly (e.g., Ma, Chau, Zhou, & Noguchi, 2017). This has resulted in a proposal for using environmental experience design in order to call designers’ attention to the environment of the elderly (Ma et al., 2017). Pan et al. (2019) have addressed the importance of memories among elderly people. Both of these accounts emphasise the importance of the integration of seniors’ individual experiences in design processes with and by elderly people for improving aged care.

In service design with and by the elderly, the sense of community and participation, in addition to pleasant and profound experiences (Pan et al., 2019), plays an important role in care. Crozier (1994) defines how life experiences can reflect on or shape the meaningful emotions of people. Stoyanova et al. (2017) claim that mental commitment to the past is important for human beings, especially during the process of ageing. We link these statements as responses to the claim by Owen (2004) that design is a profession that is concerned with creating solutions and services that satisfy users’ need to improve their lives.

3. Research methods and data collection

Based on the aim and research questions of this study, the research was conducted in Zhuhai, China in April 2019. One of the authors worked with design teachers and students from the design school at Beijing Normal University, Zhuhai (BNUZ). Design ethnography was employed as the research strategy with the aim of learning about participants' perspectives, daily routines and what they care about (Spradley, 1979). The research process was strategically built in two stages. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to explore the spectrum of the elderly people's perspectives on the "old days." This was followed with a participatory focus group discussion. The data were collected from elderly participants who met in an informal setting to talk about a particular topic that had been set by the researcher in order to obtain feedback from the participants (Curedale, 2013; Longhurst, 2003).

During the entire research process, data collection methods such as storytelling, audio recording, photography and notetaking were used to stimulate and record discussions about the seniors' daily routines. The data were collected digitally via password-protected voice recorders, cameras and smartphones.

3.1 Step one: Semi-structured interviews

The aim of the first stage was to explore the scope of the "old days" from the seniors' perspective, and semi-structured interviews were organised around the common themes. Thirty students from the design school of BNUZ volunteered as research interviewers. The students were divided into groups of three (one interviewing, one documenting and one observing), and they had to randomly choose four senior individuals (two males and two females) above the age of 55 (in China, the official retirement age is 55 for females and 60 for males) to conduct the interview with. Participants were selected from residential areas, markets or senior homes.

Prior to the interviews, preliminary training was prepared in order to familiarise the interviewers (students) with the process and the research questions. Three interview questions were prepared as guidelines for the semi-structured interviews: 1) According to the "good old days," would you like to share some experiences or memories?; 2) Why are they significant to you?; 3) In your opinion, how do the experiences related to the "good old days" influence your daily life?

The interviews were conducted between 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. at locations such as residential areas, senior homes and markets because this is the usual time when the local seniors meet up with each other to participate in social or outdoor activities. A total of 25 interviews (with 13 females and 12 males) were conducted. . Subsequently, the data were analysed using a qualitative content analysis method (Blair, 2015), and accordingly, the transcribed interviews were categorised into prominent themes using open coding, thus providing participant-generated knowledge (Blair, 2015). The themes that emerged via this method were grouped as: 1) being with nature; 2) being with family or people in the neighbourhood; and 3) being creative (Figure 1). These themes were further coded according to the age and gender of the respondents. The second stage of the data collection was to apply these themes into the focus group study.

3.2 Step two: Focus group study

The aim of the group study was to understand how the three identified themes based on the interviews could potentially contribute to seniors' happiness and wellbeing.

A three-hour study (between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m.) was conducted; four senior participants (two males and two females) with an average age of 69 volunteered. All participants were able to communicate and understand the process and idea of a focus group study. Each senior participant was grouped with three design students as a team.



Photo 1: Storytelling during the group study



Photo 2: Analysis at the end of the group study

The group study was structured as an introduction, an in-depth discovery and a final analysis. The introduction (30 mins) outlined the purpose and process of the group study to avoid misunderstandings or confusion. At the same time, the introduction provided time for the participants to familiarise themselves with each other. This created a basis for communication and collaboration. In the in-depth discovery phase (60–90 mins), storytelling was used to evoke old memories and past experiences. The senior participants were encouraged to use all media (e.g., smartphones, tablets, drawing) to explain their stories or experiences (Photo 1). In each group, one student led the topic as defined from the interview stage and encouraged the seniors to begin the discussion while the other two students captured the core meanings from the stories using notetaking and sticky notepads. Afterwards, all teams, guided by the keywords, organised their notes on a wall and presented their results. During the last step (60 mins), all keywords from each senior were grouped and posted on different coloured notes, depending on the topics identified from the coding of the interviews (Photo 2). Finally, during the presentations and data analysis, the senior participants were encouraged to interrupt and comment on or clarify misunderstandings at any time in order to obtain accurate results. According to the ethical practices of the academy, we obtained permission from the participants to use their photos, interview data and ethnographic observations for publication purposes. However, the names of the senior participants used in this paper are pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy and ensure anonymity.

