

## **Research on China's Eldercare Policy from the Perspective of Policy Network — Based on Quantitative Analysis of Policy Texts**

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**Abstract:** Based on the quantitative analysis of China's national level eldercare policy documents and from the perspective of policy network theory, this paper mainly analyzed China's eldercare policies after it entered the aging period. The research showed that the frequent interaction of eldercare policy network action subjects in policy network based on interest appeals, resource exchanges and policy preferences has affected the network relationship and network structure, which further affected the implementation of eldercare policies. Hence, an interdependent, stable and positively interacted policy network should be established through platform innovation and integration of multiple interests to satisfy the demands of multiple eldercare subjects, deepen the socialization and marketization of eldercare, and promote the stable and healthy development of eldercare policies.

**Keywords:** policy network; eldercare policy; policy change; network relationship; network structure

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In 1999, the proportion of people aged 60 or older accounted for 10.3% of China's population, marking that China has entered a period of aging society<sup>[1]</sup>. The main features of China's aging include large population of elderly people, rapid growth of elderly population, low fertility rate, aging before getting rich, and regional imbalance. As a country of large population, China's eldercare matters the national economy, long-term stability and people's livelihood, and the eldercare crisis is more highlighted under such an era. Currently, China's material, spiritual and systematic preparations are not sufficient to cope with aging. It will face enormous pressure and require more time to deal with eldercare from all sides. Thus, precautions should be taken and the research into eldercare policies should be strengthened.

After more than fifty years of slow development and adjustment since 1949, China's eldercare has initially formed a home-based, community-dependent and institution-supported eldercare service system. At the beginning of the foundation of PRC (1949), eldercare was mainly borne by both the family and the government. Although no official and explicit eldercare policies were enacted, the government kept control of the supply and distribution of eldercare resources, and received urban "Three Noes" (no labor ability, no source of life, no supporter) elderly people, and rural "Five Guaranteed" (guaranteed food, clothing, housing, medical care and burial expenses) elderly people. Since 1982, Chinese government started to concern the aging problem, and gradually formed aging work networks from central to local. On the one hand, the eldercare policies emphasized to "increase the investment in the undertaking of elderly"<sup>①</sup>, and strengthen the eldercare construction. On the other hand, it turned the eldercare issue from the government to the society, "encouraging investments from all walks of life", to realize a harmonious development of eldercare with economy and society.

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<sup>①</sup> As stated in the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly* (enacted in 1996), "people's governments at various levels shall include the undertaking of elderly into their plans for national economic and social development."

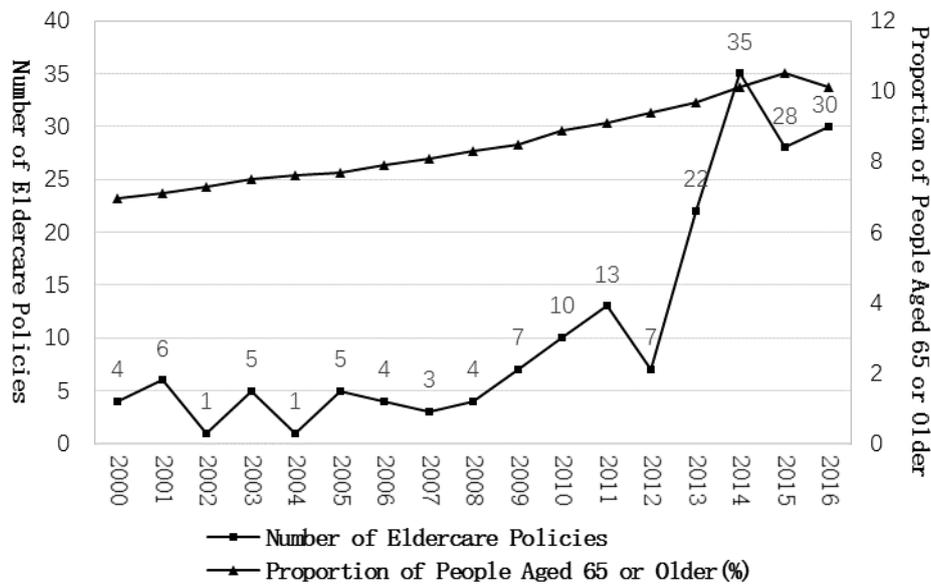


Fig. 1 Distribution of China's national level eldercare policy documents from 2000 to 2016

Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China has entered the aging period, and the party and government of China have a strategic understanding on the importance of eldercare services, and strengthened the exploration and construction of eldercare policies and systems. As a result, China's eldercare policies have achieved substantial development in both quantity and quality (as shown in Fig. 1). On the one hand, the target of eldercare services is being revised constantly according to the development of national conditions and eldercare practices. On the other hand, through the methods as tax preference and subsidies, the government directed and encouraged social forces to participate in the supply of eldercare services. After 2013, the concept of "Internet Plus" was proposed and eldercare policies became more diversified. A lot of advanced and typical experience are obtained through pilot work, and new eldercare service supply methods are being developed. Internet thinking, information technology and artificial intelligence are introduced to eldercare service field. The eldercare service market subjects are supported to the maximum to innovate and develop, thus to further promote the services in the residence, life, medical care, education and culture of elderly people, expand the scope of eldercare services, and provide diversified, personalized and high-quality intelligent eldercare services.

