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Competing visions and paradigms for lifelong learning co-exist at national as well as international levels. The fact that one ‘official’ discourse may be dominant at any one time does not mean that other ways of thinking about learning throughout the life course have disappeared. They are alive and well in a range of critical traditions and perspectives that retain their power to engage and persuade.

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Taiwan’s Senior Learning Movement

Perspectives from outside in and from inside out

Springer
The field of older adult learning is certainly at an important crossroads. Despite a global and dramatic increase in the education attainment levels of adults, the number of participants in older adult learning has not increased in a commensurate manner, and typical learners remain physically and cognitively healthy older women from relatively advantageous socio-economic backgrounds (Formosa, 2021a, b). The perils of globalization, malestream biases, neo-liberal hegemony, the fetish of consumption, novel generational habitus of incoming cohorts of older persons, a neglect of older persons in care homes and/or living with dementia, and the ingoing COVID-19 pandemic, amongst other challenges, are really testing the established ethos and vision of late-life learning. Such encounters are not surprising and instead to be expected. Furthermore, later-life learning runs the risk of experiencing academic imperialism, becoming dominated by Western philosophies and modes of practice, and Eurocentric hegemonies as a way of knowing, seeing and understanding its subject matter (Formosa, 2019a, b, c). Such waves of ideological domination are both hidden and expressed, as they seek to reinforce past and present superiorities of Western social systems over others. Of course, in the drive to sustain social, economic and political agendas, such conceptual ascendencies are produced and reproduced in the echelons of learning institutions, and the overlapping arenas of older adult education and educational gerontology are absolutely no exception.

One thus welcomes the imperative of *Taiwan’s Senior Learning Movement: Perspectives from Outside In and from Inside Out* to crystallize the need for the discipline of late-life learning to counteract such currents of intellectual subjugation and instead act in culturally relevant ways, go against the current of assimilationist education, and embark on geragogical practices that are cross-cultural, multi-cultural, culturally sensitive and socially inclusive. In many ways, this publication was certainly thought, planned and written in line with a Freirean ideological spirit:

I don’t want to be imported or exported. It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them. Please tell your fellow educators not to import me. Ask them to re-create and re-write my ideas (Freire, 2005, p. 58).
This was both foreseeable and anticipated. Primarily, the oeuvre of work published by one of the editors, Brain Findsen, has been consistently rooted in a critical and decolonizing paradigm. One article that surely deserves special mention is ‘Learning in later life: A bicultural perspective from Aotearoa/New Zealand’ (Findsen, 2016) as it traversed the overall relationship of colonizer and colonized in the particular context of Aotearoa New Zealand, and argued that the plight of older adults’ learning needs to be contextualized as how this wider socio-cultural framework was recently influenced by a government-led neo-liberal agenda. Second, the past decade witnessed an emergence of scholarly writings that highlighted the uniqueness and potential of Eastern approaches in enriching older adult learning. As Tam (2012, 2016) argued, Western and Eastern modes of learning are generally perceived as polarized and described in terms of the Confucian-Anglophone dichotomy. According to Confucian beliefs, lifelong learning is an effort made throughout one’s life span to inculcate a morally excellent life and to develop into a virtuous person, since learning is conceived as a vehicle of ‘learning for the sake of the self’ to enrich one’s life and character. Quite to the contrary, engagement in ‘learning for the sake of others’ is generally congruent with the instrumental and competition-directed notions of lifelong learning in Western societies for survival or competitive purposes in a knowledge-based society. Finally, recent years also witnessed a constructive critique of older adult learning for overlooking the fact that many older persons outside the Global North may have never attended any formal education when younger and, thus, may be more interested in basic literacy provision rather than the liberal courses that are generally offered. Ratana-Ubol and Richards (2016, p. 99) rightly pointed out that the University of the Third Age phenomenon ‘is sometimes resisted (or may not sufficiently inspire) in non-OECD or at least more traditional societies on the basis of cross-cultural differences as well as views of education directly linked to the tension between tradition and modernity (and associated rural-urban, poor-rich, and technological divides)’ on the basis that most learning programmes for older persons were, ultimately, created in – and for – a Western context.

