

BOOK REVIEWS

Ageing in Asia-Pacific: Interdisciplinary and Comparative Perspectives

Edited by Thomas R. Klassen, Masa Higo, Nopraenu S. Dhirathiti, and Theresa W. Devasahayam. New York: Routledge, 2018. Pp. 308. ISBN 10: 1138550426; ISBN 13: 978-1138550421.

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Today, population ageing is commonly seen all over the globe, but in Asia in particular it has been remarkable for its speed and scale. When we consider the social impact of population ageing in different Asian and Pacific countries and regions, we are likely to ask whether they will become like Western societies or develop along their own diverse paths. For anyone who has entertained such a question, this book is a must-read. My initial impression after reading this book is that the countries of the Asia-Pacific region are unlikely to converge readily in any one direction. Rather, I have become firmly convinced that the possibility of multilateral cooperation through diplomatic relations across different countries/regions must be explored in the near future. To understand population ageing in every Asia and Pacific country/region, this book is a fine resource, a collection of excellent papers providing an overview of the situation across the region and access to sources of data.

Twenty-four authors have written seventeen chapters from their own perspectives on Asia-Pacific population ageing and its context. Originally, each article was presented in a symposium. Authors who had participated in the First Annual Symposium on Ageing and Old Age in the Asia Pacific, held in Fukuoka City in 2015, brought their papers to the second Symposium in Bangkok in 2016. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the book and introduces each article briefly. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework, which is elucidated below. In Chapter 3, the ageing population of the Asia-Pacific region and its influence is showcased. The book's final chapter, Chapter 17, presents policy recommendations. The remaining chapters illustrate challenges posed by population ageing by each country and region.

In Chapter 1, the editors present the following three assumptions: the Asia-Pacific region (1) may present considerable diversity among countries/regions in the timing and speed of population ageing; (2) the region has social institutions and cultural legacies obviously different from other parts of the world; and (3) the region would experience social changes different in particular from those of Europe and North America. Five goals of the book are: (1) to offer the latest data; (2) to summarize issues such as gender, social policies, and well-being; (3) to pay attention to life courses; (4) to enable mutual learning of policies; and (5) to enhance students' and researchers' interest in the topic.

In Chapter 2, Masa Higo discusses "ageing and elderly in modern society." When we are ageing in a population-ageing society, he maintains, we will have to redesign our life courses. It means that we do not live our lives in accordance with the standardized age norms, but live our lives in accordance with our individualized, personal life courses.

In Chapter 3, David R. Phillips discusses the ageing population in the Asia-Pacific regions in terms of changes in the epidemiological situations and family systems. In a super-aged society, like in Asia, crises for older persons are caused by "shrinking of household size," "extramarital childbirth and 'divorce' without marriage," "decline of filial piety," and "social exclusion and loneliness." Furthermore, he warns that many older persons will be exposed to changes in the environment,

such as natural disasters, global warming, air pollution, and climate change, which could even affect the mental health of the elderly. In particular, the current elderly generation is in between the previous generation whom they have cared for and the future generation whom they cannot depend on, both in the family and in the community; moreover, they may be left behind even given the minimum protection from poverty the government might provide. They are exposed to the growing risks of living in a less convenient and less protective society in the midst of the changes of social norms, Phillips warns.

Each chapter contains an article written by author/s with different disciplinary backgrounds and methodologies, as the subtitle of the book implies: “interdisciplinary perspectives.” Chapters 4 through 16 illustrate current situations and policy recommendations in China, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Viet Nam, Singapore, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Thailand, Burma, Nepal, Australia, and New Zealand. Through such a presentation, a comparative perspective by country is explicitly developed. Each country has a different situation in the distribution of social class, ethnicity, culture, gender, generations (e.g. the baby boomer generation and others), and locality (urban and rural); these are well elucidated.

In the final chapter, Chapter 17, Napraenue S. Dhirathiti recommends integrated policies in responding to social changes, in which the elderly and those who have diversified socio-cultural backgrounds should be integrated. Such policies would cover measures like pension and income security, health care, housing and infrastructure, family support, and community support for the elderly. I agree. However, I argue that such measures have already been implemented. Integrated policy proposals/guidelines for the elderly have been established in, e.g., the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) by the United Nations, Active Ageing as a social policy framework and a global network of age-friendly cities and communities by the World Health Organization, and the Basic Act on Measures for the Ageing Society by Japan. I wonder if we really need policy recommendations nowadays. Perhaps what is more important is that we develop collaboration on issues commonly experienced by different countries rather than each international country’s efforts.

