



Residential satisfaction of migrants in Wenzhou, an ‘ordinary city’ of China



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ABSTRACT

Residential satisfaction is one of the main topics of recent urban studies, yet most focus on a relatively small group of cities, particularly megacities. This paper uses Wenzhou, China, as a case study to deepen our understanding of residential satisfaction in an ‘ordinary city’. Based on a survey of 435 migrants and 20 in-depth interviews in Shuangyu, Wenzhou, this study finds that most migrants are dissatisfied with the current housing conditions. Migrants who live in urban villages are more dissatisfied than those who live in factory dormitories. The factors that influence migrants’ residential satisfaction in different housing types are also different. Moreover, marital status, education, income, length of residence, employment status, and housing facilities significantly affect residential satisfaction. Institutional factors and selected housing variables that are usually found to be important to residential satisfaction are not significant for migrants in Wenzhou. In contrast with other research conducted in megacities that emphasizes the importance of social attachment, we find that providing better facilities is likely the most effective way to improve residential satisfaction for migrants in Wenzhou.

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1. Introduction

Residential satisfaction is one of the main topics that concern scholars in urban studies, yet most studies cover a relatively small group of cities, including Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai (Fang, 2006; S.; Li & Song, 2009; Z.; Li & Wu, 2013; C.; Zhang & Lu, 2016). This paper follows the view of postmodernist urban studies that all cities are ‘ordinary cities’ in the sense that each is distinct in its own way, and that furthermore, the extant studies that emphasize global metropolises should take a broader perspective (Amin & Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2002, 2008; Roy, 2009). Moreover, residential satisfaction research has rarely been carried out from the perspective of migrants (Z. Li & Wu, 2013; Tao, Wong, & Hui, 2014). The process of massive migration is changing Chinese cities in unprecedented ways (Chan, 2011; Fan, 2008; Z. Li & Liu, 2011; S. Lin & Gaubatz, 2016; Ye Liu, Li, Liu, & Chen, 2014). At the end of 2015, there were 247 million temporary migrants in cities, accounting for 18 percent of China’s total population (NHFPC, 2014). Housing these migrants in the city is one of the major

concerns of the Chinese government. This paper presents a case study of Wenzhou, an ‘ordinary city’ on China’s southeast coast, to reveal migrants’ housing and living environment, to evaluate their residential satisfaction with different housing sources, and to provide suggestions to policy-makers. It emphasizes the importance of the experience of less prominent cities, which may differ from that of megacities. It also increases the knowledge of residential satisfaction by considering the special characteristics of China’s migrants.

Wenzhou is a typical case by which to examine the issue of migrant residential segregation in general and in China in particular. Among the 14 coastal cities that opened to foreign investments in 1984, and for the first time in post-reform China, Wenzhou is situated in the southwest corner of Zhejiang Province (Zhou, 1984). Wenzhou has experienced rapid development and is often taken as a model² to examine reform-era China’s rising privatization and entrepreneurship (Hu, 1987; A. P. L. Liu, 1992; Nolan & Dong, 1989;

² The Wenzhou model, along with the Sunan model and the Pearl River Delta model, was used as an economic development model at the beginning of China’s reform era. The Sunan model attributes the development of Sunan (Southern Jiangsu) to local state-directed townships and village enterprises (TVEs). The Pearl River Delta model refers to the foreign direct investment (FDI) development, due to its proximity to Hong Kong and Macau. For details, see Ye and Wei (2005).

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Wei, 2007, 2011). Economic take-off has brought Wenzhou a great number of migrants, who make up about 36 percent of Wenzhou's total population and constitute a majority in several districts (S. Lin & Gaubatz, 2015). Based on a survey of 435 migrants and 20 in-depth interviews in Wenzhou from 2012 to 2014, this paper aims to examine the residential satisfaction of migrants in Wenzhou and identify the determinants that influence their residential satisfaction. Moreover, the current research on migrants' residential satisfaction has focused mainly on the residential satisfaction of migrants who live in urban villages (Du & Li, 2010; Z.; Li & Wu, 2013). Little attention has been given to the residential satisfaction of migrants with different housing sources. This paper attempts to fill this gap by comparing the residential satisfaction of migrants who live in urban villages and migrants who live in employer-provided dormitories. By identifying different factors that may influence migrants with different types of housing, we express the idea that the residential satisfaction of migrants with different housing sources should be improved in different ways.

The remainder of this paper is structured as followings: the first part is a literature review on residential satisfaction and the current migrant housing condition in Chinese cities. The second part introduces the survey of migrant settlements in Wenzhou and summarizes the socioeconomic status, transitional characteristics, and housing characteristics of the migrants surveyed. The final part examines the residential satisfaction of migrants overall and the residential satisfaction of migrants in different housing types by running linear regression in SPSS software. It concludes by explaining the factors affecting residential satisfaction and presenting policy implications.