Table 1 Historical development of China's eldercare policies

| Stages                      | Policy goal   | Policy tool             | Typical policy   |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------|--|
| Infancy stage (1949-1981)   | Life care and material support for elderly people with no legal supporters, no labor ability and no source of life in food, clothing, housing, medical care and burial expenses.  | Regulatory policy tools | <i>Model Regulations for Advanced Agricultural Producer's Cooperatives (1956), The Regulations for Rural Five-Guarantee Work, and PRC Labor Insurance Byelaw (1951)</i>                    |
| Formation stage (1982-1998) | To perfect the social security system for old people, gradually improve their life, health and conditions of participating in social development, and provide old people with a sense of security, medical care, worthiness, learning and entertaining. | Mixed policy tools      | <i>Seven-year Development Program for China's Old-age Work (1994-2000)</i><br><i>Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (1996)</i> |

|   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Development stage<br/>(1999-2012)</p>            | <p>Establish a multilevel social security system, gradually improve the security level of the elderly; establish and perfect home-based, community-depended and institution-supported eldercare service system</p> | <p>Market policy tools<br/>Mobilized policy tools</p> | <p><i>Opinions on Accelerating the Socialization of Social Welfare (2000), Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Eldercare Services (2005), Notice About the Opinions on Accelerating the Development of Eldercare Services of Departments of the Aging Committee Office and National Development and Reform Commission Forwarded by the General Office of the State Council of PRC (2006), Notice of Issuing Construction Plan (2011-2015) of Social Eldercare Service System (2011), Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (2012 revision), Civil Ministry's Implementation Opinions in Encouraging and Directing Non-governmental Capital to Invest in Eldercare Field (2012)</i></p> |
| <p>Innovation and perfection stage<br/>(2013- )</p> | <p>By 2020, establish a complete home-based, community-depended and institution-supported eldercare service system with perfect functions, appropriate scale and urban and rural areas covered.</p>                | <p>Market policy tools</p>                            | <p><i>Notice on Implementing Comprehensive Pilot Reforms of Eldercare Services (2013), Notice on Implementing Application and Demonstration Projects of National Intelligent Eldercare Internet of Things (2014), Implementation Opinions on Socialized Eldercare Service System Construction Supported by Development Finance (2015), The Guideline of Promoting the Integration of Medical Care and Eldercare Services (2015), Opinions on the Full Liberalization of Eldercare Services Market and Improvement of Eldercare Services Quality (2016), Education Development Plan for the Elderly (2016-2020) (2016)</i></p>   |

Regarding the questions as what are the action subjects in the eldercare policy network system, what role do they play in the system, what are the interactive and collaborative relationship between the subjects, how the relationship or structure of the subjects will influence the policy results, and what kind of policy network should be established, this paper will adopt powerful explanatory policy network theory to conduct an in-depth analysis into China's eldercare policies, and provide new analytic perspective for the reform and development of China's eldercare policies.

### Selection of analytical tools

Currently, the researches on China's eldercare policies are mainly focused on the content analysis and policy evaluation of the eldercare policies. Seldom of them studied the dynamic interaction between the action subjects in the eldercare policy field. Eldercare is a compounded problem involving population problem, economical problem, social problem and cultural problem. Featured with long-lasting, widespread, wide interests involved and strong conflicting characteristics, the policy process and policy results are affected by multiple actors. Hence, it is very important to understand and know the network characteristics of the interaction between multiple action subjects during the eldercare policy process.

Policy network theory rose in the 1970s, and entered the politics and public policies field of Western countries as a type of mainstream discourse and research paradigm. In the 1970 and 1980s, the boundary between the public domain and private domain in Western countries became more and more ambiguous, and the expansion of "policy primary domain" and the gap of resource control, which led to the overload of government governance, and the government had to seek policy subject resources beyond the control of traditional hierarchy for sharing and cooperation. Amid such changes, policy network theory was formed and developed, and was used as a new policy analytic tool to explain the cross-government, cross-organization and cross-department social network policy process. During the development of policy network theory, a great many scholars interpreted policy network based on the differences in nationality, eras and perspectives. Their interpretations mainly concerned the concept of policy network, network type, policy process and policy result prediction, and

the core content can be summarized as following: (1). There are a lot of actors in the policy process. These actors are interdependent based on resource dependence, interest appeals and policy preferences; (2). The interest appeals of the actors are featured with diversity and uncertainty. The actors can achieve a common network target through collaborative cooperation and interest games; (3). The essence of the formation of policy network is the independent relationship between the actors formed due to the resource occupation and exchange demands. (4). Different network structures will have different impacts on the policy process and policy results [2].

