

which plural medical systems emerge; how the Vietnamese have incorporated and transformed values and practices from elsewhere for their own benefit; and early examples of how Vietnamese women's personal private reproductive lives became of concern to the state. *Childbirth, Maternity, and Medical Pluralism in French Colonial Vietnam, 1880–1945* provides valuable historical antecedents to contemporary discussions on Vietnamese motherhood and the state's concern with 'quality children'. Thuy Linh Nguyen's work provides a cautionary lesson for contemporary health care practitioners and administrators working in different cultural and geographic contexts. French colonial 'civilising' efforts, accompanied by attitudes of superiority and a failure to understand the importance of indigenous beliefs about the body, mirror contemporary global health care efforts designed to change values and behaviours so that they align with western biomedical practices. We would be well advised to heed these lessons from the past.

Harriet M. Phinney
Seattle University, USA

doi:10.1017/mdh.2018.16

Hyung Wook Park, *Old Age, New Science: Gerontologists and Their Biosocial Visions, 1900–60* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), pp. viii, +342, \$49.95, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-8229-4449-2.

Old Age, New Science traces the emergence and growth of the multidisciplinary scientific field around old age and ageing. Focusing on the ageing process of humans as living organisms, Hyung Wook Park's book is the outcome of deep research into the history of the study of ageing by life scientists. It is a well-documented narrative and a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of the beginnings of the biological study of ageing and the strong interrelationship with social and clinical fields.

Park explores the early years of this new science in the American (mostly) and the British contexts. More specifically, the book delves into how this kind of research work emerged, how it developed in different ways in these two contexts, and became by the mid-twentieth century a well-established scientific field with multidisciplinary identity, and an existence beyond those local considerations (as the foundation of the related international scientific association clearly demonstrates).

Old Age, New Science extends over six chapters, giving an account of the developments of the field in its various dimensions, including research activities (their organisation and the questions related to the need for funding), science training, and the societal scope. Park's analysis starts in the early twentieth century by looking at the increased awareness of the problems of old age (and the process of ageing) related to the then observed boost in human life span, the result of a better control of infectious diseases. The analysis tracks the course of the scientific approach to biological ageing throughout the following decades until 1960. The narrative is centred on the main topics that were addressed by researchers and on the contribution of a series of key actors. Although following a chronological order, as the author stresses in the introductory section of the book, the structure of the text is not rigidly determined by time.

Briefly, in Chapter 1 Park presents the early years and stresses, the idea of the connection between experimental and social domains as a feature of the emergence of the scientific approach to biological ageing in the United States. Ageing was then conceived as a localised phenomenon within the organism, occurring throughout the life span, and in this sense the idea of exploring the phenomenon at the cellular level was pursued by a number

of researchers. The function of aged cells in the body provided inspiration to think about questions of old age and society, Park argues.

Chapter 2 further develops the idea of the role of gerontologists' biosocial visions (to use the author's term). It explores in particular the work by the cytologist Edmund Vincent Cowdry in fostering a community of researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds, all involved in research on the problem of ageing. Park examines closely Cowdry's effort to organise the ideas of gerontology in the book he edited on the subject, *Problems of Ageing: Biological and Medical Aspects*, and which was published in 1939. Including contributions from the social sciences and philosophy, the publication well illustrates the multidisciplinary nature of the concern with ageing. Cowdry's role in promoting collaborations and dialogue between researchers working on ageing extended to other initiatives also deserving the author's close attention.

How the new science of ageing was intertwined with American society is the focus of Chapter 3, presenting and discussing the role of organisations such as the Club for Research on Ageing, other groups formed by elderly individuals or even the integration of lay members in the Gerontological Society.

Chapter 4 presents the biosocial research program put in practice in the 1940s by Clive Maine McCay, professor of animal husbandry. In this program, the idea of the preparation of the body for old age was central and discussed in both in specialised and lay environments.

The British context is explored in Chapter 5. The focus of the account is mainly comparative and illustrates important differences with regards to the developments of the research field in the United States. Park refers to the British collective view of the problems related to old age and the American individualistic notion as underlying those contrasts.

Back to the American context, Chapter 6 looks at the role of the National Institutes of Health through financial support of both intramural and extramural research on ageing, and examines in particular the contribution of Nathan W. Shock in shaping the medical and biological study of ageing.

The above descriptions of the book chapters are clearly abbreviated and incomplete. Park's *Old Age, New Science* is a thoughtful study of the dynamics of the field, conveys detailed information and is worth reading. A final note is due to refer the well-delineated epilogue section reflecting on the early gerontologists' legacy to a society of increasing complexity with regards to growing old.

In sum, *Old Age, New Science: Gerontologists and Their Biosocial Visions, 1900–60* is an extremely valuable contribution to the studies of knowledge on ageing, adding crucial insights into how the problem was framed as multidisciplinary scientific research field. The book is an essential contribution to both the history of biology and the history of medicine, by bringing the dynamics of the study of ageing to the centre of historical concern. It will be of great interest to scholars in the history, philosophy and social studies of biology and medicine. But life scientists will also appreciate it. In a time when there is a call for multidisciplinary efforts in research, when the societal dimensions of research are to be considered and acknowledged from the beginning of the process, it may be crucial to look at the history of the dynamics of this field and see a concrete example of disciplinary crossings, and of science and society's mutual influence, even though the science–society dialogue would be framed differently today.

Maria Strecht Almeida

Abel Salazar Biomedical Sciences Institute, University of Porto, Portugal