4. Findings

4.1 Results of the interviews and focus group study

The analysis based on the semi-structured interviews led us to identify the three emerging themes related to the “good old days” (Figure 1).

Being with nature	Farming and gardening	“From time to time I remember the time of farming and the local market atmosphere” “I was very happy when I did gardening, growing vegetables” “I am good at different farming methods and am very proud of this”
	Outdoor activities	“Like to be close to nature, capture birds in nets and go fishing” “Go to the field and rivers, enjoy the birds singing and fishing” “Travelling to other places” “Outdoor walking” “Raise children”
Being with community	Children	“Children growing up” “I am very proud of my daughter’s acceptance to a good university” “Tutor my grandson with my knowledge. It brought me a lot of happiness”
	Neighbourhood	“I miss the time when I was with my parents” “Family and children are important for me” “The company of children, partner and family” “Family members, relatives and home atmosphere”
	Community	“In the ‘60s, the society was safer, the neighbourhood and interpersonal relationships were better” “The friendship with former classmates” “I have experienced the Mao Time and miss it”
Being creative	Handcrafts	“I have enjoyed the handcraft of embroidery my whole life, and I am good at it” “I like nature and I like working here as a gardener”
	Previous jobs	“I was lucky to be accepted to university and to served our country and government” “Every time I get some information about my students’s success, I am so proud of it” “I miss the Mao Time because of the social security, safe food, and harmonized friendships” “As long as I was at work with my nice colleagues, it brought me happiness and fulfillment”
	Singing and dancing	“Life is beautiful because of my job” “I started singing and dancing during the Mao Time, and they became my hobbies”

Figure 1: Three themes defined by the semi-structured interviews

Being with family and neighbours appeared to be the most important experiences from the past, regardless of the participants' gender. Almost all of the seniors interviewed came from big families or villages with the same family name. In China, the whole village often is part of one family tree; thus, the village may be named after one family, such as "Lee-Village." For seniors, taking care of family members (children or grandchildren, parents or grandparents and extended family members) is a culture- and tradition-based obligation, and maintaining a good relationship with relatives, friends and even colleagues (many senior people were only allowed to work only at one company during the Mao period) is another aspect of this norm. Being with nature was the second theme we found, and it included enjoying farming, gardening, vegetable cultivation and taking walks outside. These desires were not only related to aging, but also reflected their pasts; the participants were born and raised in the countryside and had been part of fishing or farming communities and had a close relationship with nature. The third most important experience for the seniors was about enjoying their professional skills from their previous jobs (mainly for the males), handcrafts (women and men) and other hobbies such as singing and dancing, which reflected the meaning of being creative.

4.2 Results of the focus group study

First, the significance of **being with community** is rooted in Chinese social norms, traditions and life patterns. Taking care of family members is an obligation that can bring seniors some psychological security, pride and happiness (Cheng & Chan, 2006). For instance, in Chinese society, having four generations living together is perceived as a family honour, according to the classical Xiao tradition (Whyte, 1997). Being with family is one of the significant values that can be connected to the "good old days." It is not unusual for some neighbourhoods in Chinese communities to have known each other's family members for generations. The connection to the neighbourhood is equal to a family connection. This illustrates that for the seniors, being with family and among neighbours played an important role in terms of their sense of attachment and connection with the "good old days."

Mrs. Xu: *"If life is a tree, people are the leaves. We, old people, are the falling leaves down to the root of the tree with other leaves. That is our community, which we are familiar with and can gain happiness from, is it not?"*

Moreover, **being with nature** not only provided pleasure and positive emotions for the seniors, but also gave them the opportunity to release some of the stress of daily challenges. The important reason for outdoor activities from this focus group study was that these seniors "found themselves" and got in touch with their "past" in nature. Their roots in the countryside were maintained in their vital memories of nature. Since they were becoming older or had retired from work, the seniors had a strong will to escape from the city to the "homeland" in the country. As in Martin's (1954) view, going back to the "motherland" is one option for gaining some happiness because it is not easy "to forget mother's milk" (p. 94).