Theoretically, policy network refers to the theory that studies the formal and informal relationship network between the interdependent actors during the policy process, as well as the influences of the network structural characteristics on the policies [3]. Under the perspective of the policy network, the bonds of the traditional hierarchical identity of the actors were broken, the differences in hierarchical identity and authority no longer exists, and informal participants and informal relationship structure were included in policy perspective. Although the influences of the actors on the policies are different due to their different roles, network positions, willingness of participation or capability, the qualification and power of the network actors participating in policies are specified, and their legitimacy and authority have no difference. Policy network theory reflected the realistic demand of complicated public issues, diversified policy actors and complex interest appeal. The boundary of the action mode and interaction structure in the policy domain is broken and is extending outwards constantly. All of these are caused by the practical interest games between numerous actors in the policy network.

In the past thirty years, China has conducted reforms in economic and administrative fields. The transformation of government functions and development of civil society have promoted the mutual collaboration relationship between the state and the society. China is currently at the stage of social transformation, and problems as complicated public issues, prominent contradiction and interest differentiation appeared during the policy process of China. To realize a good governance, China pays more and more attention to the society's participation in public administration and sharing of rights and resources. China's eldercare policy concerns multiple aspects in economy, politics, society and culture, involving various interest groups with large policy adjustment. The complicated relationship and problems during China's eldercare policy process required a new theoretical research paradigm to solve the problems. The theoretical perspective of policy network can present the interaction and network structure relationship of relevant interest subjects in China's eldercare policy network. Hence, policy network theory is a scientific theoretical analytic tool that can be used for the interpretation of China's eldercare policies.

## II. ANALYSIS ON CHINA'S ELDERCARE POLICY UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF POLICY NETWORK

### 2.1 Analysis on eldercare policy network actors

The premise of studying eldercare policy network is to analyze the subjects of policy network. The network subjects of China's eldercare policy include individuals or groups from central or local governments, enterprises, social organizations, citizens, experts, scholars and media who have a stake in the policy. Based on the resources of legal authority, information, skills, profession or funds, these individuals or groups are interdependent and formed an action community. Based on Roots network model and the actual situation of eldercare policy as well as several dimensions like the interest orientation and structural features of the policy participants, this paper divided China's eldercare network into the following five categories (Table 2) [4].

Table 2 Eldercare policy network model

| Policy network types | Constituent part   | Network features and role analysis   | Interest orientation   |
|----------------------|--|--|------------------------|
| Policy community     | NPC (National People's Congress), ruling party, central government, CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) | Stable, vertical, interdependent, strict limitation of members, limited parallel opinions, strong authority, tight network, strong closeness | Public interests       |
| Professional network | Research office of governments at all levels, think tank, social organizations,  | Stable, vertical, interdependent, strict limitation of members, limited parallel opinions  | Professional interests |

|                           |   |  |                     |
|---------------------------|---|--|---------------------|
|                           | experts and scholars                                    |  |                     |
| Intergovernmental network | Governments at all levels except the central government | Stable, strict limitation of members, limited vertical interdependent, wide parallel opinion | Local interests     |
| Producer network          | Welfare home, nursing home, eldercare institution       | Mobile, limitation of members, limited vertical interdependent                               | Producer interests  |
| Issue network             | Experts and scholars, news media, residents             | Unstable, no limitation of members, limited vertical interdependent                          | Uncertain interests |

**Policy community.** In China's eldercare policy network, the policy community consists of state institutions including multiple functional departments such as Ministry of Civil Affairs, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China. These institutions are at the top of the structure of the state power, with superior authority in the formulation and implementation of eldercare policies. The departments maintain a frequent and orderly interaction as well as a close and complementary relationship with each other. Hence, they are playing a leading role in the eldercare policy network. From 2000 to 2016, the central government has released totally 185 eldercare policies in the form of law, decision, opinion or strategy (as shown in Fig. 2).

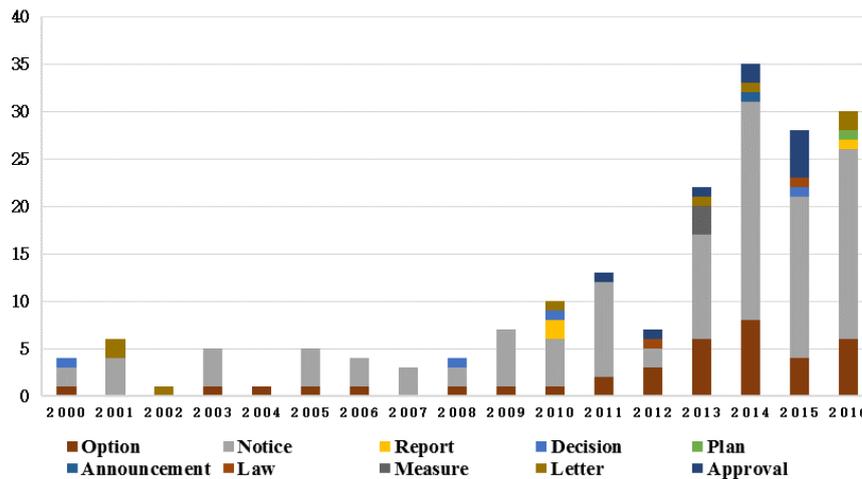


Fig. 2 Document types of released eldercare policies from 2000 to 2016<sup>①</sup>

