

REVIEW

## Chinese Migrants Ageing in a Foreign Land: Home Beyond Culture

Shang Liu, Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2019, 112 pp., hbk US \$75.95, ISBN 13: 9780367218225

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The Routledge Focus series aims to provide short-form books on topical issues, and Shang Liu's *Chinese Migrants Ageing in a Foreign Land: Home Beyond Culture* fits this bill neatly. This book aims to advance a new understanding of acculturation processes for older migrants, drawing on empirical data from migrants of Chinese heritage in Australia.

The impetus for writing the book came from the author's own experience as a Chinese migrant to Australia, and questions she herself has grappled with. These include the tension between being an Australian citizen and yet not feeling culturally Australian, and the importance of home for supporting a sense of belonging. An analysis and empirical investigation of this concept of home forms the core of this book, which conceptualises ageing in a foreign land as a home-building process.

The book is structured into six chapters, with an introductory chapter providing background and context, followed by a chapter outlining the methodology used in the studies reported. These are followed by three chapters that report the data undertaken in two studies. A final chapter integrates the findings and reiterates the central importance to migrant wellbeing of building a sense of home as an ongoing process. The findings are interpreted through the lens of a social-geographical approach that conceptualises the person–environment fit as having three dimensions – physical insiderness, social insiderness and autobiographical insiderness – which provides the link between past and present experience.

Chapter 1 reminds us of the unprecedented growth in the ageing population, together with the growing numbers of older migrants, who fall into two categories: those who migrated as young adults and have grown old in their host country and those who migrate as older people, often to join adult children who have settled in the host country. Shang Liu's contention is that all migrants face four key challenges: to build a sense of place, to rebuild cultural identity and a sense of belonging, to manage language barriers, and to negotiate cultural differences in intergenerational relationships. 'Home' becomes the crucible in which these challenges are experienced, as it provides the multi-layered social context in

which the tension between belonging to the new culture and retaining habits from the old country is lived.

The empirical data reported in Chapters 3–5 are drawn from 20 participants who provided two sources of data: semi-structured and open written questions and interviews, and photographs they took that signified home to them. These data were then analysed thematically, using the three dimensions of insideness as the anchor points. With respect to physical insideness, key findings included the importance of cultural objects in the home to represent connection to the homeland, while the ability to use community facilities, such as transport and restaurants, contributed to the sense of belonging to the host country. Chapter 4 explores the theme of home as relationships, highlighting the importance of not only family relationships that help maintain traditional practices, but also weak ties that may be more integral to a sense of belong to a neighbourhood. Chapter 5 addresses autobiographical insideness, suggesting that when the home becomes 'transnational', that is, contains and enables elements from both cultures, migrants can achieve an identity that encompasses both the past and the present.

One of the novel aspects of this study is its nuanced integration of diverse theoretical perspectives, drawing on insights from environmental gerontology, intercultural communication and acculturation theories. Although the empirical data are based on studies of Chinese migrants in Australia, the author draws extensively on international literature, and her conclusions are widely applicable across a range of societies and ethnic groups. I was unfamiliar with this 'short-form' style of publication, and in some ways, it did feel rather like reading a PhD thesis – with the sequence of chapters being almost exactly what one might expect in that format. The central sections of the book report data from studies with 20 participants. As a result, I was left with the feeling that the book was something of a compromise between a monograph describing a circumscribed area of study and the more extended treatment of a topic that would normally be expected in a book format. Nevertheless, with its careful consideration of what it means to age 'in place' for people who may feel torn between old ways and new, this volume will be of interest to both policy makers and those involved in the provision of culturally sensitive services for older migrants.

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