Anthropology & Aging

Book Review

Review of He, Longtao and Jagriti Gangopadhyay, eds.
Eldercare Issues in China and India. 2022. New York:
Routledge. pp. 250. Price: $158 (Hardcover); $36.5
(eBook).

Ashwin Tripathi

Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar
ashwin.tripathi@iitgn.ac.in

Book Review

Review of He, Longtao and Jagriti Gangopadhyay, eds.
Eldercare Issues in China and India. 2022. New York:
Routledge. pp. 250. Price: $158 (Hardcover); $36.5
(eBook).

Ashwin Tripathi

Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar
ashwin.tripathi@iitgn.ac.in

This edited volume highlights the topical issue of eldercare in India and China. The pairing of both countries in this volume is of course no coincidence; both countries have experienced rapid population aging and massive socio-cultural and political transitions that provide an interesting ground for analysis. These changes are here theorized through the lenses of family studies, sociology, and social gerontology, and empirical evidence is presented through concepts of social security, need for care(ing), family networks and the lack thereof. The chapters knit together similarities and differences in cultural ideals of filial piety towards older people in India and China and re-instate the challenges of health infrastructures and social care in both countries. They are grouped in five thematic sections: "Eldercare and Filial Piety" (section 1), "Family Care for Elders" (section 2), "Institutionalized and Formal Elder Care" (section 3), "Care Issues of Marginalized Elder Groups" (section 4), and "Eldercare Research" (section 5).

In the introductory chapter (Chapter 1) Longtao He explicates the importance of care in aging societies. Interestingly, both India and China have experienced the consequences of population growth – an unbalanced age structure, growing disease burden and insufficient institutional arrangements to cater to the needs of older adults. For example, it was 2009 before China introduced universal health insurance in the context of a national health care reform. Along with providing factual information (e.g., policies, official statistics) to demonstrate the consequences of a complete lack of coverage of health expenses, the author also points towards the absence of social security in the Indian context. The latter half of this introduction outlines the volume's content and broadly lists various issues affecting the older population in both India and China, such as the lack of socio-political infrastructures for older adults, rapid population growth, family nuclearization, urbanization, neoliberal marketization and consumerist individualism, to name a few.

Opening Section 1 on "Eldercare and Filial Piety," Chapter 2 by Marius Meinhof and Yiming Zhang engages with the mechanisms of filial piety in Chinese families, as practised through *xiao*, a Chinese philosophical ideology. The authors argue that accounting for *xiao* is crucial to make sense of care in contemporary China. An interesting angle in this chapter shows how *xiao* is being depicted in state discourse, where it is mobilized to promote the larger civilizational project. The authors explore the changing relation between citizens and the state/country across different generations and through changing public consciousness. For this, they elevate the principle of parent-child relationship to a metaphor for social relations. Interestingly, *xiao* also is being discussed as a pillar of the "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) across diverse cultural traditions in China. Filial piety is similarly

discussed in Chapter 3 by Jagriti Gangopadhyay (also the co-editor of this book) through a discussion of joint Indian families (i.e., where multiple generations stay in the same household). There has been a dearth of research on filial piety and on multigenerational families in neoliberal India. Through her work, the author provides an understanding of filial expectations between adult children and their parents from an Indian city and re-emphasises the idea of obligation within Indian families.

In Section 2, "Family Care for Elders," Longtao He and Han Wu (Chapter 4), present a comparative analysis of caregivers of elderly cancer patients in China and India. The chapter provides a detailed overview of the PRISMA technique used for article selection in a scoping review and compares caregiving experiences in China and India. Although the analysis is rather minimal, additional information on this technique can be useful for scholars who plan to do scoping reviews in any discipline. In Chapter 5 Zhuopeng Yu and Boye Fang discuss filial piety-based family care in Chinese societies and its health impact on both caregivers and carereceivers. They find that filial piety-based care has a positive effect on both older adults who are cared for and their family caregivers: whereas the former experience increased life satisfaction, psychological wellbeing? and decreased loneliness, the latter enjoy affective intergenerational intimacy and develop strong ties with their carereceivers. However, this is only true for individuals and families who practice filial piety, which is generally challenging because of competing social values, role conflicts and role strain within and across families.

