


REVIEW

Care Work, Migrant Peasant Families and Discourse of Filial Piety in China

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Care Work, Migrant Peasant Families and Discourse of Filial Piety in China by Longtao He explores crucial themes related to filial piety, family care-givers and end-of-life care. The author depicts filial piety as a composite concept that has a significant impact on family care-giving in China, focusing on the most prominent population of migrant peasant workers post China's socioeconomic transformation. The book details the challenges faced by family care-givers in contemporary China and highlights the role of filial piety in shaping care-giving practices.

Drawing on traditional Chinese philosophy and empirical qualitative research on family care, this book goes beyond Western-centred and quantitative methodological tendencies in health-care research. Through ten well-argued chapters, He dissects why and how Chinese migrant peasant workers draw on discourses of filial piety to justify their care-giving towards their parents with terminal cancer. In Chapter 1, 'The Care Burden of Chinese Migrant Peasant Workers', He recognises that emotional and moral burdens, centred on filial piety, are key to informal care, stretching the limits of economic and institutional perspectives. Subsequently, Chapter 2, 'A Historical Trajectory of Filial Piety', criticises the widespread belief that neoliberalism is the sole cause of diminishing filial piety. Chapter 3, 'Research on Care and Filial Piety in China and Lack of "Localised" Theoretical Grounding', further suggests the possibility of filial piety as a path to localisation.

Unlike other localisation studies that completely reject Western paths, He compares and combines the Foucauldian theories with Chinese epistemological positions in Chapter 4, 'Foucault and Chinese Traditional Philosophies (Confucianism)', and Chapter 5, 'The Path to a Culturally Integrated Foucauldian Discourse Analysis'. He criticises the taken-for-granted adoption of Western theory and suggests that Foucauldian theory complements Chineseness.

Chapters 6–9 integrate the time dimension into family care-giving analysis and find that individuals uphold filial piety rather than depart from it using participants' interview data. Chapter 6, 'Findings: The Burden of Care for Migrant Peasant Workers and Filial Piety's Mediating Roles', reveals the positive and negative impacts of filial piety on family care-givers in terms of gender, economy and care responsibility. Chapter 7, 'Parental Sacrifice Discourse', confirms the filial

association between generations by retracing parents' past sacrifices. Chapter 8, 'Intertwined Discourse of Parental Sacrifice and Forgetting', further indicates the mutual shaping of filial memory by individual and political discourse. The final chapter of this section, 'Migrant Peasant Workers' Care Experiences in Relation to the Three Conceptual Similarities Between Foucauldian and Chinese Philosophies', focuses on how migrant peasant workers negotiate their caring roles and highlights the complex relationship between Chineseness and Western modernity within the ideas of family care.

The concluding chapter synthesises the findings, highlighting the limitations of current government policies, proposing that 'the action/practice orientation inherent in Chineseness' (p. 269) would be meaningful to filial care in China. This entails connecting filial piety with tangible policies, such as introducing family care leave for employees, tax exemptions for those with care-giving responsibilities and expanding social services for family care. These recommendations aim to provide better resources for family care-givers while alleviating the potential burdens of filial piety. Grounded in empirical research, these policy suggestions hold significance for China's ageing population and pension challenges, and offer valuable insights for similar issues globally.

The book focuses on care-giver subjectivity but, unfortunately, lacks an in-depth exploration of individual care-givers' daily care and spirituality. Further, discussions on external influences, such as local policies, hospitals and social institutions, are relatively cursory. Finally, these results are limited to migrant peasant workers who are actively caring for their parents and therefore are not representative of the issues of abandonment of ageing parents in rural China. In noting these limitations, He called for further research.

The book concerns question such as: 'How do Chinese migrant workers make sense of their experiences of caring for parents with terminal cancer?', 'How does sense-making relate to and reflect the discourse on filial piety?' and 'To what extent and how are Chinese migrant workers affected by changes in discourses of filial piety in current Chinese society?' (p. 259). These arguments are relevant, particularly when He situates them within family care research. He claims that family care is not only structural and consistent, but also spiritual and heterogeneous. The book provides an understanding of family care-giving and the enduring influence of filial piety in modern China and presents a model for bridging Eastern and Western scholarship. Given its rich history, personal experiences, interviews and policy documents, the book is a valuable resource for students and scholars of medical social work, health care, family sociology and Chinese studies.

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