

# From the Editor

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This issue is special, not only because it highlights some of the great work of anthropologists on aging in East Asia, but also because, as you the reader have no doubt noticed, AAQ has changed in both design and content. In terms of the latter, AAQ will no longer function as both journal and newsletter for AAGE, but will focus entirely on scholarly content. These changes are part of an ongoing process of increasing our professionalization as an organization and providing the best venue for contributors to our journal. I hope to hear more from members on what they think of these changes, and welcome additional suggestions. As scholars of aging and the life course know, maturing is something best done with others and lots of support.

I am proud to introduce the first special issue of AAQ on Anthropology and Aging in East Asia. East Asia is home to the most rapidly aging countries in the world, all of which are highly influential in global aging discourse. In Japan, the percentage of the population aged 65 and older rose from 7% in 1970 to 14% in 1994, making it the first nation in the region to experience this rapid shift to a “super-aged society,” but others are not far behind. China’s population is estimated to reach the same benchmark by the year 2026, and South Korea even sooner. While other countries around the world are experiencing population aging, they have done so at a much slower pace. It is estimated that the 65 and older population in the United States will reach 14% by the year 2015, having taken 73 years to double in size. In contrast, this change occurred in a mere 24 years for Japan, and will occur in 25 years in China.

This rapid demographic change is the result not only of increased longevity in East Asia, but declining fertility as well. As a result, the entire composition of social institutions from families to welfare systems, to employment, healthcare and education must be radically rethought. Aging in Asia alters the relationships between mothers and daughters as much as the relationships between citizens and states.

This issue begins with two commentaries on aging in Japan, each bringing a different perspective to bear on the subject of aging in Asia. **Ayumi Takenaka**’s commentary highlights the challenges and contradictions of population aging, which has far-reaching implications not only for Japanese cultural identity, but for international movements of people and their labor. The state’s gestures towards encouraging skilled migrants is challenged by other’s reluctance to make dramatic changes towards multiculturalism. In contrast to this regional and policy perspective, **Susan O. Long** writes about the insights drawn from ethnographic interviews with the very old. These voices offer lessons to anthropologists about what life looks like in old age, as much as they point to the work still to be done.

**Megumi Kondo** continues Long’s reflections on finding meaning in late life, by introducing us to a Japanese woman’s last days on the hospice ward. Kondo shows how the physical, emotional and spiritual experience of aging and dying is not summed up neatly in a few wise words; the process of making it all meaningful and paying attention to the events around her continued to shape this woman’s life until the very end.

**Wonjee Cho and Denise C. Lewis**’s article on South Korean aging points out the articulations and dissonances between embodied subjective feelings of aging, cultural beliefs about temporality and political categories of aging. Their research on the transition to old age echoes the uneven transitions of societies in flux.

Each of these articles contributes to the growing literature on aging in Asia, and it was a pleasure to put this issue together. My thanks to all of the contributors and reviewers for their hard work in helping to put this issue together, and to AAGE for their support in for the journal’s mission.

Jason Danelly, Editor