

overlooked are the motivations of doctors and patrons. Although assumed to be disinterestedly benevolent, the home's medical personnel enhanced their professional reputations by serving a prestigious charity and, along with lay benefactors from the middle classes, accrued social status from socialising occasionally with the royalty and aristocrats that graced the institution with their patronage. Philanthropy delivered concrete rewards. Gordon Cook is to be commended for identifying the British Home and the incurables movement as a Cinderella of historical enquiry. It is to be hoped that historians will not only use his antiquarian work as a secondary source but also return to the archive that he has brought to our attention.

Swansea University, UK

ANNE BORSAY

doi:10.1017/S0144686X0600585X

Peggy Teo, Kalyani Mehta, Leng Leng Thang and Angelique Chan,
Ageing in Singapore: Service Needs and the State, Routledge, London, 2006,
192 pp., hbk £65.00, ISBN 9780415374873.

Ageing in Singapore fills a considerable gap in the growing literature on ageing in Asian societies by bringing together evidence on a broad range of services for older people and on the ways in which these services are negotiated. The book elucidates the ways in which dominant ideologies concerning Asian family values, communitarianism, individual responsibility and national economic competitiveness are exploited by the Singaporean state to limit its role in welfare provision. Rather than complying with the constructions of old age suggested by these ideologies, older people are portrayed as contesting and reshaping them the better to reflect their own needs and priorities. Two introductory chapters set out the theoretical and methodological approaches and overview the demography of ageing in Singapore. They are followed by a fascinating chapter on the welfare regime and its history. Singapore has its roots in a multi-ethnic migrant society in which many people lacked extended family support. This set the stage for civil society engagement, for example by ethnic or religious organisations, in welfare provision. Post-independence governments have built on this, and on the supposed strength of family solidarity, to promote a 'many helping hands' approach to welfare, in which the state acts only as the last resort. In the subsequent chapters, the authors paint a detailed picture of the ways in which the Singaporean state has designed policies to harness the resources of individuals, families and communities. There are chapters on employment in old age, financial resources, health care, social care, housing policy, child-care provided by the older generation, and widowhood.

The central pillars of formal welfare provision in Singapore are compulsory savings schemes for old age and medical care. Most are woefully inadequate, partly because savings can be used for house purchases, and partly because the current cohorts of older people have been unable to pay sufficient contributions. The state has responded to these shortcomings not by providing money to individuals directly, but by giving adult children tax-breaks and subsidies if they care for elderly parents (or if they employ foreign maids to do so). The state also

funds and trains an impressive array of voluntary welfare organisations. Writing from a post-colonial angle that seeks to challenge the hegemony of western models, the authors clearly sympathise with the Singaporean approach to welfare provision. 'For Singapore, even though welfarism is inconceivable for the primary reason of cost, it does not mean that alternative interpretations do not exist. The Singapore-style of welfarism, 'many helping hands', is exemplary. It does not drain the country of its hard-earned wealth, yet it strives to create a compassionate society' (p. 89). Yet such statements sit uncomfortably alongside the authors' convincing catalogue of the welfare shortfalls faced by older Singaporeans and their families today. For example, they note that almost two-thirds of older women have less than US\$500 income a month, and are thus at 'extreme risk of living in poverty' (p. 70); and they comment that Singaporean health policies marginalise older people and force them to pay for most services themselves, which many are unable to do. In the face of these real gaps in welfare provision, a more critical stance would have been welcome. It is interesting that the authors never question the claim that Singapore cannot afford a welfare state. Ranking among the world's 30 richest nations, and with a per capita GDP of US\$28,000, the rejection of welfarism is clearly a political rather than purely an economic decision.

