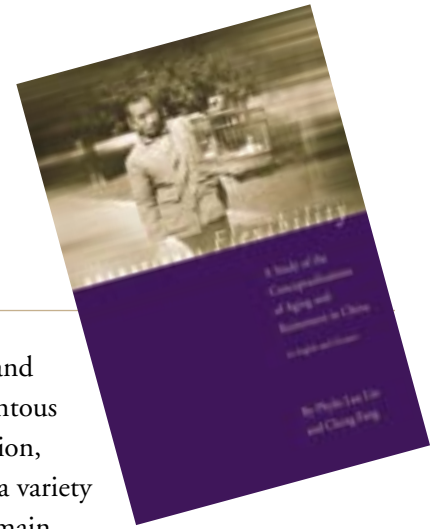




Operational Flexibility: A Study of the Conceptualizations of Aging and Retirement in China

By Phylis Lan Lin and Cheng Fang

(in English and Chinese)



With the implementation of an open-door reform policy, and accelerating industrialization, China is witnessing a momentous demographic shift. This social restructuring of the population, characterized by the rapid aging of its citizens, will lead to a variety of urgent problems, among which aging and retirement remain at the core. China is different from the West in that it is not what sociologists call “an employee society”; thus, aging does not necessarily mean retirement, and vice versa. This problem appears to be more complicated. It is often determined by the economic conditions and authoritative operational flexibility that underwrite the ideologies of convention and power.

China is a politically hierarchical, economically polarized, and culturally diverse society. For this social actuality, this monograph explores various conceptualizations of aging and retirement in China based on the hierarchical social status imposed by arbitrary political power. This monograph discusses five aspects of aging and retirement: types of aging groups and the conceptualizations of retirement, eligibility for retirement and its implications, operational flexibility and patterns of retirement, differences in pension and social welfare, and issues of retirement and their impact on research about aging.

This monograph concludes that aging and retirement are two relatively independent concepts in China. The majority of China’s population is not yet eligible for retirement, and those who benefit from the retirement privileges are granted diverse pension incomes and social welfare. This monograph is part of the global aging project cosponsored by the University of Indianapolis Center for Aging and Community and the University’s Asian Programs.

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