

Experiencing Grandparenthood

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Kalyani K. Mehta • Leng Leng Thang
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Experiencing Grandparenthood

An Asian Perspective

 Springer

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The Editors

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Preface

Asia in the twenty-first century has experienced rapid socio-cultural, economic and family transformations as a result of modernisation, urbanisation and demographic ageing. Hailed as the next major challenge for Asia, the ageing of Asia is characterised by a record speed of ageing in many countries in Asia, much faster than what the Western nations have historically experienced. Asia will have an unprecedented number and proportion of grandparents amongst its population. For children in Asia who are shrinking in number with lower birth rate, it is becoming a norm to have living grandparents, great-grandparents and even great-great-grandparents in the family. With the feminisation of ageing, their living grandparents are also likely to be grandmothers.

What are the experiences of these grandparents living in such *exciting times*? It is with this enquiry that we offer this volume based on grandparents in five Asian countries to enhance the current state of literature on the growing segment of our world population – grandparents from an Asian perspective. Based primarily on an original qualitative research project of grandparenting in five Asian countries carried out by a multidisciplinary team of researchers from Japan, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Hong Kong, the local grounded knowledge of the researchers offer unique observations in individual societies which contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic interplay between changing socioeconomic conditions and cultural saliency in affecting the intergenerational relations between the grandparents and the grandchildren. In addition to the above five countries, a chapter on China has been included to expand the comprehensiveness of the book.

Social changes bring to surface paradoxes that serve at once to define and redefine the nature of grandparenting and meanings of grandparenthood to the three generations within a family. In filling a gap in the current stock of knowledge on the study of grandparents in Asia, the volume seeks to answer the following questions: What is the state of grandparenting in the Asian context today? How do the roles and functions of grandparents differ depending on living arrangement, gender, age, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relations and changing health of the grandparents? What stresses are there with grandparenting and strategies adopted to manage intergenerational conflicts? What are the cultural, religious and social principles

that buttress the value of multigenerational ties? From the social linguistic perspective, how does an analysis of ageing discourse in different cultural contexts promote our understanding of intergenerational relationships?

The grandparents in the study, by and large, represent the range of families in these Asian societies. They are the witnesses to the economic and social developments that have swept across Asia affecting the cultural and social norms they used to hold. Whilst they grow up with respect for grandparents who usually have legitimate roles in the family, expecting to be cared for at home in old age and symbolising family authority and standing at the centre of family relations, the changing expectations of care and intergenerational living arrangements have left some of them at the margin of a nuclear family focus. Whilst some grandparents may still regard themselves as playing significant roles in the upbringing of their grandchildren, others have only little contacts with their teenage grandchildren. The grandparents in the study revealed their joys and dilemmas as grandparents, and implicated the coping strategies they deployed to negotiate and balance their desires with that of their adult children's and grandchildren's. As link parents, the middle generation showed appreciation to their older parents, but exposed the paradox of wishing for an appropriate distance in grandparent–grandchildren engagements. The grandchildren observed the mix of affection and tension between their parents and grandparents, and are mostly glad to have the grandparents around as providers of various sources of support. The volume's strength lies precisely in its rich body of qualitative three-generational data spanning five Asian countries. Such an intergenerational perspective on the study of grandparenthood, which includes in its analysis the views of three generations (grandparents, link parents and grandchildren), contributes to a new dimension of advancing our understanding of grandparenthood in the familial context.

The book is targeted for social researchers, academics, gerontologists, social workers, family therapists, community workers, policy makers, anthropologists, scholars of regional studies and grandparents themselves.

As you read this book, we hope that you will grasp the authentic voices of the Asian grandparents, who are different because of their different cultures and nationalities, yet similar due to their value and belief systems.

As co-editors, we would like to thank the contributors who have been patient and dedicated in their efforts to complete the project. We have gained much both personally and as scholars of gerontology through the process of completing this volume. As we walk life's journey as grandparents, link parents and grandchildren, and as we experience the stresses, frustrations, joy and satisfaction that comes with the different life stages, may we always remember to cherish those around us who have made our existence meaningful.

Kalyani K. Mehta
Leng Leng Thang

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