Experiencing Grandparenthood
This new series aims to provide a public forum for single treatises and collections of papers on social indicators research that are too long to be published in our journal Social Indicators Research. Like the journal, the book series deals with statistical assessments of the quality of life from a broad perspective. It welcomes the research on a wide variety of substantive areas, including health, crime, housing, education, family life, leisure activities, transportation, mobility, economic s, work, religion and environmental issues. These areas of research will focus on the impact of key issues such as health on the overall quality of life and vice versa. An international review board, consisting of Ruut Veenhoven, Joachim Vogel, Ed Diener, Torbjorn Moum, Mirjam A.G. Sprangers and Wolfgang Glatzer, will ensure the high quality of the series as a whole.

For further volumes:
http://www.springer.com/series/6548
Kalyani K. Mehta • Leng Leng Thang
Editors

Experiencing Grandparenthood

An Asian Perspective
Kalyani K. Mehta is Head of the Gerontology Programme at University of SIM, Singapore. Her research interests are ageing-related policies and services, family caregivers, cross-cultural studies, grandparenthood, intergenerational ties and their impact on the well-being of older people. Her rich experience in the field of social gerontology spans the past 20 years. Dr. Mehta’s PhD thesis on “The Dynamics of Adjustment of the Very Old in Singapore” started the passion for this specialisation. Although most of her research is conducted in Singapore, she has extensive knowledge of the Asia Pacific region. Her numerous publications include two co-authored books “Understanding and Counselling Older Persons” and “Ageing in Singapore: Service Needs and the State”, six edited books, and more than 40 papers in international journals on social gerontology and social work. Dr. Mehta was Member of Singapore Parliament (2007–2009) by nomination, and during her term she spoke on ageing policies and services.

She is President of the Singapore Association of Social Workers and council member of the Singapore Gerontological Society. She is associate editor of the Singaporean journal “Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development” and serves on the editorial boards of the Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work and Asian Journal of Gerontology. Internationally, Dr. Mehta has served as consultant to United Nations, Asian Development Research Forum and is currently advisor to the Asia Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

Leng Leng Thang is a socio-cultural anthropologist with research interest in ageing, intergenerational programming, intergenerational relationships and gender. She graduated with PhD in Anthropology from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Japanese Studies and member of steering committee of the health research cluster at Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore.
She writes extensively on ageing and intergenerational issues focusing mainly on Asia (especially Japan and Singapore), and is the author of “Generations in Touch: Linking the Old and Young in a Tokyo Neighbourhood” (Cornell University Press 2001) and co-author of “Ageing in Singapore: Service Needs and the State” (Routledge 2006). She is active in promoting intergenerational interaction and is vice chair of the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programs. She is also associate editor of Journal of Intergenerational Relationships (Taylor & Francis). She provides consultancy on intergenerational programmes and ageing-related issues for various government and social service agencies in Singapore and is currently president of Singapore Fei Yue Family Service Centre.
Asia in the twenty-first century has experienced rapid socio-cultural, economic and family transformations as a result of modernisation, urbanisation and demographic ageing. Hailed as the next major challenge for Asia, the ageing of Asia is characterised by a record speed of ageing in many countries in Asia, much faster than what the Western nations have historically experienced. Asia will have an unprecedented number and proportion of grandparents amongst its population. For children in Asia who are shrinking in number with lower birth rate, it is becoming a norm to have living grandparents, great-grandparents and even great-great-grandparents in the family. With the feminisation of ageing, their living grandparents are also likely to be grandmothers.

What are the experiences of these grandparents living in such exciting times? It is with this enquiry that we offer this volume based on grandparents in five Asian countries to enhance the current state of literature on the growing segment of our world population – grandparents from an Asian perspective. Based primarily on an original qualitative research project of grandparenting in five Asian countries carried out by a multidisciplinary team of researchers from Japan, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Hong Kong, the local grounded knowledge of the researchers offer unique observations in individual societies which contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic interplay between changing socioeconomic conditions and cultural saliency in affecting the intergenerational relations between the grandparents and the grandchildren. In addition to the above five countries, a chapter on China has been included to expand the comprehensiveness of the book.

Social changes bring to surface paradoxes that serve at once to define and redefine the nature of grandparenting and meanings of grandparenthood to the three generations within a family. In filling a gap in the current stock of knowledge on the study of grandparents in Asia, the volume seeks to answer the following questions: What is the state of grandparenting in the Asian context today? How do the roles and functions of grandparents differ depending on living arrangement, gender, age, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relations and changing health of the grandparents? What stresses are there with grandparenting and strategies adopted to manage intergenerational conflicts? What are the cultural, religious and social principles
that buttress the value of multigenerational ties? From the social linguistic perspective, how does an analysis of ageing discourse in different cultural contexts promote our understanding of intergenerational relationships?

