

representatives stressing the view that retirement is a social right under threat, whilst employers consider retirement as an outdated and costly institution.

Three closing chapters address the consequences of working past retirement age. Katey Matthews and James Nazroo confront the thorny issue of the inequalities manifest in working past retirement. Using data from the English Longitudinal Study on Ageing, the authors unequivocally demonstrate the self-evident fact that poor working conditions and hazardous occupations impact negatively on the health of workers who prolong their working life. This is followed by a comparative critique (Germany and the USA) of the concept of productive ageing and the positive gains of working past retirement age. Silke van Dyke draws attention to the persistence of the desirability of withdrawing from the labour market and 'retiring' that is evident in both countries. A final chapter by Harald Künemund and Simone Scherger draws together the issues presented throughout the book and offers a novel paradigm to replace the tripartite character of the life-course: 'a reorganization of the life course that keeps the separation of preparation, activity and leisure, but alters the duration of these periods and multiplies their sequence' (p. 311). This imaginative framework consists of periods of flexibility (career breaks, training and leisure opportunities) throughout the lifecourse in the context of social regulation that would protect more vulnerable citizens. Such a structural reorganisation of the life-course raises many practical questions of its implementation which, although not dealt with here, would need to be systematically addressed.

Overall, the book is well-written and pleasant to read, despite some unevenness in the compilation of the chapters. There are some notable exceptions of 'large players' in the comparative approach, especially the absence of France where numerous factors combine to create low levels of working past retirement age and a general unpopularity of institutional measures aimed at extending the working life. However, the book succeeds in identifying the complexities and contradictions in what is often taken for granted as an inevitable trend with positive outcomes. Perhaps the clearest message is that the drift to paid work beyond pension age is occurring in the absence of a clear alternative to the place of retirement within a welfare state. This creates winners and losers with regard to both the financial and health impact of working longer, and it is difficult to see how these can be overcome in the short term.

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Vivian W. Q. Lou, *Spiritual Well-being of Chinese Older Adults: Conceptualization, Measurement and Intervention*, Springer, Heidelberg, 2015, xiii + 92 pp., pbk US \$54.99, ISBN 13: 978 3 662 46302 4.

I had great pleasure in reading this ground-breaking book on *Spiritual Well-being of Chinese Older Adults* by Dr Vivian Lou. The book is to be recommended for the boldness of Dr Lou in conducting the research on a new area of spirituality, claiming that 'China is a perfect place to study spirituality from a nonreligious perspective' (p. viii). There is limited literature available on Chinese spirituality and measurement tools are mostly translated from Western measures and may not fit this context. Dr Lou and her research team therefore embarked on developing a new conceptual model of Chinese spirituality and designed a validated measurement tool: the Spirituality Scale for Chinese Elders (SSCE). They also developed a Spirituality Process Model which turns out to be a useful guide for the development of an effective intervention protocol, the Spirituality Enhancement Group for Chinese Elders (SEGCE).

The most challenging aspect of this research is the development of a conceptual model of Chinese spirituality in a non-religious socio-cultural context. It is 'non-religious' because Chinese people do not have the same kind of understanding of 'spiritual wellbeing' as is understood in Western culture. Research on spirituality in the West is embedded within a Christian theology which views spirituality as denoting a personal relationship with God and surrendering to His will, but investigating spirituality in a Chinese context focuses on non-religious, socio-cultural approaches. Hence, Lou suggests three core features of Chinese spirituality, including (a) a sense of relationship with self, others and the social environment; (b) a sense of meaning in life; and (c) a sense of transcendence and maintaining harmonious relationships with all things. These are key elements in any understanding of Chinese spirituality.

Chinese people are known to be ethical, relational, pragmatic and practical. They are concerned about the meaning and purpose of life and the search for transcendence, and they believe that the most important resources for life's meaning and transcendence would be found in human relationships with all things. The key to spiritual wellbeing lies in the development of harmonious relationships with oneself, with one's family, with others, with the environment, and with nature and heaven. This concern for seeking harmonious relationships with all things, such as 'Family harmony leads to prosperity in all things' (家和萬事興), reveals the ethical/relational dimension of Chinese spiritual wellbeing; and the search for meaning and purpose of life in harmonious relationships, such as 'Harmony with heaven and earth comes with social harmony' (天時地利人和), also reveals the pragmatic side of Chinese understanding of spirituality. Dr Lou and her team succeeded in drawing out eight core elements in their design of the SSCE, namely (a) the meaning of life, (b) spiritual wellbeing, (c) transcendence, (d) relationship with self, (e) relationship with family, (f) relationship with others, (g) relationship with the environment, and (h) relationship with life and death (p. 34).

Though the Chinese people do not believe in a personal God, they trust that human beings can develop a harmonious relationship with nature and they find the meaning and purpose of their lives in moments of unity with

nature and heaven (天人合一 *Tian yen he yi*) (p. 8). Even in the search for transcendence, Chinese people are concerned with what C. P. Lin categorises as the four domains of relationships, namely ‘with heaven (天), with others (人), with the environment (物), and with self (我)’. Chinese people see ‘heaven’ as the living nature which is independent of human will, yet ‘heaven’ is the source of energy for human life, and human beings need to live in harmony with ‘the will of heaven’ (天意). It reveals how pragmatic the Chinese are, for even this concept of ‘transcendence’ has to be understood in practical terms – the search for meaning and purpose of one’s life in harmony with nature, in acceptance, in forgiveness, and in loving oneself and others. Hence, there is a need to re-define Chinese spirituality from a non-religious context.

Finally, in the development of the SEGCE, Dr Lou and her team again draw on cultural sensitivity and contextual appropriateness in their design of a handbook called *Fu Le Man Xin* (福樂滿心), which means ‘full of blessings and joy’ (p. 85). The four Chinese words literally mean ‘the spirit of blessing’, ‘Joy and Peace’, ‘Contentment’ and ‘Happiness in heart’. They are precisely what Chinese people are ultimately pursuing, and are concerned about their spiritual wellbeing. Hence, Dr Lou’s research study was set to help Chinese people to generate positive life energy through the development of harmonious relationships with self, family, environment and nature. It is the generation of positive life energy which provides the meaning and purpose of one’s life, as well as the power of transcendence, and in such a way that the Chinese people could find the enhancement of their spiritual wellbeing. Dr Lou’s book and research is a strong start towards understanding this.

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