

# Preface

China is fast on its way to become the most powerful economic force in the world. Simultaneously, it has the fastest increase in the aging population in the world. Between 2010 and 2040, the portion of people 65 and older will rise from around 7% to between 25% and 30% of the population (Kim & Lee, 2007).

China has four unique characteristics that distinguish it from other countries in Asia. First, the proportion of aging population is growing faster than Japan, the country previously recognized as having the fastest rate, and much faster than nations in Western Europe for example. Second, an early arrival of an aging population before modernization has fully taken place, with social policy implications. It is certain that China will face a severely aged population before it has sufficient time and resources to establish an adequate social security and service system for older people. Third, there will be fluctuations in the total dependency ratio. The Chinese government estimates are that the country will reach a higher “dependent burden” earlier in the twenty-first century than was previously forecast (Powell & Cook, 2010). Fourth, the strong influence of the government fertility policy and its implementation on the aging process means that fewer children are being born. However, with more elderly people, a conflict arises between the objectives to limit population increase and yet maintain a balanced age structure (Peng & Guo, 2001).

The intersection of these fourfold factors means that the increased aging population is giving rise to serious concerns among Chinese social policy makers. There is a chronic lack of good resource materials that attempt to explain social policy in its relationship to examining the problems and possibilities of human aging grounded in an analysis of the political economy of social policy in China and impact on rural and urban spaces.

Such analysis of China will be covered by conceptual, theoretical, and empirical approaches in this volume. The book will also discuss substantive topics of pensions, family care, housing, health, and mental health. The book brings together an array of active researchers to provide discussions of critical implications of aging social policy and the economic impact in China. It also fits the core requirements of the book series by flagging *Aging in China* as a key component of international aging.

This book is aimed at second and third year advanced undergraduates in social policy, social gerontology, sociology, psychology, health studies, nursing, social work, family studies, urban studies, rural community development, Asian and international studies, and public and business administration. It will also appeal to post-graduates in these areas, including interdisciplinary master's level courses; to professionals in health and social care and public services; and to academics in the social and human sciences.

The book's cross-disciplinary appeal is one of its major strengths given the expertise of the contributors. Such discussions of social policy and effects on older people in China will allow debates around the impact of health and social welfare on contemporary social life to enter new realms: realms that students and practitioners can utilize to reflect on their own experiences in challenging assumptions about aging and relationship to health and social welfare, while learning from the experiences of other cultures. This book is timely given the recent proliferation of academic degrees focused specifically at the interplay of socio-economic policies and aging in China, but more generally in light of the current high profile of comparative studies of a wide range of subjects. It is our hope that the efforts reflected in this book will make a significant contribution to the research literature and teaching resources.

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