

## Reviews

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Misa Izuhara (ed.), *Ageing and Intergenerational Relations: Family Reciprocity from a Global Perspective*, The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2010, 176 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84742 204 0.

Intergenerational relations are an intrinsically dynamic process. Changes in patterns of intergenerational exchanges can be seen as the consequence of different phenomena such as shifting family norms, demographic change, welfare state expansion or retrenchment, migrations, etc. Social scientists are far from providing a precise account of the mechanisms through which specific patterns of intergenerational relations evolve. However, when analysing these variations, scholars too frequently adopt an ‘ethnocentric view’ by focusing on single-country studies or by systematically comparing only Western developed societies. In contrast, this book aims to explore whether new forms or patterns of family reciprocity are emerging in national or *global* contexts, considering also East Asian and African societies.

The book is divided into two parts: the first is devoted to the discussion of some key concepts in the study of intergenerational relations; the second presents a series of case studies aiming at shedding light on new (or persistent) patterns of intergenerational relations in different areas and social contexts. In Chapter 2, Phillipson examines the fundamental question of how population ageing and globalisation are transforming the relationship between the generations. From his analysis of previous literature Phillipson concludes that the impact of this new social environment on intergenerational ties remains somewhat uncertain, but there are signs that intergenerational relationships may be entering a period of major uncertainty and potential upheaval. In Chapter 3, Katz and Lowenstein present a brilliant analysis of the theoretical bases of the intergenerational solidarity–conflict and ambivalence paradigm. Next, by using data from the OASIS project they examine the impact of intergenerational solidarity, conflict and ambivalence on quality of life. Their findings reveal that while for elderly people intergenerational family relations have a relevant impact on quality of life, this does not apply to younger respondents.

In the second part of the book, Joseph presents in Chapter 4 the results of a qualitative study of the transmission of housing wealth among elderly Caribbean immigrants in the United Kingdom. In Chapter 5, Izuhara explores the shift in the nature and patterns of intergenerational support in two major metropolitan areas of East Asia: Tokyo and Shanghai. Her interesting qualitative study shows that in both cities, although with a time lag in the Chinese case, types, ideologies and levels of family support appear to have shifted from extensive direct provision of practical and personal support to more indirect types of support. It is still unclear to what extent these emerging patterns undermine the norm of filial piety that traditionally defined intergenerational responsibilities in this region, but this

study clearly signals the need for scholars to pay much more attention to changes that are taking place in East Asian families and societies. An East Asian society is also considered in 'Spiritual debts and gendered costs', in which Engelmajer and Izuhara present an insightful analysis of the roots of gender differences in filial obligations in Thailand. While it is commonly accepted that sons repay their parents by becoming ordained as monks, daughters are expected to provide the necessary social and financial support to their elderly parents. The study combines an extended textual analysis of ancient religious texts with an investigation of contemporaneous Thai-language material including magazines, popular novels and television programmes. The two authors conclude that the roots of the gendered division of filial obligations are not to be found in the gender-neutral teaching of Theravavada Buddhism. Rather, they argue, gender-bias expectations may have emerged to fit in with modern socio-cultural and economic needs and the conditions of families and society: particularly as the family system has been matrilinear in household succession and physical and material obligations.

Next, Oduaran and Onduaran address the role of grandparents in societies in sub-Saharan Africa, in which the parents' generation has almost disappeared due to the HIV pandemic: however, this study is based on anecdotal evidence. Ganong and Coleman then present an interesting overview of their work of the past 15 years on the topic of intergenerational relations in stepfamilies in the United States of America. The policy relevance of their results are significant. They state that they do not support the public burden argument that most people believe families to be unconditionally responsible for dependent family members: rather they question widespread support for the recent surge towards regulations on personal responsibility.

Overall the book is quite successful in providing a vivid picture of emerging topics in the study of intergenerational relations in the global perspective. However, one possible criticism relates to the fact that in spite of the book title, and with the exception of Chapter 2, the phenomenon of globalisation is not systematically considered in the contributions. The book also presents some of the usual limitations of edited books, i.e. a limited connection between the topics dealt with in the different chapters and a considerable variation in the types of approach adopted and the quality of the research presented. This said, the book has the merit of attracting scholars' attention to the need to approach the study of intergenerational relations from the global perspective. Furthermore, Chapters 3 and 8 provide valuable overviews of some of the most relevant topics in intergenerational relations literature, thus constituting essential reading for scholars undertaking research in this area. Chapters 5 and 7 are also likely to be of great interest to any scholar conducting research on East Asian societies. Furthermore, I would also recommend the contribution of Engelmajer and Izuhara to those working in the area of 'gender studies'.

University of Bologna, Italy

MARCO ALBERTINI