

## **Hyunsook Yoon and Jon Hendricks (Eds), Handbook of Asian Ageing, 512 pp ISBN:0415784557**

**Reviewed by Halimatus Sakdiah Minhat<sup>1</sup>**

The book *Handbook of Asian Ageing*, edited by Hyunsook Yoon and Jon Hendricks, provides a detail perspective and evolution that are associated with ageing population phenomenon that is occurring in Asian countries. Contributors to the book focusses on the social and economic implications of ageing population with specific elaboration on individual countries experiences, ranging from low-income countries and countries with economies-in-transition to the developed regions, in facing ageing population in relation to the living arrangement, social support system, employment, retirement and health of older persons.

The rapidity of Asian demographic change will shorten the lead time governments have for implementing reforms to suit the needs of the older persons. Although the figures vary widely from region to region within Asia, the rapid ageing process was contributed by the rapid decline in fertility and infant mortality rates following the World War II that led to the production of an increasingly younger population profile in the mid-1970s, which was further declining with the striking shift in family planning policies resulted in the proportion of the population under age 15 began to wane, especially in the Asia-Pacific nations. At the same time, massive improvements in health and abatement of chronic conditions lead to longevity and increases the proportion of older persons. Currently, Asia's older-age group is concentrated in the younger segments of the old-age population range and projected to experience greatest growth in the older age group in the next few decades, like the Japanese experience. The rapid ageing process is more significant in the developing regions of Asia, especially in the Asia-Pacific and Southeast Asia regions, that put them towards a more challenging experience of population ageing.

Across Asia, families have been traditionally assumed exclusive responsibility for providing care for the old family members. In most traditional Asian societies, older adults live with extended, multi-generational households and rely on their adult children, spouses and other family members for social and financial support. However, the demographic, social and economic changes that occur with ageing population, putting the traditional family support system under pressure as evidenced by the shrinking of family size due to reduction in marriage and fertility rates, better education and carrier opportunity for the female children who mainly served as the informal carers for older persons. This scenario has been a major issue in the developed regions of Asia such as in Japan, Korea and Singapore which leads to enforcement of public policy and public support programmes for older persons such as the

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Community Health, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, UPM, 03-89472413., (halimatus@upm.edu.my)

social welfare supports and financial assistance. The disruption in the traditional family support system has also put a high demand towards institutional care for older persons that leads to the needs for social security benefits such as the long-term care insurance that has been implemented in Japan.

Older adults also tend to be the poorest sector of society across Asia, and subject to poverty is common especially in the rural areas. Only few countries offer limited social welfare supports, financial assistance, in-home care, community services or institutional facilities, in which they are mainly available for the destitute and abandoned. In China, the existing social security system only covers residents of the urban areas with many rural older persons still heavily depending on their children for financial support and care. Older adults in rural areas are significantly poor and the economic status of rural older women are especially dim. In contrast to the Japanese, the rapid economic growth, shifting of the industrial structure and a well-planned social security system and also the long-term care insurance for older persons have brought numerous changes to the lives of the Japanese older population. The overall economic status of the Japanese older persons is good. Unfortunately, women without husband do represent an exception and tend to fall into the lowest income stratum. This is because many older women spent their prime earning years in informal and small enterprises with no entitlement to employee pensions and if they did, the pension benefit received by older women is often low due to gender gap in wages.

Health is another important implication of ageing population. Although older persons are more synonym with chronic diseases or non-communicable diseases which are commonly multiple, some developing regions in Asia are facing a double disease burden having both communicable and non-communicable diseases as main problems, putting more pressure on the health care system. Many developing nations in Asia are also dealing with childhood diseases as well as infectious and parasitic illnesses, including polio, measles, malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, which infect large numbers of people of different age groups. The increasing life expectancy is putting older persons at risk of longer years to spend with illnesses related disability which directly increase the health care cost. A comprehensive government-funded medical services are still lacking in many parts of Asia with most regions heavily reliant on the private sectors for the financing and delivery of healthcare. Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan have achieved comprehensive, mandated healthcare coverage, relying on employment-based systems. Healthcare policy is a prevailing issue as healthcare costs massively increase across Asia. The ageing of the Asian population will necessitate the restructuring of the provision of healthcare, especially with the increasing need for long-term care among older people