



Editorial

# The Introduction of the Special Issue: Asian Perspectives on Active Aging: Meaning, Purpose and Hope

Kalyani K. Mehta <sup>1,\*</sup>  and Leng Leng Thang <sup>2,\*</sup><sup>1</sup> Gerontology and Social Work, Singapore University of Social Sciences, Singapore 599494, Singapore<sup>2</sup> Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore, Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore 119260, Singapore

\* Correspondence: kskm2013@gmail.com (K.K.M.); lengthang@nus.edu.sg (L.L.T.)

This Special Issue focuses on the value of active ageing and its beneficial impact on mental and physical health. The theme of this issue “Asian Perspectives on Active Aging: meaning, purpose and hope” has the aim of portraying the concept of active ageing from multidisciplinary angles. We received papers from Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore. The aim of the Special Issue is to collate the various experiences and interpretations of active ageing from diverse facets, i.e., physical, social, intellectual, spiritual and cultural, in the rich context of Asia. Asia is a vast region characterized by ethnic, religious, language and cultural diversities. The Special Issue illustrates the many manifestations of active ageing according to the context and the authentic identities of the people concerned.

The introductory article by [David and Ali \(2021\)](#) is based on a small-scale qualitative research study conducted in Pakistan on the application of folktales, poetry, and proverbs in informal human interactions amongst the older people in the Sindh community. This example of Asian folk tales that promote active healthy ageing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, stands out as authentic to the culture of the people. The social, psychological and spiritual aspects of elders’ well-being in the Sindhi community was enhanced because they maintained and developed their wisdom by transmitting the tales they knew to the next generation. In this way, when people were anxious and depressed, such activities helped to retain their mental equilibrium. The authors conclude that “folk literature, especially folktales, are increasingly becoming sources of spiritual wisdom, social interaction, lessons for the family, and such social interactions can help in healthy psychological ageing”.

Active ageing is often perceived as productive activities conducted by older persons, which, in turn, contribute to society. The second article by [Aris Ananta et al. \(2021\)](#) relates to the pension system in Indonesia for civil servants and active ageing. The authors discuss the efficacy of the shift from a defined benefits system to a defined contributions system, and whether the pensioners would really benefit in the long-term following this systemic change. They conclude that the proposed shift would not lead to financial adequacy and, therefore, the healthy active ageing process would not be enhanced. They recommend that a raise in retirement age would be a better solution to enhance the financial adequacy of the civil servants retiring in future. Although the paper addresses the problems of a particular segment of the population, the recommendation would (if accepted) benefit the majority of the working population who face the challenges of post-COVID-19 reality and inflation.

Active ageing in Singapore among older taxi drivers and crane operators gives insight into the issues faced by older workers. The article “Relicensing Practices of Taxi Drivers and Crane Operators Aged 70 Years and above in Singapore” by [Chan et al. \(2022\)](#) adds a different perspective to our understanding of the purpose and hope experienced by older workers. In Singapore, a mandatory retirement age policy exists for taxi drivers but not for crane operators. For renewing their licenses, the older taxi drivers and crane operators have



**Citation:** Mehta, Kalyani K., and Leng Leng Thang. 2022. The Introduction of the Special Issue: Asian Perspectives on Active Aging: Meaning, Purpose and Hope. *Social Sciences* 11: 190. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11050190>

Received: 21 April 2022

Accepted: 22 April 2022

Published: 26 April 2022

**Publisher’s Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

the challenge of passing routine medical screening as well as functional work competency assessments. Advocacy by older taxi drivers and research at the national level facilitated the simplification of the relicensing framework. Similarly, for crane operators, there was ground up advocacy, but the relicensing framework has not been changed. The authors hope that greater awareness of the difficulties faced by older workers in particular transport industries would lead to better policies that would enhance their possibility to continue working.

The article by Lou (2022) explores “meaningful ageing” amongst older people in Hong Kong. In the paper, Lou reiterates the process of developing and validating a relational conceptualization of a meaningful life (i.e., spiritual well-being) among older Chinese adults from its conceptual roots, assessment, and evidence-based intervention protocols undertaken since 2009 through an academic–community collaboration. The relational-based spiritual well-being framework attributes five relationships as significant to meaningful life for older adults, namely the relationships with self, family, friends, people other than family and friends, and the environment, contributing to the development of a cultural-specific conceptualization of active and healthy aging as a co-creation process between the individuals and their socio-economic and cultural context. The framework was well received by the Chinese community, bringing to attention the need to be culturally sensitive as we strive to understand what contributes to meaningful aging in a diverse context.