Of the 185 policies, the State Council, as the dominant power of policy community, released totally 31 eldercare policies, accounting for 14% of the total released policies; Ministry of Civil Affairs, as the leading sector of carrying out eldercare work, released 43 eldercare policies, accounting 23% of the total; departments as the National Health and Family Planning Commission, and Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security also formulated many policies frequently; some departments such as the Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Land and Resources, whose participation is not as deep as the competent administrative departments, also raised important opinions and suggestions on the items related to their functions during the formulation and implementation of eldercare policies and work so that to keep in accordance with other departments; in addition, the departments showed a strong sense of cooperation in the development of eldercare services. The number of policies jointly released by multiple departments is as much as 63, accounting for 34% of the total. This shows that the actors in eldercare policy community have gathered powers and conducted high-quality interactions frequently, which formed a consistent value identity and interest appeal.

<sup>①</sup> Data sources: the policy data in this paper is obtained and sorted from policy texts published in the official websites of government institutions such as the State Council, Ministry of Civil Affairs and Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, etc.

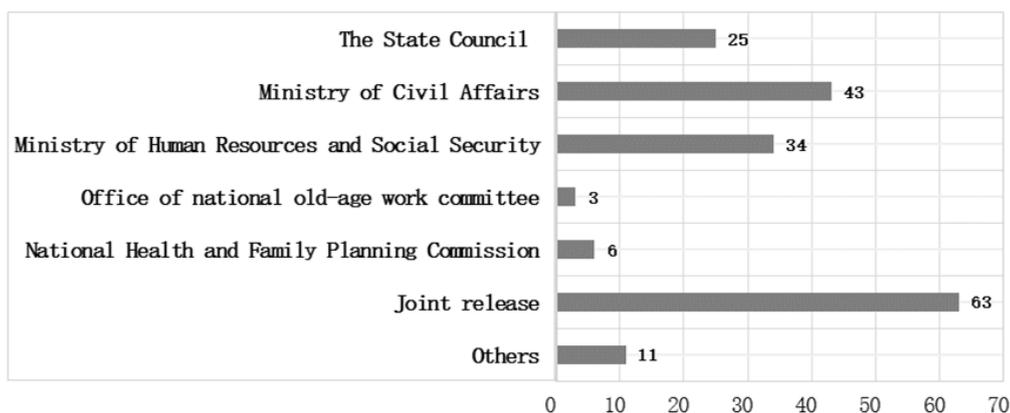


Fig. 3 Distribution of Departments released eldercare policies from 2000 to 2016

**Professional network.** As a complicated action concerning various fields, eldercare policy plays an important role in the eldercare policy network. A professional network of eldercare policies involves the subordinate research institutes of the functional departments of state organs, as well as the active experts and scholars from various fields such as economics, management, and sociology, etc. These action subjects possess certain special discourse power because of their educational background and professional skills. As the think tank of eldercare policy community, professional network can give advance and suggestions for governments at all levels from various aspects as the release, refining, feedback and perfection of eldercare policies. Eldercare policy is a complicated action concerning various fields. Hence, the professional network can offer advice and suggestions in formulating research plans, provide professional proofs, and assist in policy community's network actions and intergovernmental actions.

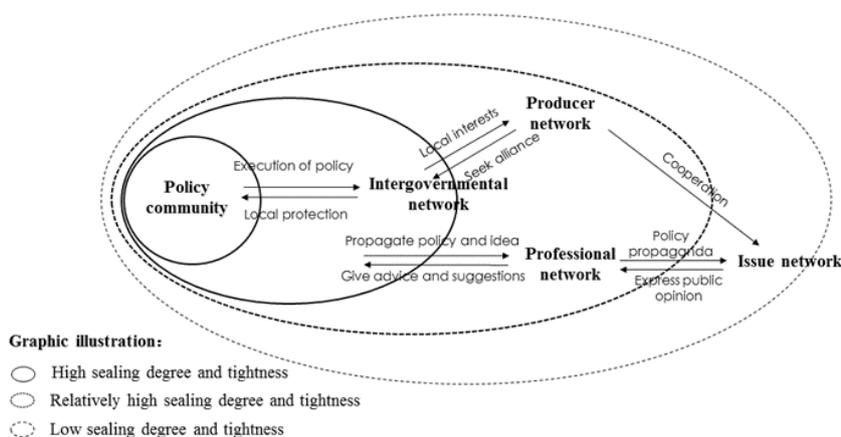
**Intergovernmental network.** As the promoting and executive party of central policies, the action subjects of intergovernmental network mainly include local governments at all levels and the standing committees of local People's Congress. During the transition of eldercare policies, pilot test of policy became a major tool for the central government to promote new eldercare methods (such as the pilot of the combination of medical care and elderly care). This enables local government to participate in the formulation and implementation of eldercare policies more frequently. On the one hand, the local government performs as the agency of the target of the central's decisions, taking the responsibility of implementing the central's distribution schemes of eldercare benefits; on the other hand, the local government is empowered with certain discretionary power, and represents their own interest appeals inevitably when formulating policies, showing certain autonomy and differences in value selection between the two parties. Hence, with the increase of the interaction, the gaming between the local government and the central government also increased obviously. It can be assumed that local governments are featured with dual-role characteristics, and can affect the policy results in the aspects of attitudes, policy execution and strategy selection, policy enforcement and selection of supporting policies, etc.