In Section 3, "Institutionalised and Formal Eldercare," Fei Peng, Mang He and Nuermaimaijiang Kulaixi (Chapter 6) explore the stigmatization of older Chinese adults through nimbyism, or the "Not in my Backyard" (NIMBY) effect. On the one hand, the government has been developing strategies to actively manage an aging population through community-based eldercare, an innovative model that "bridges the individual limitation of home, community and institutional care and effectively integrates eldercare resources from within and around the society" (107). On the other hand, citizens seem to actively protest against these interventions by the government. This friction between traditional values of Chinese filial piety and contemporary attitudes towards older adults signals changes in sentiments around filial piety. In Chapter 7 Saheli Guha discusses the growing acceptance of old-age homes in Kolkata as a consequence of the growing older adults' markets. This has prompted the popularisation of neoliberal notions of aging and the redefinition of the post-retirement lives of Indian older adults.

In Section 4, Ketaki Chowkhani (Chapter 8) explores an interesting trope of aging alone and self-care. Arguing against the idea there is only one cultural ideology of successful aging in the Global South, the author re-instates the multiple possibilities of aging successfully, prospects that are gradually being covered through the growing Third Age literature in India (Samanta 2021; Tripathi and Samanta 2022). In Chapter 9, Ji Wu and Xue Qiu discuss the experience of carework among yet another marginalised section of the Chinese population, namely older adults that lost their only child and end up caring for their grandchild(ren). In doing so they address impacts of the one-child policy in China. Discussing this phenomenon through an understanding of sudden health shock, the authors elaborate on the everyday experiences of Chinese older adults and how they carry out a multistage process of social adaptation after their loss. That is, grandparents heal themselves and develop resilience through raising their grandchildren and ultimately creating an identity for themselves as caregivers.

The final section brings it all together by shedding light on the research aspect of eldercare research in both India and China. In Chapter 10 Dona Ghosh draws attention to the paucity of data available on older Indians. She presents a detailed description of existing microlevel datasets on health and aging in the Indian subcontinent. This chapter provides information for anyone interested in available survey data on the older Indian population. A concluding chapter by Jagriti Gangopadhyay further re-emphasises the comparative lens adopted in the book. She revisits the major themes that are discussed

throughout the volume, highlights the drawbacks of existing policies on aging and calls for the active engagement of academics and policy researchers in debates about eldercare issues.

All in all, the book presents us with some extremely critical questions on eldercare in India and China, keeping in mind the contemporary changes experienced by both the countries. Adopting a mixed method approach, the chapters present readers with a diverse sets of methodologies ranging from qualitative interviews to secondary analysis through PRISMA to mining of datasets. However, a serious shortcoming of this book, published in 2022, is that it does not in any way engage with the consequences of the pandemic on families and older adults. Moreover, the book presents some very interesting empirical evidence but lacks critical engagement with the theories to substantiate the arguments. To a great extent the book offers a strong example of comparative analysis and meaningful contributions by scholars from diverse disciplines such as health sociology, anthropology, social work, and social gerontology. As a reader, I believe that discussion in Chapter 1 would have benefitted from more critical engagement with the concrete changes (e.g., longevity, elder market, growing consumerism) that affect eldercare. Similarly, Chapter 5 would have benefitted from empirical evidence for the health effects of filial piety on caregivers. There are editing concerns in numerous places across chapters (e.g., spelling for ageing/aging, proofreading in page 115: second paragraph, to name a few). As a gerontology student, I kept wondering if the trope of *cultural gerontology* could have been useful here in elaborating on the everyday experiences of contemporary aging vis-à-vis the rapidly changing societies and social networks of care and in understanding the shifting expectations of caregivers and carereceivers in India and China. Although there is often little connection or dialogue between the different chapters, this comparative endeavour is worth reading.

References

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Gilleard, Chris, and Paul Higgs. 2015. "The Cultural Turn in Gerontology." In *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology* edited by Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin, 51-58. London: Routledge.

Samanta, Tannistha. 2021. "Living Solo at Midlife: Can the Pandemic De-stigmatize Living Alone in India?" *Journal of Aging Studies* 56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2020.100907

Tripathi, Ashwin, and Tannistha Samanta. 2022. "Leisure as Self-care in the Times of the Pandemic: Insights from a Time-use Diary Study in India." *Leisure* Studies, 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2022.2121415