Population ageing changes the social conditions of each country in accordance with existing social conditions. The social condition of each country/region may be mapped out in terms of the strength–weakness continuum of each of the following elements: individual, family, community/religious groups, social stratification, market economy, and government. Perhaps, Asian countries/regions are “strong” in family, community/religious groups, social stratification, and government. They are different from Western countries, in which elements of the individual and the market economy are “strong,” reflecting the legacy of their longer history of modernization.

As Masa Higo illustrates in Chapter 2, modern societies are often moving to embrace individualism. And as Phillips points out in Chapter 3, the generation in the midst of transition between the previous one with older, established norms and the following one with new norms are exposed to the risks of adjustment problems. Their hypothesis may be aptly applied to industrialized countries such as those in Europe and North America. However, in Asia many countries/regions retain social security policies guided by frameworks that assume family support. Filial piety is a premise and a solid moral foundation for supporting the elderly in crafting laws and policies in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, Nepal, and Viet Nam, as illustrated in the individual chapters of this book, on the one hand. On the other hand, family issues are not mentioned in Australia and New Zealand. Rather, their policies are crafted in such a manner as to emphasize employment and social participation of elderly persons, in conformity with the framework of the individual-market economy continuum. Increasing numbers of elderly persons around the world tend to rely on pensions or social welfare. In Chapter 10 on Malaysia, Chapter 11 on Bangladesh, and Chapter 12 on Thailand, it is shown that as more people are engaged in employment and the family and community ties become gradually weakened, retired persons will have to depend on pension systems and social welfare benefits. In Chapter 5 on Korea, Yunjeong Yang refers to the heavy burden of family care shouldered by women under a social system that is based on the assumption of a strong family system. This demonstrates issues resulting from the basic policy of a family-government continuum.

With such strong trends of entrusting care to the family system as a premise, families in reality have to employ caregivers for their elderly parents in Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Malaysia. That said, we must not overlook the phenomenon that care workers are migrating from the Philippines, Indonesia, Viet Nam, and Myanmar to other Asian countries. Immigrant nations such as Australia and New Zealand might have undergone more ageing without immigrants from abroad. Even in a country such as Japan, which does not have a formal immigration policy, foreign care workers are inevitably accepted. I suggest that each country's situation in the Asia-Pacific region can be more aptly elucidated by connecting them with each other.

Although each chapter in this book describes ageing mainly as a domestic issue, it is unfortunate that a global perspective, which compares the progress of population ageing internationally vis-à-vis politico-economic contexts, is not shared across chapters throughout the book. Authors could have provided broader perspectives on international migration from such contemporary phenomena as "the international supply chain," though the domestic migration phenomenon is well explained in the chapters on Australia, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. It is time to think about ageing from a global perspective. Emerging agendas for policy makers to take into consideration include aged foreign residents, aged returnees from abroad, and new aged settlers from abroad. These are social issues that can be solved by those who have experienced different social security systems across countries without plural international cooperation.

It is regrettable that there is no chapter on Japan – which is the country with the largest ageing population – in thinking about the issues this book tackles. It is also alarming that chapters on Indonesia and the Philippines are missing: the former is a country whose population ageing is ranked fourth in the world, and the latter a country whose population ageing is taking place exceptionally slowly, unlike other countries in Asia. The Philippines has become a prominent export country of care workers to a global market. When we consider the ageing of the population in the past in the Asia-Pacific region, missing these countries is a crucial weakness.

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Framing Asian Studies: Geopolitics and Institutions

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All the disciplines, as well as inter-/trans-disciplinary research, have their own core questions and concepts. For example, political science addresses the nature of power and analyzes its traits at a particular time and space by observing the political arena. Sociology questions the nature of society or connection/disconnection between people and argues for changing/unchanging characteristics by analyzing social groups, including the family, religious groups, ethnic groups, and so on. Asian Studies is no exception, supposedly.

The book *Framing Asian Studies* addresses one of the core questions of Asian studies: that is, "What is Asia?" As the scope, nature, and perceived significance of Asia have not been fixed, but rather changed over time, Asian Studies scholars have struggled to define their mission. Because of the difficulty of sharing a core mission, Asian Studies has developed its own frames, research questions, and methodologies in different areas and times, which, in turn, make it difficult for Asian Studies scholars