



A gap-theoretical path model of residential satisfaction and intention to move house applied to renovated historical blocks in two Chinese cities



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ABSTRACT

Using data from eight historical blocks in two selected Chinese cities, this article presents the results of a path model, which captures both the direct and indirect relationships between social-demographics, residential satisfaction and intention to move. Using a gap theoretical framework, results of the path analysis suggest that the intention to move house is significantly and negatively affected by residential satisfaction. In turn, residential satisfaction is significantly influenced by the gap between aspired and actual housing and environmental attributes, proportional to aspiration level. Additionally, the intention to move house and the residential gap are influenced by a set of physical and social-demographical profiles. Residents who rent a house have a lower intention to move, while people living in historical blocks that are at the early renovation stage have a higher propensity to move. Among the various social demographical variables, age is found to be the most influential one, showing that older inhabitants have a lower intention to move house than younger inhabitants.

1. Introduction

First-time travellers arriving in China are often surprised about the western appearance of Chinese cities. The traditional historical blocks, which they remember from old photographs and movies, are difficult to find. The term historical block and district refer to those areas in Chinese cities, where historical or cultural buildings gather, or present the characteristics and style of a certain historical period.¹ From the 1980s onwards, several rounds of regeneration projects in most first-tier Chinese cities (i.e. mega-cities displaying strong political and economic influence within China with a high yearly GDP growth over 7%) have ruined a large percentage of these historical blocks. This regeneration coincided with the displacement of a large number of residents and a transformation of the residential environment (Yang & Wu, 1999). To both protect and develop the few remaining historical blocks, renovation became popular. Although scholars preferred to emphasize that additional proper renovations were needed for these blocks due to their terrible physical conditions and financial issues (Ruan, 2004; Wang, 2008), social problems due to the changed living environment during and after renovation cannot be neglected (Yang & Wu, 1999).

Over the past three decades, social problems caused by renovation of historical blocks in Chinese cities have become increasingly complicated. Forced relocation led by local government was identified as

the cause of occurring social problems. However, after the implementation of the Real Right Law in 2007, continuing social problems and conflicts were not only caused by forced relocation that had become much less frequent. Rather, unsatisfied housing aspirations of residents and decaying social bonding within neighbourhoods became the new major drivers of social problems. Recently, due to decreasing residential satisfaction and/or increasing housing aspirations, even without forced relocation, residents continue to move out of historical blocks, accelerating the deterioration of the social fabric and perpetuating social problems. As all these social problems are associated with relocation, and local government and residents alike contribute to these problems, mainstream planning studies of renovated Chinese historical blocks that solely blamed local government (He & Deng, 2014; Jin, 2005) at best only provide a partial understanding of residential moves from historical blocks in Chinese cities. Analysis of residential mobility from the inhabitants' perspective is needed to get a better and more balanced understanding of these residential processes. Rather than blaming administration as the only reason for residential mobility, we assume that a more complex process, in which government may trigger changes in housing supply and respond insufficiently or inappropriately to housing and neighbourhood deterioration, triggers residential mobility. As a result, residents become increasingly less satisfied with the increasing gap between their housing aspirations and the reality they

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¹ Ministry of Construction of the People's Republic of China, May 1985.

experience on a daily basis, and therefore, at some stage, develop the intention to move house and actually move house once the opportunity arises and they can afford it.

There is abundant empirical evidence across the world that residential mobility is influenced by a myriad of different factors. Clark and Onaka (1983) in their study in the USA found that housing attributes, neighbourhood characteristics and accessibility were the main reasons causing residential mobility. Additional factors that were found to be correlated with the probability of moving house include tenure (Clark & Huang, 2003; Ioannides, 1987), length of stay (Onaka & Clark, 1983) and lifecycle (Feijten & van Ham, 2007; Rabe & Taylor, 2010). Residential satisfaction was also found to influence the intention to move (Kearns & Parkes, 2003; Kwon & Beamish, 2013; Oh, 2003).

However, a limitation of the majority of these studies is that they have examined bivariate relationships between housing attributes, satisfaction, intention to move and actual movement patterns. Ignoring relevant factors may bias the results and even lead to erroneous conclusions and interpretations. Attempts to combine more of these concepts into a single, integrated analysis are still scarce. It implies that we have relatively little empirical evidence about the direct and indirect relationships between housing attributes, residential satisfaction and intention to move based on data from the same sample.

The vast majority of housing studies pertains to residential moves in non-regulated or semi-regulated housing markets that prevail under political systems that fundamentally differ from the Chinese system in general and particularly from historical blocks. Meanwhile, different from residents in other non-historical urban areas, those living in historical blocks are facing distinct constraints. On the one hand, these residents face much worse housing conditions and fewer own their houses; on the other hand, their houses are located in the centre of cities with a high cultural value, in neighbourhoods with traditionally a better social bonding. Facing both these negative and positive living conditions, residents may consider these trade-offs in considering to move house or not. The question, therefore, is whether the concepts used in the prevalent western studies and their findings can be generalised to Chinese historical blocks. This is one of the research questions that will be addressed in the present study.