Mrs. Wang said: *"We planted vegetables not only to harvest fresh vegetables or do some physical exercise, but I sometimes enjoy the 'home' feeling when I touch the soil and water because it brings me back to my homeland where I came from."*

Being creative was the third theme. The findings illustrate that the elderly people enjoyed immersion in their hobbies and skills that stemmed from their previous experiences and even their professional careers. This not only kept the seniors active, but also helped them to find a sense of self-accomplishment through these practices. The findings also indicated a traditional gender division in this theme. Men felt proud when they could contribute to society or community through their skills or their previous professions while the women appreciated being able to take care of their grandchildren, practise handcrafts and cook food for all of their family members. The analysis showed that this was not due to them being forced to do so, but instead reflected their cultural values and the contextual comprehension of self-fulfilment.

Mr. Wang: *"Although helping others with my skills takes my time, I receive honour from it and feel that I am still useful somehow... In my opinion, self-sacrifice equals self-actualisation."*

The analysis of the three “good old days” themes shows a strong connection between the individual, community and nature, and sometimes it is not easy to define which theme an activity belongs to. However, all are linked to the concept of “good,” such as self-actualisation, self-fulfilment or appreciation. For instance, eating or making food was emphasised many times during the interviews and focus group study as engaging with nature (planting vegetables), maintaining neighbourhood relationships (sharing vegetables) and cooking for family members, which brought appreciation and self-actualisation. Food culture in China was even perceived as a tool to measure “what life is” or “what happiness is.”

Mrs. Lee: *“The best living distance would be a bowl of soup. This means that when I cook soup for my children, it keeps warm until they arrive here from the place where they live... We rarely say ‘I love you,’ but my love is in this soup.”*

Discourse around eating manners, company and place reflected the social and cultural structure as well as the social positions of people in their community (Mikkonen, 2017). The culture around food also reflects people’s identities, separation or connection and communication (Karisto, 2004). Thus, it is not only a physical matter, but can also be viewed as a social and cultural structure defining the holistic wellbeing of elderly people.

4.3 Results of the intersecting themes of the “good old days”

Based on the results described in the previous section, we first conclude that the “good old days” have rich components. The three defined themes in the study, i.e., spending time in nature, being with the community and being creative, involve the elements of where (places such as a garden, forest, etc.), with whom (family, neighbours and friends) and how (skills or interests). This demonstrates a broad spectrum of “good old days” that the seniors long to return to in their retirement, with links to geographical, physical, sociological and psychological aspects. Based on this context, design in elderly care requires multi-disciplinary professionals to work collaboratively as ageing is a complex issue. In other words, the “good old days” can apply to elderly care from different angles in order to help seniors “feel good.”

The second important finding was that certain “good old days” can help the seniors achieve the feeling of “being good” in the present. For instance, care centres can provide opportunities for the seniors to evoke their childhood memories (e.g., being in nature) and take care of family members, relatives and friends in order to feel valued (e.g., caring for grandchildren or the neighbourhood) and to achieve self-fulfilment (e.g., using hobbies or interests to contribute to society). Thus, good memories of the past can be harnessed for care practice to strengthen the identity and self-worth of the elderly, which strengthens their emotional wellbeing. This understanding offers fresh viewpoints and a foundation to service designers, social workers and other professionals working in aged care to meet the needs of senior people in relation to their pasts.

Thirdly, the study indicates the importance of interpersonal relationships in seniors’ daily routines, such as taking care of different generations and maintaining neighbourly relationships. This reflects the contextual and cultural values in China, indicating communal responsibilities not as an obligation but as a way of living and believing. These findings align with the claim of Fung (2009) in that they not only address the difference between Chinese and Western societies, but also emphasise the importance of taking context and culture into account when addressing the meanings of past experiences in designing aged care services.

5. Discussion

Based on the findings in the previous sections, three themes (being with community, being with nature and being creative) were established through the interviews, and the values of those three themes also appeared in the subsequent focus group study. However, two considerations—the value that these themes contribute to service design in elderly care (Figure 2) and how the value of these themes empower the design process in practice—still need further discussion (Figure 3).

