

Title: China's Grandmothers: Gender, Family, and Ageing from Late Qing to Twenty-First Century

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Chinese grandmothers always play a crucial role in Chinese families as essential caregivers for grandchildren no matter in the Qing dynasty or Twenty-First Century. Although women are easily marginalised and overlooked, especially in the public area, by traditional historical narratives in China's patriarchal society, agentic Chinese women, in the past and at present, have found their ways to be active and influential in the lives of their own and surrounding others through the remarkable grandparents-children-grandchildren relationships within families. *China's Grandmothers*, by Diana Lary, uses the experiences of Chinese grandmothers from the late Qing dynasty to the present as the lens to provide vivid pictures of intergenerational relationships and interactions in Chinese families. Through locating various Chinese grandmothers' experiences as caregivers and educators to their grandchildren, as transmitters of traditional culture, custom, and skills within generations, as household managers or matriarchs, etc in the broader societal context, this book demonstrates the changes and continuities of the roles and power of grandmothers in Chinese families in modern history and nowadays.

This book's main body includes thirteen chapters that explore various aspects of life experienced by Chinese grandmothers from the early twentieth century to the present. The early part of this book, from chapters one to five, introduces the multiple roles that grandmothers play in traditional Chinese families. The later part, from chapters six to thirteen, includes diverse topics, ranging from what old age life looks like for grandmothers and grandfathers in changing Chinese societies (e.g., war, cultural revolution, "fever" to rural-urban and China-abroad migration after the opening-up) to Chinese people's philosophy of looking after self (e.g., seeking for pleasures in old age and preparing death with dignity) and contributing to the collective family (e.g., providing emotional, physical, and financial support to their grandchildren). All chapters display smooth connections and thought-provoking comparisons between historical events and current phenomena to unpack challenges faced by Chinese society beyond changes and continuities. For example, historically, the Confucian

moral code of filial piety and the traditional family structure guaranteed the elderly's "non-conditional" life security in old age. However, currently, the relationship between the older generation and the younger generations could become an exchange of resources, support, and care. For some grandparents, being the caregivers to grandchildren seems to be the precondition of claiming their right to be supported by their children in old age. There are no means to question grandparents' sincere love for their grandchildren; but it might be worth reorganising that, in some families, nowadays, looking after grandchildren might be a decision that not only comes from love but also instrumental considerations. Furthermore, through discussing the shortages of the current social welfare system (e.g., pension, health service, education, employment) in China and the consequences of Chinese family policies (e.g., One Child Policy), Lary shows that both the senior population and the younger generations (e.g., migrant workers and left-behind children) need to cope with intensive challenges to living a decent life.

Throughout the whole book and particularly in the final chapter fourteen, Lary offers a personal record of her family history under the same lens of grandmothers' life and impact on families. Through showing her own experiences of being a grandchild and a grandmother, a strong personal account has been added to this book to show an impressive combination with academic writing. This personal record crosses the cultural, geographical, and temporal boundaries to build up live "dialogues" with these Chinese grandmothers. I laughed when I read the family story shared by Lary about her grandmother's prescribed '*gold-standard in the late nineteenth century*' milk-stimulating food – several pints of Guinness a day for three months!

Extraordinarily rich sources, including photos, paintings, tales, proverbs and poems, autobiographies, interviews, etc, are well linked, triangulated, and analysed in this book. These sources not only show the lives of Chinese grandmothers over the past century but also contribute to a broader understanding of how Chinese society and families work, such as moral codes, gender rules, family structure and practice, principles of childcare and education, etc, which regulate Chinese people's everyday personal lives. An in-depth analysis based on diverse primary sources challenges some stereotypical constructions of family practice in China. For example, narratives of interactions between grandmothers and grandchildren

demonstrated in this book provide inspiring insights into the strong emotions and high level of intimacy in family practice in Chinese families. Chinese people are often constructed as ones who tend to suppress the expression of intimacy in family practice (e.g., don't say 'I love you' or rarely have intimate body contact, such as hugs and kisses), but these intergenerational interactions could show a high level of emotional intimacy. The widely recorded memories of love and warmth from grandmothers in childhood could also be good examples of carry-over emotions and emotional capital transmitted between generations in Chinese families.

In this book, a wide range of intersectional factors, such as gender, age, socioeconomic status (e.g., class and urban or rural residence), educational background, etc have been involved in the analysis of Chinese women's experiences. These intersectional factors are put in changing historical, sociocultural, political, and economic contexts in the China society. As a Sociologist with research interests in childhood studies, especially children's everyday personal lives and relationships, I find this book's interdisciplinary contributions remarkable. It could benefit not only Chinese studies but also relevant disciplines, including history, literature, sociology, childhood studies, women studies, education, etc. It is a helpful reference for a wide range of audiences, including not only undergraduate and postgraduate students but also the public who are interested in family lives in China, especially in modern Chinese history.

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