



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Location choice of Chinese urban fringe residents on employment, housing, and urban services: A case study of Nanjing



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Abstract

Urban fringe area is the most important space for city development. It includes several complicated elements, such as population, space, and management organization. On the basis of local population attributes in the city fringe area combined with people's movement characteristics in time and space, this article reclassifies basic public service facilities and discusses the relationship between facility layout and housing, employment, and commuter transportation. Through a questionnaire survey in Qiaobei District of the urban fringe area in Nanjing and on the basis of comparative analysis, we discuss the impact factor on the choice of housing, urban services, and the tolerance of commuting time. Our findings indicate mutual promoting and restricting connections among living, employment, and services. Workers' living situation determines their daily behavior, such as dining, shopping, and entertainment. Furthermore, different income levels have a great influence on residents' choices with regard to places to live and develop their careers.

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1. Introduction

Triggered by the unprecedented growth in urban populations and economies, Chinese cities have been rapidly

expanding since the 1980s. As the main driving forces, local governments have great incentives for urban expansion because city revenue can be supplemented by the sales of rural lands appropriated in urban peripheral areas (Zhang, 2000). As a result, virtually all Chinese cities, especially large cities, have entered the fast track of urbanization and sprawl. From 2007 to 2011, urban buildup areas increased by 13.7% in Nanjing, 20.2% in Hangzhou, and 26.9% in Guangzhou (China State Statistical Bureau, 2012). While

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the speed of development is astonishing, concerns have been raised with regard to the quality of development and the provision of public services and facilities in these fast-changing urban fringe areas (Pan et al., 2009).

In China, urban fringe is usually viewed as areas loaded with conflicts of interest not only because they accommodate people with a variety of social-demographic backgrounds but also because most conflicts that arise from the urban planning and development process occur in these areas. For example, urban fringes are usually severely afflicted by demolition and relocation. Conflicting land uses, such as residential and industrial, can often be seen positioned next to each other in urban fringes because of improper planning decisions. Most urban fringe land is sold to real estate developers. Therefore, tomorrow's urban fringe landscape is, to a large degree, dependent on the decisions of these developers, whose primary goal is profit maximization. As a result, more sustainable plans, such as transit-oriented mixed-use plans, are set aside in favor of large residential superblocks, and public services and necessary urban facilities are shortchanged in the process of development (Peng and Zhu, 2007).

The sustainable growth of newly developed urban areas relies on retaining and attracting people and establishments. Cities can sustain further growth and expansion only when the needs of urban fringe residents are addressed by municipal governments and developers. This paper presents an effort to understand the status and needs of the residents who live in urban fringe areas on the basis of their daily activities, location choices, and use of urban services and facilities. With the use of data collected from a survey in the new Qiaobei district of the city of Nanjing, we investigate the factors that influence the daily lives and location choices of various subgroups of residents who live or work in the urban fringe.

2. Related work

Over the past few decades, sustained interest has been focused on investigating the relationships between urban growth and public service provision. Research is generally focused on whether the cost effectiveness of urban services can be sustained in low-density, discontinued urban sprawl (Nelson and Duncan, 1995; Hortas-Rico and Solé-Ollé, 2010). Most research have focused on cities in Western countries. Therefore, existing research may have limited implications for Chinese cities because of differences in socio-political contexts and growth patterns. In addition, less attention has been drawn to the lives or the challenges faced by people who are living or working in newly developed areas.

As a result of rapid urban expansion, city fringe areas have become an important part of city space in China. An investigation into residents' living, employment and service in this region not only further deepens the research about urban space but also improves the supply method of public service facilities.

Given the abovementioned reasons, we first reviewed the previous research efforts on three topics of interest: urban expansion of Chinese cities, the effect of urban environments on human activities, and research on urban space from the humanistic perspective.

2.1. Urban expansion of Chinese cities

As urbanization progresses, the population increases in almost all Chinese cities. Population growth in large cities usually does not increase the population density of high-density areas, but it promotes densification of less-developed areas, thereby causing expansion in the urban fringe. In particular, population densities in the most central zones frequently decline as households are displaced by the expansion of other activities, such as services and retail.

Although a lack of comprehensive public service facilities always exists in the city fringe, buyers' interest in this region seldom declines. This area gives people the opportunity to purchase housing at a relatively low price. People prefer a long daily commute rather than spend a lot of money on a house in the main city, which is more convenient.

The appearance of the city fringe is affected by the expansion of the city. Different expansion methods lead to different types of city fringes, which affect the living and working behavior of residents.

By comparing the land use/cover data in a different time period, the 1930s, Xiao et al. (2006) categorized the spatial expansion of a city into three types that correspond to three growth periods in contemporary Chinese history (normal growth type, i.e., the urban expansion caused by economic development and population growth over the past two decades).

They also discussed three types of urban expansion observed in Chinese cities: expansion along radial corridors, expansion restricted by geomorphologic factors, and areal expansion in the fringes of urbanized territory (Figure 1). The first type of expansion usually occurs in cities, such as Beijing, with a good transportation infrastructure, such as a subway network. The second type of expansion can be observed in cities such as Shenzhen and Chongqing, whose expansion is restricted by geometry and topology. The third type of expansion can be found in many medium and small cities, such as Shijiazhuang and Changsha, where daily trips mainly rely on buses or bicycles. These types of expansion are not mutually exclusive, and all may be observed in one city.

In many cities, efforts have been made to build a new part of a city or satellite cities as opposed to redeveloping the old part of a city. This type of growth relocates not only residents but also businesses, government agencies, schools, and jobs. Even if the expansion is for residential purposes, the preference for large-lot, single-family housing in U.S. cities appears to be rare. Instead, high-density, superblock types of apartments and condominiums are more common, especially in large cities.

In recent years, Nanjing, where the author lives, has been constructing a significant number of large residential districts in the urban fringe area. These districts not only house a large number of newly employed young people, but also include many resettlement housing. People who live in these new urban spaces behave quite differently from those who live in the main city.

2.2. Housing, Job, and activity choices

As stated above, urban spatial change affects travel demand by changing the spatial distribution of housing and job

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