As scholars in older adult learning debate such intricacies, *Taiwan’s Senior Learning Movement: Perspectives from Outside In and from Inside Out* is certainly a book whose time has come. Anyone who works in the field of older adult learning, irrespective in which geographical territory, will be fascinated by the chapters herein, as they oscillate between outsider and insider viewpoints, as they question and discuss the extent that Western models of late-life learning are appropriate or applicable for older persons in non-culturally dominant cultures. *Taiwan’s Senior Learning Movement: Perspectives from Outside In and from Inside Out* demonstrates that in an increasingly globalized world, it is vital to recognize the diversity of the aging population within different continents and countries so that culturally appropriate practices distinguish the diversity within, build on existing strengths of older learners, develop cultural competencies (such as bilingualism, cultivate tolerance and anti-discrimination), provide information and better communication channels, and work in partnership with key stakeholders that may range from academia to government officials to family and friends (Warburton et al., 2009). *Taiwan’s
Senior Learning Movement: Perspectives from Outside In and from Inside Out also interrogates the extent that the most popular providers of older adult learning in Western societies, such as the University of the Third Age, should be implanted on Asian shores in a lock, stock and barrel fashion. The chapters are evidence that contemporary incarnations of older adult learning ‘have played an important role in moving away from the earlier deficit model, the focus on the positive and productive aspects may be as narrow and prescriptive as the earlier negative conceptions and fail to recognize the diversity of the ageing experience’ (Carrow & Bartlett, 2015, p. 290). Taiwan’s Senior Learning Movement: Perspectives from Outside In and from Inside Out is a strong signal that it is time to look beyond Western models of lifelong and late-life learning, and focus more on culturally diverse ways of creativity in later life. However, such an approach will definitely not materialize unless informed by more research on the specific needs of different groups of older persons, especially those in non-Western countries, an endeavour which lies at the heart of this book.

Taiwan’s Senior Learning Movement: Perspectives from Outside In and from Inside Out focuses on how the global movement of older adult learning exemplifies a wider challenge and related solution to promote an international brand of older learning that is both loyal to international principles but also uniquely sensitive to local social and cultural currents. The chapters herein demonstrate the urgent need to take the best of diverse knowledge and education systems on a complementary basis for a more equitable practice of late-life learning that is also faithful to social justice stances. While Taiwan’s Senior Learning Movement: Perspectives from Outside In and from Inside Out has covered a lot of ground, the road to be travelled remains never ending, and it is augured that one witnesses more regional works on senior learning in as varied geographical contexts as possible.

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Hui-Chuan (Peggy) and Ai-Tzu (Iris) Li, October 2021

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Brian Findsen, October 2021
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About the Editors

Brian Findsen completed a doctorate in Adult Education and Sociology from North Carolina State University, USA, in the late 1980s. Brian has worked in adult and continuing education in universities for most of his career, as an adult educator (teacher, researcher, manager) at the University of Auckland, AUT University, and the University of Glasgow (2004–2008), where he served as the Head of Department for Adult and Continuing Education. At the University of Waikato, New Zealand, he was the first Director of the Waikato Pathways College from 2008 and latterly as Professor of (Adult) Education in the Division of Education. He was awarded the title of Emeritus Professor in October 2021. Most of his substantive research has focused on learning in later life. He was admitted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 2012. Having retired from the University of Waikato, Brian continues to undertake voluntary work.

Hui-Chuan Wei (魏惠娟) completed a PhD in Education Policy and Administration from University of Minnesota, USA. Professor Wei is the Principal Investigator of the Taiwan Active Aging Learning Program funded by the Ministry of Education. She has overseen the program for over 10 years, ever since the policy enactment in 2008. She is also a professor and the former chair of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan. Near the university campus, she tried to integrate education and welfare using her farm to run an innovative community care center, “Active Aging on the Ark”.

Ai-Tzu Li (李藹慈) achieved a doctorate in Social and Philosophical Foundation with a major in Adult Education from Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, USA. Professor Li is the current Associate Dean of the College of Education and the chair of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan. Alongside Professor Wei in Taiwan’s Active Aging Learning Program, Professor Li serves as a co-Principal Investigator of the program and the former chair of the Taiwan Active Aging Association. She specializes in human resource development, program planning, and evaluation.
Part I
Global Perspectives and Conceptual Framework
Chapter 1
Introduction

Brian Findsen, Hui-Chuan Wei, and Ai-Tzu Li

1.1 Introduction

The story around historical and recent educational developments in East Asian societies is rather fragmented and limited in terms of outsiders’ understanding of them. Most of the reports and research have been published in local Asian languages, thus making access more difficult for an international readership, especially English speakers. Narratives around education are customarily focused on the formal education system, especially schooling. Outside this formal system a very different learning scenario is in place in community settings and none more so than learning and education for older adults (Findsen, 2005). In most, if not all, East Asian countries population aging is occurring at alarming rates including the focus in this book, Taiwan. This situation presents a major challenge for societies and governments to more fully comprehend the nature of learning in later adulthood and to make feasible plans based on solid research, the lived experiences of older people and then to enact appropriate social policies.

