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China's One-Child Policy and Multiple Caregiving: Raising Little Suns in Xiamen (Routledge Contemporary China)

Esther Goh

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This book explores the effects of China’s one child policy on modern Chinese families. It is widely thought that such a policy has contributed to the creation of a generation of little emperors or little suns spoiled by their parents and by the grandparents who have been recruited to care for the child while the middle generation goes off to work. Investigating what life is really like with three generations in close quarters and using urban Xiamen as a backdrop, the author shows how viewing the grandparents and parents as engaged in an intergenerational parenting coalition allows for a more dynamic understanding of both the pleasures and conflicts within adult relationships, particularly when they are centred around raising a child.

Based on both survey data and ethnographic fieldwork, the book also makes it clear that parenting is only half the story. The children, of course, are the other. Moreover, these children not only have agency, but constantly put it to work as a way to displace the burden of expectations and steady attention that comes with being an only child in contemporary urban China. These ‘lone tacticians’, as Goh calls them, are not having an easy time and not all are living like spoiled children. The reality is far more challenging for all three generations.

The book will be of interest to those in family studies, education, psychology, sociology, Asian Studies, and social work.

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