The last two papers focus on exploring active aging in Japan, known as the world’s oldest country, as it leads in being a super-aged society today with close to 30 percent of its population aged 65 years and older. In Someya and Hayashida’s article (Someya and Hayashida 2022) “The Past, Present and Future Direction of Government-supported Active Aging Initiatives in Japan: A Work in Progress”, it specifically examines the roles, functions and interplay of three active aging programs—the senior clubs, welfare centers for the elderly and senior colleges established since the 1960s. Although not the only types of active aging programs available, they are essential towards an understanding of the nature and direction of active aging-oriented programs in Japan. In comparison, senior clubs and welfare centers for the elderly have reported a decline in the levels of participation, while senior colleges continue to grow in popularity. Looking forward, as Japan faces increasing financial challenges approaching the norm of 100-year life, the authors note the emergence of a recrafting of the active aging motif to *shogai gen’eki*, encouraging older adults to remain productive with continued employment, suggesting the significance of remaining useful for a sustainable society.

Besides a macro socio-historical review, the article also included a microanalysis of one case study of the development of senior clubs and senior colleges in a Japanese city, and a brief overview of the U.S. experience for comparative insights of active aging initiatives in Japan. Finally, it should be noted that in Japanese literature, active aging programs are more widely known as programs to promote *ikigai* (life purpose). While active aging as a theoretical construct including multi-faceted aspects of health, wellness, social engagement and productivity corresponding to *ikigai*, *ikigai* is known to fundamentally place more emphasis on meaning, purpose and self-actualization.

The final paper by Chan and Thang (2022) addresses active aging through *shūkatsu* (later life and afterlife planning), which has become more widely practiced among older adults in Japan in recent years, reflecting their response to demographic and socio-economic-cultural transitions in Japanese society. From the perception of the active aging framework as a global early intervention strategy aiming to mitigate age-related risks, the authors suggest *shūkatsu* as a risk-averse practice, where the process of conscientious planning and management of one’s own later and afterlife choices helps one to stay actively engaged. In the process of understanding how factors such as personal history, experiences, roles, anxieties, life-changing events and cultural practices have influenced older Japanese in their decision making processes on later life planning, the authors also found the desire to live a “good old age” as significant in influencing one’s agency to age actively for better social, psychological and physical well-being.

In conclusion, the papers selected for this Special Issue have contributed towards the stock of knowledge that exists on how active aging is conceptualized and expressed in the region. Specifically, the papers add to our understanding of how the different activities and practices serve to connect the value of active aging with the search for meaning and a sense of purpose and hope in later life.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization and draft preparation, K.K.M.; refinement, and final draft revision, L.L.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

## References

- Ananta, Aris, Ahmad I.A. Moeis, Hendro T. Widiyanto, Heri Yulianto, and Evi N. Arifin. 2021. Pension and Active Ageing: Lessons Learned from Civil Servants in Indonesia. *Social Sciences* 10: 436. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chan, Hui H., and Leng L. Thang. 2022. Active Aging through Later Life and Afterlife Planning: *Shūkatsu* in a Super-Aged Japan. *Social Sciences* 11: 3. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chan, Mei L., Yoko Wong, Karen Tan, Joon C. Seng, Stephanie J.X. Ho, Claire J.W. Wong, and Gerald C.-H. Koh. 2022. Relicensing Practices of Taxi Drivers and Crane Operators Aged 70 Years and above in Singapore. *Social Sciences* 11: 41. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- David, Maya K., and Ameer Ali. 2021. Discourse of Folk Literature on Healthy Ageing: A Case Study in Sindh, Pakistan during the Pandemic Crisis. *Social Sciences* 10: 350. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lou, Vivian W.Q. 2022. Meaningful Aging: A Relational Conceptualization, Intervention, and Its Impacts. *Social Sciences* 11: 10. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Someya, Yoshiko, and Cullen T. Hayashida. 2022. The Past, Present and Future Direction of Government-Supported Active Aging Initiatives in Japan: A Work in Progress. *Social Sciences* 11: 65. [\[CrossRef\]](#)