currently intend to deal with the growing proportions of older people in their midst. What they report involves both an alphabet soup of acronyms (LTCI, SBWT, MPF, HOAA, NOAA, CSSA, CPF[1]) – thank goodness for the comprehensive List of Abbreviations (pages xii–xiii) – and a description of burgeoning lists of government promises. Promises is the operative word in most countries, since the government schemes, allowances, pensions, insurance and funds never cover more than a small portion of older people, and in some cases they are not designed to cover the current older population, but rather are savings schemes that will only be released when current workers retire. Those who are elderly today have to struggle as best they can. As we read the chapters on China, Malaysia and Thailand, what becomes clear is that many of the promising-looking schemes are currently little more than small pilot projects, more inspirational than effective.

Arguably, one of the challenges will be to assist the fit elderly to care for the unfit. After all, this is what largely happens today in many societies, and it would be a far more efficient approach than birth bonuses, or problematic intercultural labour recruitment. After all, the fit elderly know and often love their unfit partners and friends, so they already have the incentive to help. What they may need from governments are infrastructure, guidance and occasional encouragement. The studies in this volume show that none of the East Asian governments have given any thought in this direction. Perhaps this could be a practical innovation for the next decade.

NOTE

1 LTCI: Long Term Care Insurance (Japan). SBWT: *Skim Bantuan Warga Tua* (Elder Assistance Scheme, Malaysia). MPF: Mandatory Provident Fund (Hong Kong). NOAA: Normal Old Age Allowance (Hong Kong). HOAA: Higher Old Age Allowance (Hong Kong). CSSA: Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (Hong Kong). CPF: Central Provident Fund (Singapore).

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Simon Evans, *Community and Ageing: Maintaining Quality of Life in Housing with Care Settings*, Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2009, 168 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84742 070 1.

Given the evolving nature of extra-care housing and retirement villages, this book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the potential benefits of these housing-with-care settings as valued communities, together with their limitations as regards clarity of purpose, inclusiveness and sustainability. The book's chapters explore: the concept of community and its meanings to us as we age; an overview of housing-with-care settings inside and beyond the United Kingdom (UK); ways in which community is promoted and experienced in such settings; the extent to which provision supports diversity as well as its potential for

social exclusion; and possible future developments that may impact on housing-with-care settings as communities of choice.

Evans argues that a significant motivation to move to housing-with-care settings is the availability of community, which is increasingly defined by older people in terms of shared interests and identities rather than by place and neighbourhood. The evidence that older people choose such settings primarily for social reasons is rather limited, however, and may therefore be overstated by Evans. It is certainly true that a sense of community is sometimes hard to find in neighbourhoods that have become unsafe, under-resourced or inaccessible through depletion or the closure of amenities that older people rely on, such as post offices, libraries, shops, hospitals and affordable housing for their children. Evans suggests that housing-with-care provision can, to some extent and for some older people, mitigate these losses by offering facilities such as an on-site shop, restaurant, hairdresser, computer suite, gym facilities and regular health clinics, as well as support staff. Initiatives are also taking place to integrate housing-with-care schemes with their local neighbourhoods so that older residents inside and outside a scheme interact and build a mutually supportive community, but it is far from clear whether the pull of such developments will be sufficiently strong to attract future cohorts of older people to housing-with-care given the dichotomies outlined in this book.

A key strength of this book is its even-handed and realistic appraisal of contradictions that are almost built into the social fabric of housing-with-care provision in the UK. For example, Evans argues that although providers commonly market housing-with-care schemes as communities-in-waiting for a homogeneous population of older people, communities are in fact generally characterised both by the sharing of interests and identities and by experiencing difference, diversity and conflict. While it may be true that housing-with-care schemes meet older people's needs for interaction within a socially safe and purposeful framework, they are also environments where 'fit' residents can be intolerant, dismissive and excluding of those who are 'frail', impaired or who otherwise have care needs. This feature of social life can be a struggle for both residents and staff, and it is often insufficiently understood by providers of housing-with-care.

One area in which housing-with-care has shortcomings that dent its community credentials is the lack of diversity among the residents. On the one hand, the development of mixed tenure and affordable housing-with-care provision, encouraged by recent government policy, is likely to result in a more socio-economically diverse population, but on the other hand, the residents are living in an age-segregated setting: a defining feature of housing-with-care provision that inevitably casts doubt on its scope for increased diversity and which may also affect its sustainability, particularly if future cohorts of civicly-active and discerning retired 'baby-boomers' opt for age-proofed mainstream services. Housing-with-care provision often promotes itself as offering a community that is balanced in respect of the abilities and support needs of residents. For those residents with higher care needs, as well as those with few social contacts, their relationship with individual members of staff can make a significant contribution to quality of life. Evans emphasises that the care regimes in these housing settings need to be flexible enough to provide staff with the time to engage socially with

such tenants and to sustain meaningful relationships. He is right in this context to raise a concern that task-centred care and allied charging systems could undermine such relationships, raising further questions about the efficacy of housing-with-care in regard to sustainable, balanced communities.

This book will be of use to social care practitioners, housing providers and researchers, as well as to social policy makers and academics. It provides further impetus to inform ourselves more closely about daily life in housing-with-care settings. This is especially true with regard to the meanings attributed by residents to their 'community' and their views on the maintenance of esteem and social motivation in the age-segregated environment, as well as their expectations and preferences in regard to a scheme's social life, given individual lifestyles and previous patterns of valued social interaction. Evans reminds us that whether or not housing-with-care settings can be accurately referred to as communities, older people's experiences of living in close proximity with each other, and the dynamics involved, have implications for quality of life and emotional wellbeing that merit as much consideration as the provision of physical care and on-site facilities.

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Pat Chambers, Graham Allan, Chris Phillipson and Mo Ray, *Family Practices in Later Life*, The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2009, 136 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84742 052 7.

In the Preface of this book, the authors describe how it was conceived while walking towards the Rose Garden at the University of British Columbia that overlooks the Pacific Ocean. The poetry in this opening statement touches the heart of a reader like myself, and includes me in the very experience of becoming open to new ideas when walking in a rose garden, or elsewhere: more likely to happen then than when sitting crunched over the computer. The book begins with the observation that the idea of a stable, highly structured family cycle is no longer viable as an organising framework for understanding the dynamics of people's family lives. From this premise, it is argued that modern families and family lives are of many kinds, with diversity and change as key characteristics, leaving considerable room for 'doing family' in different ways, even in later life. Norms no longer prescribe family practices in detail, but rather suggest how people should organise their lives and relationships. According to the authors, these developments represent 'a shift between structure and agency in family matters' (p. 3); I would add, maybe to the extent that agency has become an integrated part of the structure itself. The structure and agency issue runs through the whole book and is treated theoretically and empirically, with a generous number of narrative illustrations. Still, for me, the striking thing is how resilient 'the family' has remained, possibly because structural flexibility and mechanisms for earlier deviant forms to become absorbed and redefined have enabled the development of an expanded standard. I would have welcomed a further exploration of the agency–structure issue along this line. The concept 'family