**Producer network.** Interest groups usually obtain their initiative and discourse power in the policy process through their own professional skills, knowledge authority and information resources. After the reform and opening up, the socialist market economy has promoted the development of eldercare market, and the eldercare industry started to rise; since 2000, in order to alleviate the imbalance between supply and demand of eldercare services, the government started to turn their policy target to the market, and the relevant interest groups started to expand. The eldercare industry involves multiple fields as health management, housekeeping, recovery, nursing, culture and finance, etc. Hence, the eldercare policies will exert tremendous influences on the eldercare industry. The action subjects in the producer network usually possess rich action resources (such as money, land and personal connections, etc.). On the one hand, they use their own economic strength, knowledge and skills as well as the monopolistic information to lead the opinions and psychological expectation of the public, and raise the price of eldercare service products. On the other hand, in the realm of politics, they infiltrate the policy network, lobbying their own interest appeals to local governments. Generally, producer network would not specify its interest claim to the policy community, but affect public opinions through their own resources, debate with the experts or scholars in the professional network, or cooperate with local governments and put pressure on the policy community.

**Issue network.** The issue network of eldercare policy is randomly formed by multiple action subjects including mass media, citizens, experts and scholars based on their professional knowledge, interest and sense of participation in the issues of eldercare policies. The issue network has a huge number of members. However, the participation subjects are complicated with different value preferences. Hence, the issue network is featured with high openness but low integration level and poor stability. Among the participation subjects, mass media (including official and unofficial media) is an important member in the issue network owing to its discourse power advantages. Official media has the same value advocacy with that of policy community, propagating and explaining their policies; while unofficial media has their own stances, tracing public opinions and information demands. Experts and scholars demonstrate their opinions through seminars and scientific research publications to spark interactions between professional networks and the issue network, and push the research achievements to the policy community, making them important participants during the eldercare policy process. As the object of eldercare policies, citizens have upgraded their eldercare awareness with the popularization of eldercare culture, and realized that eldercare is not only about the elderly, but also the old age issue of every citizen. Eldercare is a rigid demand. Hence, this group has the largest number of action subjects with greatest potential power in the issue network. Through social network platform, citizens can obtain more discourse power to express their opinions and seek consensus. During the eldercare policy process, issue network often interweaves with professional network and producer network, and is more and more concerned by core action subjects.

## 2.2 Analysis of network interaction relationship of eldercare policies

Policy network relationship refers to coordinative relationship or adversary relationship of alliance of actors in the policy process. Policy network relationship is determined by the target positioning, resources exchange and interest appeals of the actors. Network relationship affects the network structure and policy results. Hence, to make clear the network relationship of eldercare policies is very important to the research on eldercare policy network. With the advancement of eldercare policies, the following network relationship became more obvious (as shown in Fig. 4).



**Fig.4** Interaction diagram of network subjects of eldercare policies

**First, cooperation and interest conflict between policy community and intergovernmental network.** Policy community has a natural authority and legitimacy in policy formulation. It controls the discourse power of public policies and has a dominant influence on the policy process and result. Eldercare policy matters the national economy and people's livelihood, sustainable development of economy and harmony and stability of the society. It is the responsibility of the policy community to comprehensively consider various factors as demographic changes of the elderly and social development, and promote the formulation and perfection of eldercare policies.

After the founding of People's Republic of China, China entered the era of planned economy. The government controlled the supply of eldercare service resources; the policy authority developed from the top to the bottom; the central government was responsible for the formulation of the supporting measures of old people, and the local governments were responsible for the cooperative execution. After the reform and opening-up, the integration capacity of eldercare resources of the government became insufficient, and the authority part of the central government was restrained and distracted by market economy. The local government was empowered a part of the authority with certain decision-making power, who was transformed from single policy executor into both the policy executor and formulator. As the direction executor of central policies, the local government has to keep in step with the central government; but as an "economic man", it has to maintain the maximum benefit of its own interest. On the one hand, the local government cooperation with the local producer network and issue network, and game with other local departments when making policies and schemes to seek maximum

support from the policy community and achieve a maximum local finance; on the other hand, due to the problems as hard in administrative approval, insufficient financing construction funds, weak in operability of policies, the local government usually tends to partial execution or even replacement execution during the execution of policies.