Generally, the approach adopted in studies of residential mobility is to break down the problem into constituent components and study each of these separately. Hence, assuming interval properties of the satisfaction scale, ordinary linear regression analysis has been commonly used to examine the degree of residential satisfaction as a function of housing and neighbourhood characteristics, accessibility and socio-demographics, lifestyle and life trajectory (e.g., Addo, 2016; Kährlik, Leetmaa, & Tammaru, 2012; Mohit & Adel Mahfoud, 2015; Posthumus, Bolt, & van Kempen, 2014; Temelová & Dvořáková, 2012). Likewise, the decision to move house has been studied using discrete choice models. Residential choice probabilities have been investigated as a function of the same set of variables or as a function of residential satisfaction (e.g., Dane, Grigolon, Rasouli, & Timmermans, 2014). In this paper, rather than adopting this two-step, we formulate and estimate an integrated path model that allows the estimation of the direct and indirect effects between personal and household characteristics, housing and neighbourhood characteristics, residential satisfaction and the intention to move house.

Thus, this paper will systematically study how residential mobility is influenced by residential satisfaction, which is conceptualised as the gap between housing aspirations and reality, proportional to aspiration level. The aim of this paper is to analyse both the direct and indirect relationships between intention to move, residential satisfaction, residential gap and social demographics in selected Chinese historical blocks using a gap-theoretical framework. Path analysis is used to estimate the complex relationships using data collected in eight renovated historical blocks in two selected cities, Chongqing and Shanghai, in China. Findings of the study have implications for urban planners and local governments to improve the living environment in renovated

historical blocks. These implications are not only confined to the selected blocks, but may be equally relevant for other cities and countries. The particularity of these historical blocks is articulated by comparing to the finding of previous studies on residential satisfaction and mobility in other urban areas. The gap-theoretical framework can contribute to the current residential theories and be used for future residential studies.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The next section will discuss some relevant literature on residential mobility. Our conceptual model, based on the gap-theoretical framework, will be presented in the subsequent section. The section on data collection will describe where and how the data was collected. The last section will present the results of the data analysis, which is followed by a discussion of the implications of our findings for urban planning and housing policy.

2. Literature review

Finding determinants of residential mobility has been a popular topic in housing research since many decades. A plethora of studies have found evidence that the probability of moving house is significantly and negatively related to residential satisfaction (e.g., Kearns & Parkes, 2003; Kim, Woosnam, Marcouiller, & Aleshinloye, 2015; Kwon & Beamish, 2013; Oh, 2003). Authors such as Speare (1974), Landale and Guest (1985), Earhart and Weber (1996), Kwon and Beamish (2013) and Kearns and Parkes (2003) found that dissatisfaction increases the intention to move. In turn, Diaz-Serrano and Stoyanova (2010) asserted that the propensity to move is systematically but not perfectly related to actual moves. This non-perfect relationship may be explained by the fact that the wish to move may not always be realised due to a lack of resources and/or market conditions. The high transition costs and the effort involved may lead people to postpone or change their plans to move house. Another factor may be that demographic or economic factors may change an individual's or household's housing needs, implying that an existing intention to move house is not transformed into actual residential mobility.

Traditionally, the number of Chinese studies on housing satisfaction and residential mobility has been modest. Although an increasing number of Chinese studies tried to identify the determinants of residential mobility (e.g., He, 2015; Huang & Deng, 2006; Huang, Dijst, van Weesep, & Zou, 2014; Hui & Yu, 2009; Li, 2003; Wu, 2006), few scholars have examined the relationship between residential satisfaction and residential mobility. For example, using data from inner-city Beijing, Fang (2006) confirmed results of western studies, indicating that low satisfaction leads to a high moving intention. Tao, Wong, and Hui (2014), examining migrant workers living in Shenzhen, found that mobility preferences influence residential satisfaction. To the best of our knowledge, research about historical blocks has not studied this relationship yet.

The vast majority of studies assumed that residential satisfaction is a function of three dimensions: (i) housing attributes; (ii) neighbourhood characteristics, and (iii) relative location vis-à-vis various facilities. Usually, neighbourhood characteristics include a set of morphological and functional characteristics, but social composition is sometimes also included. For instance, He and Yang (2011), Huang and Du (2015) and Ren and Folmer (2016) found that community facilities exert a strong influence on residential satisfaction. Social factors such as crime and ethnical composition have also been identified as influential factors (e.g., Parkes, Kearns, & Atkinson, 2002 and Clark & Coulter, 2015). Other factors, including tenure (e.g., Hu, 2013; Huang et al., 2015; Molin & Timmermans, 2003), and age of inhabitants (e.g., Grigolon, Dane, Rasouli, & Timmermans, 2014; Waziri, Yusof, & Abd Rahim, 2014), have also been investigated as determinants of residential satisfaction. However, these research only assessed the direct effect of the influential factors on residential satisfaction. It means that such studies, implicitly or explicitly, have assumed that people with the same socio-demographic profile will derive the same satisfaction from particular

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