

## book review

Nan Zhang, [nan.zhang-2@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:nan.zhang-2@manchester.ac.uk)  
University of Manchester, UK

Merril D. Silverstein (ed) (2021)  
*Ageing Families in Chinese Society*  
Routledge  
270pp  
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China, the world's most populous nation, is entering a stage of 'super ageing', with its citizens experiencing low fertility, on the one hand, and longevity, on the other. Alongside the rapid ageing of its population, China is undergoing accelerated social, economic and cultural changes that are reshaping everyday life and intergenerational relationships. What unique challenges are these circumstances bringing to individuals, families and communities, in addition to Chinese society as a whole? How are ageing families in China coping with reduced family sizes, swift urbanisation and changing gender expectations, as well as the emerging but still underdeveloped long-term care system? These are the questions addressed in *Ageing Families in Chinese Society*, edited by Merrill D. Silverstein, which brings together leading scholars from Asia, North America and Europe in various disciplines, including gerontology, demography, family science, social policy and Chinese and East Asian studies.

Combining quantitative data from social surveys in China with the application of sophisticated statistical methods, comparative surveys in Taiwan and Thailand, and qualitative data from life history and in-depth interviews, *Ageing Families in Chinese Society* covers four major thematic areas: disability and family support; family relationships and mental health; filial piety and gender norms; and long-term care preferences. Chapters in the book discuss these pressing issues and their influence on family care and support for older adults, as well as predicting the implications of their findings for the future of ageing Chinese families and offering potential policy implications. The book is thus, so far, one of the most comprehensive publications that delve deeply into a range of aspects of the changing practices of ageing among an increasingly diverse Chinese society. With a particular focus on the Chinese context and its changing family practices, the book chapters make a key contribution to conceptual, empirical and policy-relevant understandings of emerging issues in relation to ageing families under the influence of societal change and family transformations in China. Building on this fascinating and thought-provoking book, here, I would like to offer five potential promising avenues for future research on ageing families in China: older adults who have lost their only child ('*Shidu*' 失独); older adults without close kin ('elder orphans'); the insecurity and precarity of older migrants (Zhang

et al, 2021); ageism and the forced return of (older) migrant workers from heavy labour, mostly construction sites; and the potential contribution of China's rapidly evolving technologies to elderly care and intergenerational relationships.

Although the empirical data and discussion of the findings in *Ageing Families in Chinese Society* are primarily based on China (and other Asian contexts, for example, Thailand and Taiwan), the implications drawn from the book could generate translatable knowledge about how best to solve a pressing dilemma common to East Asian societies and beyond, which are undergoing rapid socio-economic change and demographic transitions. Hence, through potential cross-country comparative studies, the case of ageing and family change in China could be informative for policy development in the rest of the world. The book is likely to be read by a broad audience and not restricted to those with an interest in ageing issues in China (and East Asia). It will be of significant interest to students and academics in ageing, gerontology, social policy and population studies, as well as policymakers and a range of professionals who share a passion for gaining a better understanding of how ageing families are evolving and how to better serve our elderly in rapidly changing societies.

### **Reference**

Zhang, N., Nazroo, J. and Vanhoutte, B. (2021) The relationship between rural to urban migration in China and risk of depression in later life: an investigation of life course effects, *Social Science & Medicine*, 270: 113637.