In an age of international migration, we do not yet well understand the impacts of adult children’s immigration processes on their parents’ later lives. Drawing on data from a larger study of Chinese grandparents’ caregiving experiences in Canada, this article explores three interconnected aspects of aging in a context of transnational care—the intergenerational relationships, the cultural idea of filial piety, and elder care arrangements. The findings reveal that adult children’s immigration has not only changed their parents’ life trajectories, it has also confirmed the relevance of state borders and multi-stranded transnational connections (e.g. material, cognitive, emotional, and symbolic) to the parents’ movement into older age. I argue that in a context of transnationalism, aging can no longer be understood as solely an age-based individual experience “in place,” as it includes dynamic processes that are simultaneously shaped by various familial, social, cultural, economic, and political forces across countries.


Critical gerontology views aging as a social construction that reflects the intersections of micro-processes with the macro-level forces of individual aging experiences. In the contexts of immigration and transnationalism, however, the macro-structural conditions, dynamics and experiences of aging have become further diversified and complicated. The dearth of empirical and explanatory knowledge in this area has inhibited us from comprehending aging in a changing world. Drawing on data from a study of Chinese grandparents’ experiences of transnational caregiving in Canada, this article examines the impacts of such experiences on three interconnected dimensions – spatial, temporal and cognitive – of aging. Although the practice of transnational caregiving allows skilled immigrant families to mobilize care resources outside Canada, it has not only ruptured the traditional trajectories of aging for their elderly parents, but also complicated the inequalities that they have to bear on individual, familial and transnational levels. I argue that the critical examination of aging in the context of transnational caregiving helps us take into consideration those dimensions (such as place, space, time, and knowledge) that are changed by immigration processes, and rethink aging from a broader perspective that links seniors’ experiences with their relationship with their adult immigrant children’s families and macro-structures outside national borders.