

"Aging and Social Welfare in Japan" by Thang Leng Leng (Routledge)

Thang Leng Leng (Japanese Studies) offers a historical perspective on the welfare system for the elderly in Japan.

Concerns over Japan's aging population began in the 1970s when Japan was ranked first of all aging societies. This continued in the 1980s when the term 'graying crisis' emerged, a result of tandem demographic and socio-cultural changes. Accompanying these societal changes were transformations within the welfare system. In the 1960s, Japan became the first country in the world to put in place an elder-related social welfare law. From the 1970s to 1980s, Japan focused on revising the current system which was hitherto western-centric, to create a Japanese-style welfare system. Finally, in the 1990s, the welfare system underwent expansion and diversification. The public pension system and long-term care insurance became pillars of the welfare system relying on state-funded aid as well as individual contributions and participation.

Thang notes that more recently the media have portrayed the elderly as active and independent. With moves toward more agentic notions of the elderly, the article concludes on an optimistic note by suggesting that this challenge faced by the baby-boomers is yet another test of resilience which they will overcome.

Thang, Leng Leng (2011) "Aging and Social Welfare in Japan" in Routledge handbook of Japanese culture and society, eds. Victoria Lyon Bester and Theodore C. Bestor, with Akiko Yamagata (Routledge: New York) 172-185.