

# POPULATION AGING IN CHINA - A BOOK REVIEW

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The book's central topic is the ageing population of China and how it affects Chinese society and in turn the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The ageing population is a byproduct of "demographic transition" which is a long-term trend of declining birth and death rates, resulting in a substantive change in the age distribution of a population. Therefore, the fall in fertility coupled with an increment in life expectancy results in an older structure of society. The book was a research paper and has been added to the International Handbook of Population Aging, in Chapter 8. The first chapter gives an overview of the relevance of studying caring in China and lays out the topics that follow. The determinants of caregiving transitions among young and middle-aged Chinese women are examined in the second chapter. The next chapter covers the factors of time spent caring for parents and in-laws. The impacts of caring status, timing, and intensity on health trajectories throughout time are investigated in Chapter 4. Finally ending with the policy implications in the final chapter.

The book starts with the concept of "intergenerational exchange" in China. Intergenerational exchange is essentially any transfer of material goods (money, or emotional support) happening across generations from abled people to their kin. China used to be a patriarchal society however, with the one-child policy reform of 1971 patterns of intergenerational exchange become more gender-neutral. The book talks about research by Xie and Zhu where they showed data comparisons of financial assistance provided to parents by sons and daughters respectively.

China's implementation of the one-child policy in the 1970s has impacted the caregiving norms, behaviours, and expectations to large extent. Based on concepts like contextual embeddedness of life transitions, the interdependence of life spheres, linked lives, and Life course development in life course theory there are six general hypotheses in the book they briefly talk about the following, The sociodemographic characteristics of adult women which influences women's time spent on parental caregiving. Caregiving time is associated with levels of socioeconomic resources among adult children as it suggests a life course development perspective. According to the interdependence of life spheres, women's social roles (i.e., marital status, work, and child-rearing) significantly influence the time they can spend on caregiving. Which in turn, raises the risks that emerge from linked lives, for instance, co-residence and widowed parents/in-laws. The contextual embeddedness of life transitions suggests that in addition to regional and urban-rural differences, the community context like population density or health infrastructure of adult children significantly influences women's time on care provision for their parents

and parents-in-law. The predictors of parental caregiving involvement differ for daughters and daughters-in-law according to the patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal norms in China.

The book is a great testament to the social evil of patriarchy prevalent in our society and crushes those norms with research and data. However, the foreign policy and domestic attributes of the book are reflected as we put certain decisions in the context of the book. China has recently been getting involved with its neighbours at a socio-cultural level, along with more diplomatic aggressiveness. Coupled with the Wolf Warrior diplomacy, greater economic expansions at saturated markets and so on may be a testament to the fact that the CCP recognises the ageing issue. This may be one of the major reasons why the One Child Policy was expunged by government officials in 2015. This is because a government with an older population has different needs and desires in contrast to a government with a younger population. The CCP's recent behaviour suggests an awareness of living through its moment of greatest relative advantage and that this window of opportunity will be closing soon. Estimates show that China may match Japan's (Japan has the oldest population in the world) demographic structure by the year 2040, it needs to become an advanced, industrial and modern economy before that happens. China is a diplomatically enclosed nation with difficult neighbours, and older societies have different concerns, edging more towards welfare. These factors coupled with the fact that the Covid induced global recession has hit China very hard. Economic growth in PRC had already been going down, and this threatens PRC to fall into the middle-income country trap which is the case for many countries in Latin America.

The book is very eloquently written and an easy read, it can be read by anyone interested in an array of issues ranging from foreign policy, domestic policy or even socio-cultural attributes like gender. I wanted to read more about the implications of ageing in China as an explainer of its domestic or foreign policy, however, the book delivers on the socio-cultural level. The book has an academic undertone to it while discussing the data but these charts can easily be omitted as it is well explained and on an overall scale of 1 to 5, I would personally rate it 4. Reducing a point because the book did not delve very deep into a specific topic and would barely dip its toes in too deep before shifting to the next chapter. I agreed with all the policy recommendations made in the book and would like to point out that it had Western influence case in point is the social security system although not the same but very similar.

**Cover Image:** [Financial Times](#)

**About the author:** Anuraj is a third-year political science student specialising in foreign policy and economics and has an interest in the environment, especially the north-south divide.