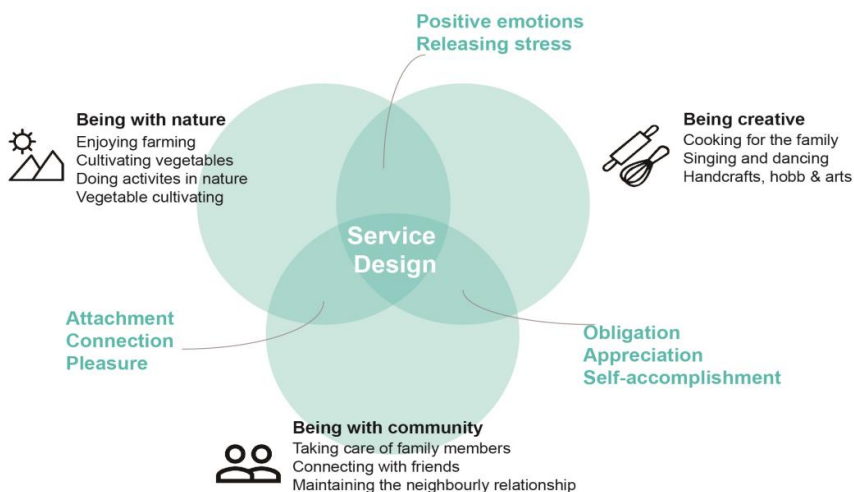


Figure 2: The meaning and value among the three themes, as defined by the focus group study

One consideration is the ways in which or in what forms these activities under the three themes can be applied in practice in order to improve elderly care. **Being with community** not only addresses three different dimensions (individual, family and neighbourhood) to take into consideration, but it also explains the value behind them, such as the pleasure that is obtained from the attachment to and connections among people. In addition, appreciation of others and enjoying certain activities with them may add value to elderly people’s experiences while the obligations of care can be enacted and expressed in meaningful ways, for example through creative endeavours, which may also strengthen cross-generational interaction and learning. These values further reflect classical morality and the culture of filial piety in China, or 孝 in Chinese calligraphy (pronounced as Xiao). The calligraphy sign is composed of two meaningful parts; the top part is 老, meaning seniors or elders, but it does not necessarily refer to one’s own parents or grandparents. The bottom part is 子, meaning children and youth. The basic understanding of a filial piety culture is caring for each other, a responsibility that is shared between elderly people and youth. Therefore, being with community is an important theme that should be given attention in the practice of elderly care service design.

Being with nature is significant in China as it is one of few countries or cultures that still uses the lunar calendar, which not only corresponds with agriculture, but also guides their daily life. There are 24 individual days in a year that inform people of the correct time to cultivate and harvest, and Chinese citizens, especially older people, still follow this “nature calendar” to plant vegetables, celebrate family occasions or socialise with each other; for instance, the Double Ninth Festival (9September on the Chinese lunar calendar, which does not align with the Gregorian calendar) is an important day in autumn, a day for being with senior family members and taking a walk with them in the mountains or in nature in order to hold a memorial ceremony for the forefathers. Put simply, this festival focusses on the health of seniors (walking in nature), family connections (being with family) and releasing emotions (for family members who have passed away). Nature is a powerful element in Chinese beliefs, so these kinds of activities are culturally appropriate as they may reinforce memories of the “good old days,” but they also

relieve stress and bring joy and pleasure to elderly people and youth while allowing new connections and positive emotions to thrive.

Due to the past and their rich life experience, the importance of **being creative** for elderly people refers to, for example, activities such as carpentry, straw plaiting, cooking or even Chinese calligraphy or painting. It depends on what people did professionally or had experience in (such as jobs or hobbies), where they came from culturally and geographically within China (different regions foster different skills) and their gender. For instance, many seniors who were influenced by the Mao period used to sing, dance and paint for the creation of propaganda. Some others who had less experience in that period paid more attention to their own hobbies for themselves because they received the valuable feelings of self-accomplishment and stress relief through immersing themselves in their creative activities. These creative hobbies or skills and the value they bring enable design in elderly care to be more human-centred in the process of creating new services. In addition, being creative with their communities, for example, creating things with youth and children, may nurture the obligations the elderly feel towards transferring their cultural skills and creative practices to the youth while at the same time nurturing the appreciation for these cultural practices in the younger generations.

These three activities and the values that they foster overlap reciprocally and intersect with particular cultural and social contexts, and they need to be embedded in service design practices with the elderly in order to develop holistic and inclusive services. In addition, these services have to be continually evaluated and improved with and by the elderly to ensure outcomes that continue to empower communities in aged care.