The grandparents in the study, by and large, represent the range of families in these Asian societies. They are the witnesses to the economic and social developments that have swept across Asia affecting the cultural and social norms they used to hold. Whilst they grow up with respect for grandparents who usually have legitimate roles in the family, expecting to be cared for at home in old age and symbolising family authority and standing at the centre of family relations, the changing expectations of care and intergenerational living arrangements have left some of them at the margin of a nuclear family focus. Whilst some grandparents may still regard themselves as playing significant roles in the upbringing of their grandchildren, others have only little contacts with their teenage grandchildren. The grandparents in the study revealed their joys and dilemmas as grandparents, and implicated the coping strategies they deployed to negotiate and balance their desires with that of their adult children’s and grandchildren’s. As link parents, the middle generation showed appreciation to their older parents, but exposed the paradox of wishing for an appropriate distance in grandparent–grandchildren engagements. The grandchildren observed the mix of affection and tension between their parents and grandparents, and are mostly glad to have the grandparents around as providers of various sources of support. The volume’s strength lies precisely in its rich body of qualitative three-generational data spanning five Asian countries. Such an intergenerational perspective on the study of grandparenthood, which includes in its analysis the views of three generations (grandparents, link parents and grandchildren), contributes to a new dimension of advancing our understanding of grandparenthood in the familial context.

The book is targeted for social researchers, academics, gerontologists, social workers, family therapists, community workers, policy makers, anthropologists, scholars of regional studies and grandparents themselves.

As you read this book, we hope that you will grasp the authentic voices of the Asian grandparents, who are different because of their different cultures and nationalities, yet similar due to their value and belief systems.

As co-editors, we would like to thank the contributors who have been patient and dedicated in their efforts to complete the project. We have gained much both personally and as scholars of gerontology through the process of completing this volume. As we walk life’s journey as grandparents, link parents and grandchildren, and as we experience the stresses, frustrations, joy and satisfaction that comes with the different life stages, may we always remember to cherish those around us who have made our existence meaningful.

Kalyani K. Mehta
Leng Leng Thang
Acknowledgments

Our deepest gratitude goes to all the respondents – the grandparents, link parents and grandchildren – from families in the five countries. Without their voices, this book would not have been possible. We would also like to thank all the research assistants and interviewers from the different countries who have supported us in the project.

We are grateful for the funding support from the 3-year research grant provided by National University of Singapore (R-107-000-040-112), the supplementary grant from Waseda University, Japan (R-134-000-040-593) and for the Hong Kong study, the Direct Grant from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Project ID: 2020824). The Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore has funded the research conference for this project in October 2005 which contributed to the formulation of this volume.

Finally, we are indebted to our families and friends who have encouraged us at every stage to publish this book.
Contents

1 Introduction: Grandparenthood in Asia ................................................. 1
Kalyani K. Mehta and Leng Leng Thang

2 Changing Social and Demographic Characteristics in Asia .......... 21
Tsuneo Usui and Mari Tsuruwaka

3 Grandparenting Roles and Functions ..................................................... 47
Vivian W.Q. Lou and Iris Chi

4 Meanings of Being a Grandparent .......................................................... 61
Leng Leng Thang

5 Stress and Conflict Management
Strategies in Grandparenthood ................................................................. 77
Kalyani K. Mehta

6 The Socio-PSychological Well-Being of Grandparents ................. 95
Peerasit Kamnuansilpa and Leng Leng Thang

7 Custodial Grandparents and Intergenerational Support in Rural China ................................................................. 109
Zhen Cong and Merril Silverstein

8 Empowering Self-disclosure: The Active Post-retiree
Life Accounts of Malaysian and Singaporean Senior Citizens........ 129
Maya Kamlnani David and Kuang Ching Hei

9 Conclusion: Change and Continuity
of Grandparenting in Contemporary Asia ............................................. 145
Leng Leng Thang and Kalyani K. Mehta

Index ................................................................................................................. 159
Contributors

Iris Chi  University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 90089-0411, CA, USA, ichi@usc.edu

Zhen Cong  Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Texas Tech University, Box 41230, Lubbock, TX 79409, USA, zhen.cong@ttu.edu

Maya Khemlani David  Member of the International Advisory Board of Linguapax, Head of Section for Co-Curricular Activities, Elective Courses by Other Faculties and TITAS (SKET), Staff of Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Languages & Linguistics, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, mayadavid@yahoo.com

Kuang Ching Hei  English Language Department, Faculty of Languages & Linguistics, University of Malaya, 50603 Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, kuangch@um.edu.my

Peerasit Kamnuansilpa  College of Local Administration, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand, peerasit@kku.ac.th

Vivian W.Q. Lou  Department of Social Work & Social Administration, Sau Po Centre on Ageing, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, People’s Republic of China, wlou@hku.hk

Kalyani K. Mehta  Gerontology Programme, School of Human Development and Social Services, University of SIM, 461 Clementi Road, Clementi 599491, Singapore, kalyani@unisim.edu.sg

Merril Silverstein  Davis School of Gerontontology and Department of Sociology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0191, USA, merrils@usc.edu

Leng Leng Thang  Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore, Blk AS 4 # 03-32, 9 Arts Link, Singapore 117570, Singapore, lengthang@nus.edu.sg
Mari Tsuruwaka  St Luke’s College of Nursing, 10-1 Akashi-cho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0044, Japan, tsuruwaka@slcn.ac.jp

Tsuneo Usui  School of Human Sciences, Waseda University, 2-579-15 Mikajima, Tokorozawa Saitama 359-1192, Japan, tusui@waseda.jp