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Book Review

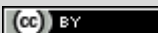
Powell, J.L. Global aging, China and Urbanization. New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers. 2013. ISBN: 978-1-6280-8463-4. 51 pp. \$52.00 (Ebook).

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Jason Powell's book *Global aging, China and Urbanization* comes at the right time: a time in which aging has indeed become a global phenomena; a time at which urbanization is a worldwide process of phenomenal importance; and a time at which China has become of increasing political, economic and social relevance worldwide. The goals he sets for this book are quite ambitious – especially considering the size of this book with a mere 51 pages – as he endeavors to expose “the nature and extent of global aging in contemporary society” and “the implications of urbanization for Chinese older people” (preface). His third, and last, goal is to moreover “illuminate a perceptual framework to examine rapid social change” (preface).

The book falls into two main parts. The first part, Chapter 2, discusses global aging in three continents: North America, Europe and Asia. It describes the processes and implications of aging primarily focusing on demographic trends, retirement schemes and financial consequences. This chapter is rich with statistical data and includes an illustrative discussion of current and prospective trends in demographic ratios and financial burdens.

The second part of the book, Chapter 3, focuses on China and highlights two trends that have come about simultaneously in China: urbanization and aging. Powell convincingly shows by ample (and interesting, quite unique) statistical data how aging is concentrated in Chinese cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. As a result, these parallel trends of aging and urbanization have become interwoven. Urban aging in China has become a development that has its challenges. On the one hand what immediately comes to mind are images of Chinese elders exercising, dancing and discussing in the street, but on the other hand the precariousness of filial and pension arrangements also emerge leaving China with many of uncertainties that touch upon the global processes Powell describes in Chapter 2. In this chapter, he delves more deeply into the idea that the way aging is portrayed, or is imagined, has important implications for the way social policy and economic policy are shaped. In this context, he discusses two main discourses: the neoliberal economic discourse and the social discourse around aging in China, while relating these to larger (global) trends. He makes some sidesteps to social theoretical propositions from Butler and Foucault to situate these discursive frameworks. Powell argues that one of the key issues is that in North-American and European contexts aging is often referred to as a biomedical idiom in which deterioration, decline and decay are primary epistemes. Such an approach, he contends, neglects the complexity and social-construction of the aging process. In his conclusion he therefore makes a case against any such (negative) stereotyping and simplification and argues instead to look at age and aging as a social construct.

The first part of this book gives a broad overview of what one could see as global aging, although the selection of continents and the actual concept of “global” remains somewhat unclear, especially given the intricacies Powell himself points at in his chapters. Chapter 2 does point to global processes and global parallels in aging, which are often not discussed in other books because the call for detail and the urge to do justice to uniqueness is so strong. The second part, Chapter 3, provides an introduction to aging and urbanization in China. It is an accessible outline that gives the reader an important, but brief, idea of the state of affairs in China. Theoretically, the whole book is a little underdeveloped, and his third goal to approach a perceptual framework remains a little hidden, but this seems inescapable given the moderate

size of this book. All in all, the book gives a good overall view on many important issues in aging nowadays: global processes, demographic changes, and economic consequences. Nevertheless, perhaps his ambitious goals were a little too ambitious for the size of this book. Likely, many anthropologists would look forward to a next book in which Powell will take his own words of avoiding stereotyping and simplification further and expose the actual narratives and nuances of the social construct of aging.