Taiwan’s senior learning movement is the topic of this book. The word senior is used to include older people, usually over the age of 55, but more normatively over the age of 65. No single definition of older adults is agreed upon internationally (Jarvis, 2001) but in the case of Taiwan, as will be revealed in later chapters, the preparation for retirement is taken seriously by government (national and local) especially. Of course, the concept of retirement itself is problematic as increasingly across the globe older people continue to work until death, undertake part-time paid...
work, volunteer as a contribution to the entire society or undertake second/multiple careers (Lain, 2018). Hence, retirement is not confined to a particular age necessarily and may constitute uneven patterns of recreation, work and learning. In the traditional portrayal of retirement older people were expected to retire from the world and engage in fairly passive activities (Phillipson, 1998). Much has changed. Today, the concept of active aging (explored in Chap. 3 of this book) has been emphasized wherein older people are encouraged to engage in active lives, undertake productive endeavors and engage socially within their own and across generations.

The inclusion of the phrase social movement is deliberate to signify that what learning older adults as individuals do is part of a broader initiative wherein sometimes cultural, economic and political factors interact to influence people’s decisions about what, how, where and why to continue learning, consistent with a lifelong and life-wide agenda. In defining what a social movement is, Crowther (2006, p. 171) comments:

Versions of lifelong learning through the knowledge they generate, the identities they foster, the learning processes and educational spaces they open up and their potential to mobilize and influence a wide range of people for collective action and/or personal transformation.

Theorists/practitioners who study social movements have often differentiated between old and new forms. The old social movements have been characterized by class politics with actors struggling to gain control over the state, the economy and have frequently crossed national boundaries (e.g. labor, peace, and civil rights). Many of these struggles have been longstanding and debates over action strategies are common (e.g. whether to centralize or decentralize resources). The new social movements, according to Mayo (2005), seek greater solidarity across movements, often center around identity and cover a wide political spectrum (radical-conservative). In our seeking to understand the character of the Taiwanese senior learning movement, both old and new elements are revealed though the fundamentals veer more towards a new movement.

1.2 Rationale

The exploration of societies’ responses to active aging and lifelong learning have been carried out in earlier work. At a more generalized level, the book Improving learning in later life (Withnall, 2010) investigated allied concepts concerning seniors’ learning but not in the context that is investigated here. In 2011, the co-authored book by Brian Findsen and Marvin Formosa entitled Lifelong learning in later life: A handbook of older adult learning, provided an overview/map of what has been understood as learning in later life from many perspectives (e.g. historical; philosophical; issues of participation) – in effect, a panoramic synthesis.

In work that has more specifically examined accounts from individual countries, Gillian Boulton-Lewis and Maureen Tam constructed as editors Active Aging, Active learning: Issues and challenges (2012) which focused on aging issues, research
methods and three comparative chapters illustrating patterns in each of Hong Kong and Australia. One chapter by Ernest Chui (Chui, 2012) did provide a snapshot of “Elderly learning in Chinese communities: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore”. In 2010, Wei-Yuan Zhang edited the book *Theories, policy and practice of lifelong learning in East Asia*, one chapter of which discussed the relationship between lifelong learning and social changes in Taiwan (Wang, 2010). Other chapters focused on neighbouring East Asia countries’ educational philosophies and practices.

In 2016 Findsen and Formosa edited a mammoth publication entitled *International perspectives on older adult education: Research, policies and practice*. In this work which captured what older adult learning/education looked like in 42 countries, there were nine from Asian countries. Some of these same countries are to be included in this book but based on a different viewpoint. In 2019 Marvin Formosa edited *The University of the Third Age and Active Aging: European and Asia-Pacific Perspectives*. Included in this volume were chapters from Mainland China, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, complemented by authors from New Zealand and Australia. Hence, it is acknowledged that these chapters provide useful insights into what is happening in adjacent countries to Taiwan. However, the comparative nature with Taiwan is not explicitly addressed in that U3A-focussed book. Other contributions in later life learning have focussed on regions outside of East Asia. Finally, in 2019, Findsen edited *Fresh perspectives on later life learning*, a selection of issues pertaining to later life learning from diverse parts of the world, including one from Maureen Tam (2019) concerning Hong Kong.

So, what can be deduced from these recent publications? Some are concerned with depicting the character of lifelong learning for older adults, some provide panoramic views of the field of later life learning, some provide case studies from specific countries and some concentrate on one country. The three books with closest affinity to this current book are Zhang’s *Theories, Policy and Practice of Lifelong learning in East Asia* (2010), Findsen and Formosa’s *International perspectives on older adult education* (2016), and Formosa’s *The University of the Third Age and Active Aging* (2019) wherein there are several chapters describing older adult learning/education in (East) Asia. This current book offers a more cohesive concentration on Taiwan and its senior social movement from both macro (global) and micro (localised) perspectives.

### 1.3 Focus of the Book

In this case, we editors seek to clarify the character of the senior social movement in which older people are the primary actors and to more fully understand how the movement has crystallized and to point to possible futures. Undoubtedly, there have been several factors of influence in the formation of the senior learning movement in Taiwan, explored in more detail in subsequent chapters. Changing demographics, past and present cultural practices, historical precedents and political emphases