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Belinda Yuen  
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# Arts and Culture for Older People in Singapore: An Annotated Bibliography



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# Arts and Culture for Older People in Singapore: An Annotated Bibliography

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# Foreword

We all understand intuitively that exposure to the arts is good for one and participation is even better. Today, there is no industrializing country or global city that does not allocate budget to the development of the arts for the society. Decision-makers are beginning to understand that investing in the arts creates a ripple effect.

There is clearly a link between the appreciation of the arts and the development of the mind and imagination, and we must start with the young. The growth of the knowledge and creative industries is helped by the proximity of the arts. And now, experts the world over are extolling the benefits of creative endeavours such as storytelling, dancing, drawing, painting or walking through a gallery or museum, on people who are facing the challenges of growing older. That is why understanding the contributions of arts and culture to the study of managing and coping with ageing should be a key priority.

By 2030, one out of four Singaporeans will be aged 65 and over. The Singapore government has taken great strides to look into providing healthy and gracious ageing. Working with the arts community, it has rolled out many programmes for the older population and has started to look at the arts as therapy for those with dementia.

In the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, we are fortunate that the Lee Li Ming Programme on Ageing Urbanism enables us to take up this focus. Dr. Belinda Yuen and Penny Kong have produced a useful annotated bibliography on *Arts and Culture for Older People in Singapore*, which we hope will be useful for those wishing to carry out research on this topic.

Singapore

Heng Chee Chan  
Ambassador-at-Large and Chairman, Lee Kuan Yew  
Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of  
Technology and Design

# Preface

A growing body of evidence advocates the use of arts and culture to enhance quality of life and well-being of older persons. This annotated bibliography on *Arts and Culture for Older People in Singapore* is an attempt to consolidate these myriad studies into a single resource for anyone interested in the nature and extent of research conducted on the arts and ageing.

Singapore, as many other countries, has embraced arts and culture as an integral part of its urban development. On population ageing, as early as the 1980s, the government has begun to formulate the policy framework and various programmes to address the needs of an ageing population. Yet, elderly arts development has largely remained on the fringe until recently. Chapter 1: State of Arts and Culture Participation in Singapore begins the annotated bibliography with an overview of the state of policy, practice and research on the arts and ageing in Singapore. Chapter 2: The Annotated Bibliography offers a brief review of some of the available publications on arts and older people in Singapore including grey literature. The remaining bibliography scans the global literature—Asia-Pacific, North America and Europe—and is arranged by region and chronological order.

This desktop literature review has been conducted as part of our study on *Visual Art Participation and Ageing in Singapore* (<https://lkycic.sutd.edu.sg/research/ageing-urbanism/>) undertaken under the Lee Li Ming Programme in Ageing Urbanism at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design. We hope that sharing this annotated bibliography, thorough but not exhaustive, can serve as a helpful reference and will contribute to further discourse on the arts and older people—why arts and culture matter in an ageing society and in cities.

Singapore

Belinda Yuen  
Penny Kong

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This volume draws on research undertaken under the Lee Li Ming Programme in Ageing Urbanism at the Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities, Singapore University of Technology and Design. We are deeply grateful to Mrs. Lee Li Ming for funding our ageing urbanism research.



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# Chapter 1

## State of Arts and Culture Participation in Singapore

### Policy, Practice and Research

#### 1.1 Introduction

By 2030, one in five Singaporeans will be aged 65 and over.<sup>1</sup> Longer life expectancies, coupled with better health and rising education levels, have led to the emergence of the Third Age—a time when older adults experience changes in their career and family responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> This is the span of time after the cessation of paid work or family-rearing responsibilities and before the onset of age-imposed physical, emotional and cognitive limitations—the “golden years”, roughly between 65 and 80+ years old. At the individual level, this time of life may last a few years or decades, depending on health conditions. Regardless, this later life offers opportunities and possibilities for unlive potentials like self-fulfilment, purposeful engagement, lifestyle choices, and leisure and recreation pursuits.

Recent research indicates that the creativity of older adults can flourish in later life.<sup>3</sup> Arts and cultural activities are often a common option. Arts and cultural activities combine leisure, entertainment, skill-building and social interaction. These activities are able to transcend individual limitations such as illiteracy and differing levels of cognitive, intellectual and physical abilities.

When incorporated into the regular schedules of an older person, they have been shown to offer a host of benefits related to physical and mental wellbeing. These include a sense of purpose and meaning in individual lives, opportunities for social interaction and self-expression, and reduced fall risk, depression and anxiety.<sup>4</sup> Agitated behaviours, traditionally managed with anti-psychotic medications or physical restraints, have been successfully minimized using arts therapies instead.<sup>5</sup> Research has shown that early implementation of art and other creative modalities

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<sup>1</sup>Committee on Ageing Issues (2006).

<sup>2</sup>Laslett (1991).