The chapter on housing is particularly absorbing, as it details Singapore's innovative policies that have promoted inter-generational co-residence and proximity. Singapore has also pioneered housing adapted to the needs of elderly people, thereby minimising the demand for residential care and engendering community integration. While these policies have resulted in unusually high levels of co-residence with adult children, the authors are quick to draw attention to the burdens on female care-givers that arise from the close association between 'home' and 'care'. The book effectively exposes the ambivalences in the negotiation of responsibility and identity. In a later chapter, the authors highlight older people's rejection of the presumption that grandparents are happy to provide child-care. At the same time, they recognise older people's desire to assist their families, and acknowledge that for many older women, helping with domestic tasks is one way in which they are able to offset their material dependence on their children.

The book draws on several data sources, including surveys of older people, widowed persons and carers; interviews with service providers; and focus group discussions. In addition, newspaper articles from *The Straits Times* are extensively cited. While the multiple methods allow the authors to unpack some of the mismatches between ideology and reality, and to highlight the diverse meanings of some statistics, the focus-group data alone are arguably insufficient to support the authors' call for a *cultural gerontology*. The portrayal of family norms and intergenerational relations, for example, is sometimes rather stereotypical and neglects ethnic heterogeneity. In part this arises from the composition of the focus groups: the 'voices' that the book articulates are predominantly those of Chinese elders, rather than Malay or Indian. This bias should perhaps have been made clearer; it is certainly unsatisfactory to caricature family support for older Malay people as 'unproblematic' (p. 100) on the basis of a single non-Malay focus-group participant. The preceding reservations notwithstanding,

the authors have produced a much needed analysis of old age and welfare provision in one of the world's most rapidly ageing societies. The book will be of great interest to researchers interested in comparative welfare regimes, ageing and social policy in Asia, critical gerontology, and the social construction of ageing.

University of Southampton, UK

ELISABETH SCHRÖDER-BUTTERFILL

doi:10.1017/S0144686X06005861

John A. Vincent, Chris R. Phillipson and Murna Downs (eds), *The Futures of Old Age*, Sage in association with the British Society of Gerontology, London, 2006, 272 pp., pbk £19.99, ISBN 1412901081.

Predictions and prognostications about the future are often heady stuff, whether they are laden with gloom or optimism about wealth, science, technology and opportunity in tomorrow's world. This book has some of that, but is not of course an *Old Moore's Almanac*. Why was it written? It is obviously important to think about and predict possible futures, perhaps mainly for three reasons: policy and public services must think ahead and prepare for future needs; the next generation of older people need all the help they can get in preparing for their futures; and researchers need to think about what to investigate now if they are to produce useful baseline data for the future. Strangely none of these aims emerges very prominently in this book. The authors are cautious and careful, and in many ways it is a parochial though often scholarly book, with relatively little taken from the prognostications or projections of scholars whose focus is something other than old age. Much of the book summarises how things are or were, with little emphasis on why we need to consider possible futures, that is, very little in the way of an address to service planners or policy makers, or even to the researchers of the future's present. The book is multi-authored, mainly by stalwarts of the British Society of Gerontology, sociologists or other social scientists. The 21 chapters are all short and the topics range widely over all the expected subjects: health, self and beliefs; family and work; housing and migration; gender and ethnicity; income and inequality. Of the 31 authors, 24 work at UK universities, six in the USA and one is an independent researcher.

Envisaging the future has to be based on trend projections, or a theoretical framework, or on logical or reasonable supposition – or perhaps pure speculation (if there is such a thing). That is why writing about the future is hugely challenging. One must use the present on which to base one's argument; so all these chapters start from a description of the current situation. If one is familiar with this material this is unnecessary (and even somewhat boring). But if one is new to the topic much more detail is needed. So this is not a book I would recommend to new students of social gerontology (they should go first to the more typical textbook). But there is an important and fascinating theme running through the chapters, about whether life in old age will be better or worse in 30 or 40 years' time. Among the authors are both optimists and pessimists. Although it is invidious to simplify their positions, Bengtson and Putney for example can be picked out as optimists: they think that 'a viable social contract between