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Li Zhang

Living Longer and Healthier at Older Ages

A Longitudinal Analysis of Chinese
Oldest Old's Health and Its Determinants

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*To my grandmother, parents, and children,
Guilian Liu, Jianguo Zhang, Yanqing Shi
Xiying Lu (Candice) and Xiyuan Lu (Emily)*

Preface

Fertility decline has caused rapid population aging worldwide. With no exception, the Chinese population is also aging quickly. According to the seventh Chinese census conducted in November 2020, population aged 0–14 (253 million) and 15–59 (894 million) were about 18.0% and 63.4% of the total population, respectively. There were 264 million people who were 60 and over, which is about 18.7% of the total Chinese population. Among them, 190 million were 65 and over, which is about 13.5% of the total population. As compared to the sixth census conducted in 2010, population aged 0–14, 60 and over, and 65 and over increased by 1.4%, 5.4%, and 4.6%, respectively. Whereas the working age population aged 15–59 decreased by 6.8%. With such a trend, China will eventually face a shortage of working age population and a great deal of challenges due to population aging, including old age support, pension policy reform, family care, medical costs, and others.

One of the effective ways to alleviate challenges caused by population aging is to promote healthy aging in older ages. Under such a proceeding, demographers and sociologists are urged to elucidate factors that may influence population health in older ages and prolong human life span. This book tries to use the newly developed age-period-cohort (APC) approach to explore how a variety of demographic, socio-economic, and behavioral factors have impacted Chinese oldest old's physical and mental health. It also aims to detect how period and birth cohort have played a role in shaping the oldest old's health outcomes. The manuscript has demonstrated, when a variety of social factors are controlled, how oldest old's health status has changed over time and across birth cohorts. The manuscript makes contributions to the fields of demography, sociology, geriatrics, and so forth.

Looking at the monographs that have been published during the past 15 or so years, most books studying Chinese population aging are policy oriented. This can perhaps be explained by an extremely powerful status of the Chinese government. Among those, a few books published by Springer Publisher have dealt with aging in China in particular. These books are such as *Healthy Longevity in China-Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Psychological Dimensions* edited by Zeng Yi, Dudley L. Poston Jr., Denese Ashbaugh Vlosky, and Danan Gu, Springer Publisher, 2008; *Aging in China: Implications to Social Policy of a Changing Economic State* edited by Sheying Chen & Jason L. Powell, Springer Publisher, 2012; *The Development of Security and Whole Care System for the Aged in China*, edited by

Yanzhong Wang, Springer Publisher, 2018. The book edited by Zeng Yi and associates examined aging issues and health longevity in China from demographic, socio-economic and psychological dimensions. The book answered questions critical to the aging population worldwide. That is, is the period of disability compressing or expanding with increasing life expectancy and what factors are associated with these trends in the recent decades? Is it possible to realize morbidity compression with a prolongation of the life span in the future? This book is obviously a very important piece that enhances our understanding of several longitudinal survey datasets, including the Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (CLHLS), as well as healthy longevity in China. The book edited by Sheying Chen discussed topics of bio-medicalization, aging policies, housing, community care, institutional elder care, family care, pensions, and mental health in China. The majority of the chapters addressed how social policies and economic reforms have impacted old age care in China. The book edited by Yanzhong Wang devoted more attention to the development of a pension security and comprehensive care system for elders in China. The book provided a large number of comparative analyses of security systems for the aged in China and in more developed Western countries. In addition, the book analyzed the reforms of Chinese pension security system over the past years. Similar to the book edited by Sheying Chen and colleagues, this book is also largely policy oriented.

This current manuscript differentiates it from the above books in the following aspects: First, in contrast to other existing books which are largely policy oriented, this study focuses on studying Chinese oldest old's health and its determinants at the individual level. It is one of the few books that examine Chinese oldest old's health-related factors. Second, the study goes beyond analyses of cross-sectional datasets to a longitudinal scope when exploring the multivariate relationships between health and a number of factors. The study examines how a variety of covariates have affected Chinese oldest old's health status. More importantly, the research reveals the compound effects of age, period and cohort in the associations between the oldest old's health and diverse demographic, socioeconomic, behavioral, and lifestyle covariates.

The book commences with a review of the existing literature on older adults' health determinants. The study then introduces the age-period-cohort approach and the strengths of using this method to study older adults' health. The book introduces several important surveys that contain longitudinal information of Chinese older adults' health, including the Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (CLHLS), the one that is used to conduct the analyses in this monograph. The following chapters conduct empirical analyses and present regression results, which show how a variety of demographic, socioeconomic, social, behavioral, and lifestyle factors influence Chinese oldest old's physical and mental status. In addition, the research elucidates how period and birth cohort effects play a role in the associations between Chinese oldest old's health and its determinants. The book offers important implications in terms of how to improve older adults' health status and help them to live longer and healthier at older ages.

Since this book studies aging issues and has important policy implications, the book will be of interest to a range of readers. Scholars of gerontology and geriatrics may find this research cutting edge because this is one of the few frontier studies that systematically examine Chinese oldest old's health from a longitudinal scope. This book can also be used as a textbook in graduate and upper-division undergraduate sociology and demography core courses. Beyond the classroom, the book would also be of significant interest to a general audience, including policy makers who are interested in the topics of old age care, healthy aging, and population policy making.

Beijing, China
April 25, 2024

Li Zhang

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