

REVIEW

## Eldercare Issues in China and India

Longtao He and Jagriti Gangopadhyay (eds), Routledge, London, 2022, 250 pp., hbk £104.00, ISBN 13: 9781032183794

Lucy Smout Szablewska

Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

*Eldercare Issues in China and India* examines the changing nature of care for older people in the world's two most populous countries by drawing attention to five key themes: filial piety, family-based care, institutional care, marginalised elder groups and population data. The central chapters are bookended by an introduction in Chapter 1 by the editor Longtao He, and a summary in Chapter 11 of future research directions by the co-editor Jagriti Gangopadhyay. Several chapters focus singularly on either China or India, others consider both countries and all use a qualitative research lens. Overall the book makes a thought-provoking – but somewhat fragmented – contribution to scholarship on normative understandings of care in China and India.

The first section examines the cultural ideal of filial piety towards one's parents, known as *xiao* in China and as 'filial obligation' in India. In Chapter 2, 'The Extension of *Xiao*', Marius Meinhof and Yiming Zhang draw on discourse analysis of policy documents and speeches to analyse the ways in which the state has mobilised *xiao* as part of a 'civilisational' social engineering project to encourage volunteers to take responsibility for older people in their communities. In Chapter 3, 'Eldercare, Filial Piety Within the Joint Family System of Urban India', Jagriti Gangopadhyay uses data from semi-structured questionnaires to reflect on how the tensions enmeshed in filial obligation are managed in households shared between older adults and adult children in one Indian city.

Family care is the focus of the second section, with Longtao He and Han Wu reviewing the demands upon family care-givers of elderly cancer patients in India and China in Chapter 4, 'A Comparative Study of Caregiving Experiences Between Family Caregivers of Elderly Patients in China and India: A Qualitative Meta-synthesis'. In Chapter 5, 'Filial-piety-based Family Care in Chinese Societies', Zhuopeng Yu and Boye Fang pen a sweeping overview of how family care is being both undermined and redefined by demographic and socio-economic change in China and in Chinese communities outside China.

The third section considers the rise of institutional care through two lenses. In Chapter 6, 'Stigmatization of the Elderly and the Influence of NIMBY in Community-based Eldercare Institutions', Fei Peng, Mang He and Nuermaimaijiang Kulaxi review the barriers facing developers seeking planning permission for

community-based eldercare institutions in Chinese megacities. Their research draws on planning documents, site visits and semi-structured interviews to investigate spatial and social tensions and ageism. In contrast, in Chapter 7, 'Dimensions of Eldercare and Quality of Life of Elderly People in an Old-age Home in Kolkata', Saheli Guha and Neogi Ghatak drill down to one eldercare institution to measure residents' varied perceptions of their Quality of Life.

Generalisations about older people as a homogenous and needy cohort are challenged in the fourth section. In Chapter 8, 'Successfully Ageing Alone: Long-term Singlehood and Care During Covid-19 in India', Ketaki Chowkhani brings to the fore practices of self-care and resilience by the long-term single elderly. In Chapter 9, 'Loss of the Only Child and Caregiving for Grandchildren Among Older Adults – A Qualitative Case Study in China', Ji Wu and Xue Qiu outline how bereaved parents find solace in their grandchildren. The fifth and final section is devoted to a detailed analysis of the gaps in datasets on older people by Dona Ghosh in Chapter 10, 'Does India Have Sufficient Data to Understand the Need for Eldercare?'

The strengths of the book are the rich insights it gives into the moral concerns of researchers in China and India, concerns which in turn shape and are shaped by debates in both societies. Chapters 2 and 6 provide novel assessments of the respective roles of social engineering and town planning in responses to population ageing in China. There are timely calls in Chapter 8 for greater societal recognition of self-care in later life, and in Chapter 10, for better data on older people in India.

However, several gaps could be addressed. A section putting China and India into geographical, historical, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-generational social context would be helpful for readers who are not familiar with carescapes in South and East Asia. More reflexive care could be taken with terms such as 'disease burden' (p. 1) and 'eldercare issues plaguing China and India' (p. 219). Such wording may be well intentioned, but risks feeding into ageist assumptions about older people as uniformly burdensome. In a similar vein, vague terms such as 'insufficient institutional arrangements' (p. 1) merely hint at rather than spell out clearly the significance of unequal power relations and uneven resource allocation. More could be done to foreground the barriers families face in fulfilling ideals of familial care in the absence of comprehensive state welfare, and as a result of inadequate investment in material, social and economic infrastructures of care. Additionally, the role of classed and gendered care labour in freeing up others to be economically productive could be much more fully developed, although the need for a gendered lens is recognised on page 7.

Lastly, there are several inconsistencies and typos. Different spellings are used, e.g. 'aging' and 'ageing'. The term '*seva*' (explained as the Indian equivalent of the Chinese term '*xiao*') is referenced on page 3, but never appears again. However, in general the book is carefully edited and provides useful building blocks for future publications.