Anthropology & Aging
Journal of the Association for Anthropology & Gerontology

Book Review

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Anthropology & Aging, Vol 37, No 1 (2016), pp. 51-52
ISSN 2374-2267 (online) DOI 10.5195/aa.2016.150

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The present volume is an impressive collection of research studies that grew out of the 2007 NTNU Japan seminar entitled "Eldercare in Japan and Norway: Organization and Quality" held in Norway.. The content is organized in five sections with an attempt to compare the models of insurance systems of Japan and Norway where each country has distinct ideational roots.

In the introduction of this book, the editors explain the reasons why the two countries are selected for comparison, which include their differences in terms of demographics, and their target population for long-term care (LTC) service. Part I begins with describing the development of LTC policy that are interwoven with political and economic changes in the two countries. The first two chapters (by John Creighton Campbell and Kjell Arne Aarheim) present the LTC model in terms of content, organization, and resources. The distinctions lie in the differences between the governments' roles and responsibility in the provision of LTC services.

The chapters in Part II showcase formal care provided by various organizations. In Chapter 3, Yayoi Saito describes a change of structure and roles of stakeholders: from the role of family members in eldercare during prewar time, to the formation of pluralistic care providers under the Long Term Care Insurance system in 2000 in Japan. What follows is the paper presented by Steinar Bartstad, who discusses whether the complex needs for elderly can be adequately met by the healthcare services in the municipals that are underdeveloped in Norway.

As a researcher conducting a project on elderly care in Hong Kong, the part that caught my attention was Part III - Provision of Informal Care. These chapters (by Ruth Campbell and Marit Solheim) unpack the roles of informal support in LTC. They also challenge the assumptions of priorities of home care in Japan where filial piety is traditionally valued, and emphasis of the government-funded social care that are mandatorily provided by the municipals. The perspectives of gender and social changes are taken into consideration within their discussions of the "negotiation of new ways of care" (p.116) in Japan and direction to both "de-familiarization and re-familiarization" in Norway (p.146). Of particular interest to me is Chapter 6 in which the author gives an impressive overview of theories, providing the framework to conceptualize the complex interplay between family care and public care, and giving key insights in ways to explore politics and ethics of care responsibility.

Part IV, titled "Procedures of Assessment and Allocation of Eldercare", the authors examine approaches of needs assessment used in each country. Noriko Kurube critically discusses the problem of using a standardized tool to measure the "complex needs" of the elderly. In Norway, as discussed by Unni Edvardsen, the multiple purpose of the IPLOS used by different levels of government suggests the needs to reform the existing assessment instrument. "Mechanism for ensuring quality of care" is the final theme of the volume. Koichi Hiraoka and Unni Edvardsen walk the readers through ways to ensure quality of care. Their accounts depict the need for regulation and evaluation that may be resisted by service providers in both countries. The end point of the discussion lies in the future where Paul Midford envisions the needs for using technology to support healthcare labor in Norway, and economic and political forces on eldercare in contemporary Japan.

Contributed by ten experts, the greatest strength of this volume is the structure of pairing of chapters surrounding an array of sub-divided themes. Such organization make**s** readers continually keep comparison**s** in mind and give**s** both sides of the debate equal attention. This book definitely provides a wealth of information of the historical development and contemporary reality of social care policy in the two different cultural settings through employing a variety of statistical sources and ethnography. Several chapters (from chapter 3 to 6) notably highlight female family members as principal caretakers. Still to be explored is an examination of policy implications on gender differences in caregiving. The single attention on the perspectives of care providers may preclude critical engagement of the elderly, whether as individuals, as classes, or as consumers. I would have liked to have seen whether voices of the elderly are heard and how their opinions can be addressed in policy.

Supported by substantial evidence as presented in the papers, the subtitle "Aging societies East and West" clearly invite the readers to rethink and challenge the exotic views of "clear-divide" between the East and West. This volume is a highly relevant source for both undergraduates and graduates in the discipline of gerontology and public health. Researchers, healthcare professionals, social or health policy-makers who are of interest in practice and policy design in aging issues will find this eye-opening.

Vol 37, No 1 (2016) ISSN 2374-2267 (online) DOI 10.5195/aa.2016.150 http://anthro-age.pitt.edu