<sup>3</sup>Noice et al. (2014).

<sup>4</sup>Choi and Jeon (2013); Johnson (1986); Short (1995); Li et al. (2001); Rawtaer et al. (2015).

<sup>5</sup>Sung et al. (2006); Svansdottir and Snaedal (2006).

can help to prevent age-related degenerative diseases and mitigate the strain on healthcare systems, social services and housing in ageing societies.<sup>6</sup>

There has been an emerging trend of incorporating the arts and culture as a creative approach to active ageing. The range of scales at which these activities can be implemented offers a valuable versatility to agencies and organisations looking to develop new programmes geared towards people in their golden years. This Chapter examines the current state of policy, practice and research in Singapore on ageing and the arts, tracing the growth of aged care as it matures to provide a more comprehensive mind-body approach, not just meeting physiological needs.

## 1.2 Policy for an Ageing Society

Population ageing has consistently been on the agenda of the Singapore government since the first Committee on the Problems of the Aged was convened in June 1982. The Committee was tasked to study the problems and consequences of a growing population segment aged 60 and above. It published its report in 1984, covering five broad themes related to ageing population.<sup>7</sup> Key objectives included addressing the concern with negative perceptions of ageing, reinforcing the traditional family structure, and transforming workplaces to promote employment opportunities for older adults.

The government's position on population ageing issues was gradually refined through the publication of master plans and reports by several ministerial/advisory committees including:

- Committee on the Problems of the Aged, 1984;
- Advisory Council on the Aged, 1988;
- Inter-Ministerial Committee on Healthcare for the Elderly, 1997;
- Inter-Ministerial Committee on the Ageing Population, 1999;
- Services Review Committee, 1999;
- Committee on Ageing Issues, 2006; and
- Ministerial Committee on Ageing, 2016.

Several waves of government entities are identifiable. In the 1980s, the inaugural committee came under the sole purview of the Ministry of Health (MOH). In the 1990s, this responsibility was extended to statesmen from ministries concerned with community and social development. These became the lead ministries for older population matters. Each committee built upon the work of the last, fine-tuning policies and directions with input from inter-sectoral advisors and public feedback.

Committees since 1997 have combined the efforts of various ministries, reflecting a more holistic approach towards population ageing that goes beyond a

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<sup>6</sup>Cohen et al. (2002); Laukka (2006); Leung et al. (2010); Kwok et al. (2011).

<sup>7</sup>Committee on the Problems of the Aged (1984).

health-centric view to also encompass urban planning, environment and socio-cultural services. In all, the onus is on the individual to mitigate the risk of chronic disease through healthy lifestyles and active ageing. Such emphasis on personal responsibility aims to reduce the dependency on the state and minimise the strain on healthcare resources. In the current era, ageing in place has been identified as a key policy in this bottom-up process towards active ageing.

To enable ageing in place—“growing old in the home, community and environment that one is familiar with, with minimal change or disruption to one’s lives and activities”<sup>8</sup>—the government embeds the family as the cornerstone and primary form of eldercare. Community-organised activities maintain seniors’ participation and engagement with society. Continued employment, whether full-time or part-time, is mooted as a way to keep the older adult physically and mentally active while providing a steady source of income. These are seen as tools to promote positive self-image and independent mindsets. In the same vein, volunteerism has been championed as a way to occupy and engage older adults while tapping into their experience and talents.

*Committee on the Problems of the Aged, 1984* The Committee (1982–84) 1984 Report recommended that national policy should focus on continued employment, financial independence and family support to sustain older adults in their later years.<sup>9</sup> With increasing life expectancies, the Committee recognised the need for older adults to remain socially and mentally engaged to maintain a healthy ageing population. Central to this would be organised community activities to engage and keep older people involved in society, and voluntary organisations to provide supplementary support to their families.

Provisions were made to include institutional care homes for older persons. These homes were specifically restricted to the aged sick and destitute. That is, the focus was towards ensuring that the individual “retain his normal living arrangements for as long as possible”,<sup>10</sup> and avoiding the early/premature onset of institutional care. Ageing in place was emphasised. The support infrastructure included day care centres. These centres were expected to provide domiciliary services. This is a far cry from the rich variety of leisure activities and services they provide today.

The Report acknowledged the relationship between wellbeing (mental and physical) and active ageing, and went on to highlight the importance of creating the conditions and opportunities for older people to have regular physical activity, social relations and participation in meaningful activities. While arts and culture were not specifically mentioned, paragraph 4.2.7 recommended:

Systematic recreational programmes and activities, geared to the expressed needs and interests of elderly persons, should be organised by community centres and other voluntary and religious groups.

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<sup>8</sup>Committee on Ageing Issues, op cit, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup>Committee on the Problems of the Aged, op cit.

<sup>10</sup>Committee on the Problems of the Aged, op cit, p. 17.