**Secondly, cooperation between policy community and professional network.** During hearing and consulting survey, government and administrative institutions would always turn to researchers, and research became a decisive part of policy design<sup>[5]</sup>. After the reform and opening-up, especially after 2000, the State Council and related functional ministries showed insufficient integration of eldercare resources and in adequate supply of eldercare services, and the authoritative and legal resources of the policy community started to disappear. The government-based policy community re-examined the traditional value orientation, and started to cooperate with professional network, then deliver its policy advocacy and idea and exchange information through the issue network in the form of seminars and media propaganda and debate to obtain support from the issue network. In recent years, a lot of large and small organizations such as committees of experts and industry associations were founded in China. This kind of organizations can provide the government with high-level consultations on transformation of government functions and improvement of eldercare service quality and efficiency, especially the questions of combination of medical treatment and elderly care, reform and guarantee of eldercare institutions and community elderly care since 2013.

**Thirdly, alliance and cooperation between producer network and intergovernmental network.** Policy-making is a process with high density of information, and the actors owing the information usually play a crucial role. With specialized knowledge and skills authority, producer network can obtain the information that others are unable or can hardly get. Based on the information, they can obtain and monopolize the information and obtain the discourse power of the “legitimacy” of some policies. Producer network has dual influences on the policy process. For one thing, producer network seeks cooperation with policy community and intergovernmental network to acquire development opportunities by means of making response to the advocating of the policy community in the policy environment of promoting the development of eldercare service industry; for another, some negative actions of producer network may also hinder the policy reform. The real situation is that China's eldercare institutions are facing problems of complicated administrative examination and approval procedures, shortage of elderly care facilities, lack of funds and talents, and low service quality, etc.<sup>[6]</sup> Producer network usually emphasizes the contribution of eldercare services to the local economy to attract the local government to provide cooperation opportunities and policy protection. In recent years, many local governments have enacted specific measures to encourage and support private capital to participate eldercare services, and supported the development of eldercare service market by establishing special fund, operating subsidies and land allocation, etc.

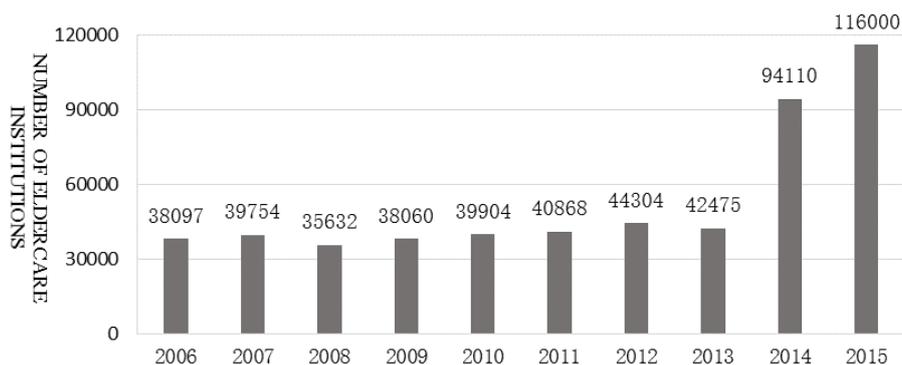


Fig. 5 Development of China's eldercare institutions and facilities<sup>①</sup>

### 2.3 Analysis of the changes of eldercare policy network structure

How policy network influences policy execution should be considered from the perspective of network itself. As different coupling will exist in the policy network with different network relationship and structures, the network structures as the scale, openness, centrality, group density, network position and integration level are also different. As time goes by, these differences will exert dynamic influences on the policy process and result. This paper takes openness and integration level as the indicators to analyze the key factors of eldercare policy.

<sup>①</sup> Data sources: *Statistical Report of the People's Republic of China on the Development of Social Services* of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of previous years

### **2.3.1 Openness: close to perpendicular and horizontal**

After the founding of new China and before the reform and opening-up, China's eldercare policy network was a relative closed network structure. Policy community was in the core position of the eldercare policy network, which was featured with superior authority, high threshold, large occupation of resources and formulating power of eldercare policies. As a dual role, the intergovernmental network was the internal actor, who owned the execution power and decision power of eldercare policies. In the policy network, only some of the core members of the intergovernmental network and expert network could enter the policy community. Other actors had limited awareness and ways of expression their interest appeals. In addition, their values and interest advocacy were also not highlighted and differentiated. These actors were outsiders of the policy network. The whole policy network had a stable structure and clear hierarchy. In this period, the eldercare policy was led completely by the policy community.