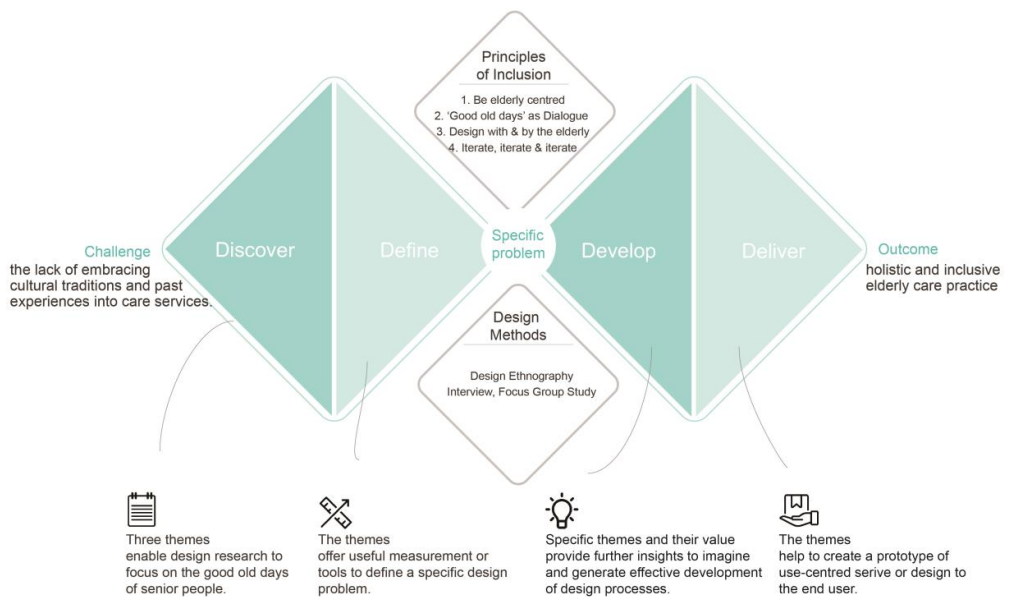


Figure 3: The Double-Diamond Model (adapted from Design Council, 2019) is integrated with the implementation of the themes and values emerging from “good old days.”

Therefore, another consideration is how these themes affect the design in the process of creating or improving a new or existing service. The adapted Double Diamond Model (Design Council, 2019) illustrates the design processes that service designers can use to embed the activities and values stemming from the memories of the “good old days” into a service design with and by the elderly (Design Challenge, Figure 3). The outcomes are the empowerment of the elderly that results from the values embedded in the service design through culture-specific practices. The principles of inclusion and design with and by the elderly are illustrated, and the design methods (design ethnography, interviews and focus group study) are indicated. In the first diamond, Discover and Define, the value and insight from the three themes bring multiple options for inspiration and discovering the context in

order to define a specific problem, for instance, which theme fits based on the circumstances of elderly care and why it fits. The second diamond, Develop and Deliver, shows a specific solution for responding to the problem defined in the previous step, and it shows how specific themes and their activities can inspire the formulation of an effective service prototype. In other words, in the divergent phases on the left side of each diamond, the design will receive support and inspiration from the three themes and activities (i.e., being with nature, being with the community, and/or being creative), and in the convergent phases on the right side of each diamond, the design will be augmented by the values (i.e., attachment, obligation etc.) that emerged from the themes and their activities in order to evaluate whether the services that designers are imagining or developing with the elderly have the cultural elements of the “good old days” that the seniors experienced in the past embedded into the service prototype.

6. Conclusions

This paper addressed the relevance of the past experiences of seniors in elderly care. The study utilised a two-step approach composed of semi-structured interviews and a focus group. The semi-structured interviews allowed us to identify three themes, aligned with activities, of the “good old days” to which the seniors yearn to return, namely, being with nature, being with family or neighbours and being creative. The study explored why the “good old days” are significant for ageing communities and considered some of the meanings and values that are connected to this phenomenon for the seniors, for instance, individual wellbeing, collective (family and community) responsibility and self-realisation.

With the findings and discussion of this paper, an understanding was generated of the kinds of meanings that elderly Chinese people connect to their own “good old days.” These meanings may contribute to their aged care if designers harness their potential. At the same time, these understandings may provide meaningful insights (i.e., wellbeing, feeling good, returning to a home atmosphere or achieving self-actualisation) for designers to create user-centred care services. However, we should also note that the “good old days” embraces an untraceable, bittersweet feeling. They can be “good, sweet,” but they can also involve “pain, suffering or grief” (Havlena & Holak, 1991. p. 323). In this paper, we explored the value of having good or sweet feelings about the past and promoted this positive and strength-based influence in elderly care. Since the “good old days” may cause some painful memories and feelings in elderly people, the concept should be approached with care and ethical sensitivity during design processes. Because of the limitations of the study, these dimensions were not evaluated with the elderly participants, but they offer avenues for further research. For service designers, this is a call to pay attention to the value of appropriate activities designed with and by the elderly in order to improve the lives of seniors and bring forth empowering experiences.

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