After 1978, the country overall planned eldercare services, and various problems as shortage of funds, low quality and limited eldercare service agencies. In contrast, with improvement of people's living standards, current eldercare services can no longer satisfy people's increasing demand. The lack of the government in eldercare services urged the policy community open to professional networks gradually, and these networks are asked for advice and suggestions of how to promote socialized eldercare. The policy network started to get flexible from inside to outside, the policy community became all-inclusive as the network, and the resource fluidity in the network is also accelerating.

After 2000, with the development of aging process and the forming of values and interest advocacy of producer network and issue network, alliances and cooperation at all levels are developed in the policy network. The policy community would actively ask other networks for exchange of resources, coordination and cooperation. The innovativeness of eldercare policies is increasingly strengthened. Topics as eldercare insurance, construction of eldercare service systems, innovation of eldercare modes and construction of elderly's residential environment are widely discussed between the networks, which makes the target planning of the eldercare policy more scientific. The eldercare policies pay more attention to the construction of service quality, with increasingly abundant eldercare service items and large policy coverage. Besides, along with the opening of policy network, more and more actors are included in the policy network system. This shows that China's openness of eldercare policy network developed in the path of "close—half-open—open". More open the policy network, more frequent the interactions of the resources between the networks will be, with more influences on the policy.

### **2.3.2 Integration level: from local tightness to balanced state**

As the result of the coordination and cooperation of network actors, network integration level can be regarded as the integration degree of the information resources, policy target and value tendency. Integration level includes loose network, half-loose network and tightly integrated network<sup>[7]</sup>. The frequent interactions with high degree of association will produce relatively strong network, attracting other weak networks, which will have large influences on the policy result. If the networks at all hierarchies are relatively balanced, the interactions such as interests exchange between the sub-systems will not be limited to the network at this hierarchy, but will flow to the whole network.

In the eldercare policy network, the policy community and intergovernmental network take the formulation and execution power of eldercare policies with high organizational degree, which belong to tightly integrated network. Producer network and professional network are more professional and targeted with some interest expression ways. But the integration level is lower than that of policy community and intergovernmental network. They belong to half-loose network. The issue network has a huge number of actors. But the actors are complicated, with large mobility, less responsibility and different interest tendency. It is hard for the actors to form a collaborative effect. Hence, this network belongs to loose network.

Essentially, network integration level determines who is responsible for the division of public issues. Normally, stronger networks may have more effects on the policy result. However, the practical experience of eldercare policies showed that the internal values of the network become unified gradually with the deepening of network openness, broadening of interest expression ways, actors' increasing awareness, understanding and willingness to participate policy issues which triggered further negotiations and discussion at all hierarchies of network on the major livelihood issues of elderly care. The network evolved from local tightness and overall dispersion to local balance and overall strong state, and formed a highly integrated network structure.

## **III. NETWORK RECONSTRUCTION OF CHINA'S ELDERCARE POLICY REFORM**

After 1978, China implemented the socialist market economy system, and the government is separated gradually from the society. The fragmentation of interests brought by the market economy made related interest groups appear and grow, and the policy participating groups also expanded. The complexity of the interests involved in the eldercare policy required that the policy process should be established on the basis of wide and

effective consensus. With the development of market economy, it becomes a key for the current eldercare policy system construction of how to carry forward a policy network which is stable, benign, interactive and interdependent of multiple parties. Specifically, it can be realized through the following methods.

### 3.1 Digital platform: docking diversified eldercare demands

Under the information age, the technologies of IoT (Internet of Things), cloud computing and big data developed continuously, and China's 5G technology will reach a commercial level in 2020. The collection, transmission and calculation of big data based on modern communication technologies became a breakthrough point for the reform of eldercare services. On the one hand, the integration of the government and Internet should be strengthened to establish big data platforms to break through the data barriers between the government, enterprises and institutions, organizations, and citizens, establish a long-term dialogue mechanism with the society, broaden the interest expressing channels of the main subjects, effectively dock the demands between different organizations and groups, and improve the scientific rationality of the policies. On the other hand, promote the development of intelligent eldercare, establish eldercare information data platform through big data and cloud computing technologies, explore and analyze various mass data, and provide personalized services for the elderly; in addition, strengthen the financial support on eldercare service, develop various eldercare supply modes, promote a diversified docking of the supplier and the demander, and enhance a simultaneous development of eldercare with the economy and society. For example, eldercare institutions can cooperate profoundly with hospitals, with data sharing, real-time monitoring of data and related evaluations, to increase the attractiveness of the eldercare project.

### 3.2 Supply-side reform: marketization and socialization of eldercare service

Eldercare service involves people's life and contains great development potential and commercial opportunities. It is important to deepen the marketization and socialization of eldercare service to comprehensively solve the eldercare problem. In *Some suggestions on Full Market Liberalization and Quality Improvement of Eldercare Service (2016)*, it was planned to fully liberalize the eldercare service market in 2020. It was proposed that a fair environment should be created to thoroughly motivate the enthusiasm of various market subjects, and to actively attract social capital into eldercare industry, thus effectively improve its service quality. According to the focus of the policy, service has become an important orientation of eldercare policy. As shown in Fig. 6 and 7, the importance of service in eldercare policies gradually emerged during the latest 5 years. Besides, the service is shifting towards socialized and corporate service, indicating an irreversible trend towards socialized eldercare service and a correct direction for supply-side reform of eldercare service. However, the supporting policies of related ministries and commissions are still waiting for implementation, presenting a lack of support strength. In other words, the market is in urgent need of a good operational pattern<sup>[8]</sup>. The industrial organizations, markets, and families should be included into eldercare policy system; the outer edge of eldercare policy network should be expanded continuously, while the relations between varied main subjects are balanced and social resources are fully mobilized.

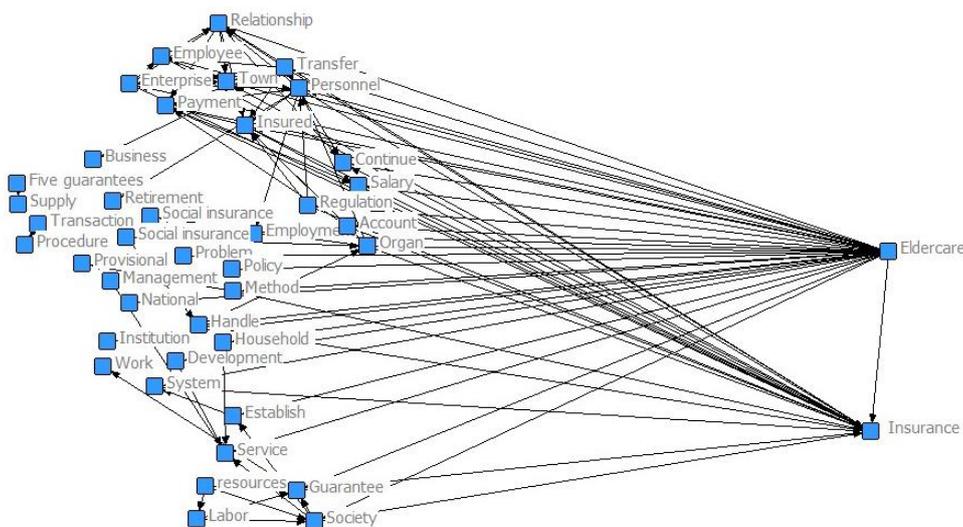


Fig.6 Network structure of eldercare policy's high-frequency keywords during 2006-2010

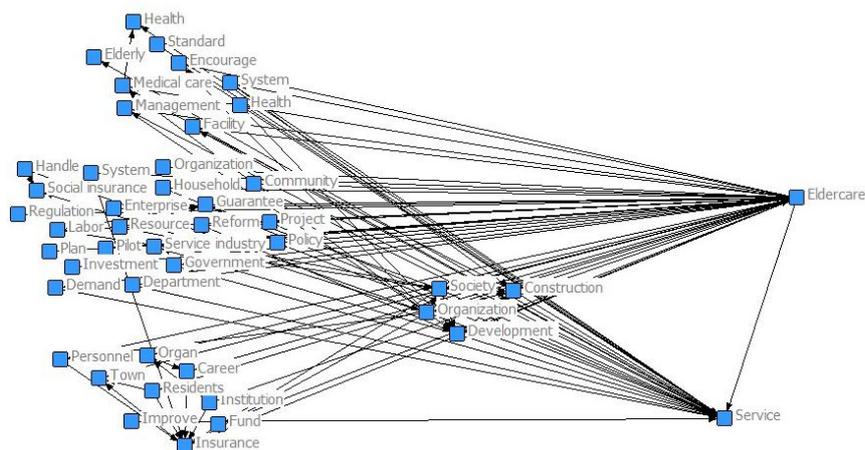


Fig. 7 Network structure of eldercare policy's high-frequency keywords during 2011-2016

### 3.3 Strengthening cooperation: continue to develop eldercare policy bonus

Although the central government and the ministries and commissions have introduced a series of favorable eldercare policies at present, deficiencies still exist between different eldercare departments, such as divergence of labor division, poor integration, low co-movement, and low cooperation degree. Besides, there are also barriers between different policies, which would obscure the execution of these policies. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, the governments and ministries at all levels emphasized the eldercare work and released over 200 files concerning the normalization of eldercare. However, the eldercare policies are not very mandatory and consistent. Most of the eldercare policies in China exist in form of notice or suggestion (see Fig. 2); the contents of eldercare policies are focusing on the developing direction and value orientation. The central government has offered local governments certain autonomous rights, but didn't provide quantitative indexes and technological advices on local eldercare service. Therefore,<sup>[9]</sup> the central government should establish a good cooperation mechanism with ministries, commissions, and local governments at all levels, trying hard to strengthen the lateral coordination and lengthwise cooperation between varied departments, to solve the fragmentation problem among different departments can be solved, and to systematically arrange the structure of eldercare service based on practical situations.

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