2. Literature review

2.1. Residential satisfaction across different contexts

Residential satisfaction is an important topic in the field of urban studies (Amérigo & Aragonés, 1990; Barreira, Agapito, Panagopoulos, & Guimarães, 2016; Dekker, de Vos, Musterd, & van Kempen, 2011; Herfert, Neugebauer, & Smigiel, 2013). Empirical studies have identified a number of important determinants that influence residential satisfaction. In general, these determinants can be grouped into three categories (Z. Li & Wu, 2013). First, the respondents' residential satisfaction may be affected by their socioeconomic status, such as their age, education, gender, marital status, race, and income. For example, respondents with higher income tend to be more satisfied with their residence (Chen, Zhang, Yang, & Yu, 2013). A second set of determinants related to residential satisfaction is housing characteristics, such as housing size, housing location, housing tenure, housing cost, and physical conditions. Positive housing characteristics, including larger size and better housing facilities, have been found to be important for improved residential satisfaction (Chen et al., 2013; Mohit, Ibrahim, & Rashid, 2010). Third, neighborhood characteristics may also affect residential satisfaction. For instance, Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson (2002) found that neighborhood factors, especially the location and condition of the neighborhood, are much more important in predicting residential dissatisfaction than socio-demographic factors.

In recent years a growing number of residential satisfaction studies have been carried out in China (Fang, 2006; Huang & Du, 2015; S. Li & Song, 2009; C.; Zhang & Lu, 2016). The methods of examining residential satisfaction can be divided into two categories. Some studies consider residential satisfaction as a criterion in evaluating residential quality (Huang & Du, 2015; Z.; Li & Wu, 2013; C.; Zhang & Lu, 2016). The aim of these studies is to find the major factors that determine the degree of residential

satisfaction, and then make suggestions to help improve residential quality. Other studies consider residential satisfaction as a predictor of behavior, finding a link between residential satisfaction and residential mobility. Examining the original residents' residential satisfaction in the redeveloped inner-city neighborhoods of Beijing, Fang (2006) suggests that low residential satisfaction does not lead to higher frequencies of relocation. By contrast, in the study of three different neighborhoods in Guangzhou, He and Qi (2014) found that residential satisfaction was an important factor influencing residents' intention to move. The above two cases indicate that different local contexts matter to the dynamic relations between residential satisfaction and intention to move.

Although the existing empirical studies on residential satisfaction in Chinese cities provide rich insights, little research has been carried out on the residential satisfaction of migrants. However, the massive ratio of rural to urban migrants plays a significant role in China's urban development (Chan, 2011; Fan, 2008; Z. Li & Liu, 2011; S. Lin & Gaubatz, 2016; Ye Liu et al., 2014). How to 'urbanize' or integrate these rural migrants into the cities has become the major goal of China's urbanization plan (according to China's National New-Type Urbanization Plan [2014–2020]). Understanding and improving the residential satisfaction of migrants is also important for realizing the national government's goal of building a 'harmonious society' (Z. Li & Wu, 2013). However, migrants, a relatively disadvantaged group, find it difficult to solve housing problems and improve residential satisfaction by themselves—their voices have rarely been heard.

Until recently, there have been very few studies on migrants' residential satisfaction in China. On the basis of a housing survey in Guangzhou, Du and Li (2010) suggested that residents' subjective perception of neighborhood quality is the most significant factor in community satisfaction, while none of the social-demographic factors are related to residential satisfaction. Z. Li and Wu (2013) examined and compared the residential satisfaction of informal settlements in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Their results showed that social attachment within the community is much more important to residential satisfaction than basic facilities or most socioeconomic attributes. Based on a survey in Shenzhen, Tao et al. (2014) examined the determinants of migrant workers' residential satisfaction. Kinship and friendship ties, mobility, family life, and housing conditions were found to be significant to residential satisfaction. One common conclusion from the above studies in global cities is that social attachment is one of the most important factors influencing residential satisfaction.

From the literature review, we find that scholarly understanding of residential satisfaction is currently based on the experiences of a relatively small group of cities, particularly well-known global metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. But little attention has been paid to smaller cities. In this paper, we follow the post-colonialism perspective of urban studies, which sees all cities as 'ordinary' (Amin & Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2002, 2005, 2008), and we attempt to contribute to the 'new geographies of theory' (Roy, 2009). As Amin and Graham (1997) put, all cities are ordinary, in the sense that each city is distinct; they also held that the extant studies, which emphasized global metropolises, needed to take a wider view. Moreover, almost none of the existing studies has examined migrants' satisfaction with various sources of housing (a notable exception being Tao et al., 2014). Most of the studies on migrants' residential satisfaction emphasize urban villages but neglect the other main type of housing—factory dormitories. Thus, through a study of migrant settlements in an ordinary city of China—Wenzhou—this paper fills the gaps mentioned above. Specifically, we aim to address the following questions: What is the overall residential satisfaction as perceived by migrants in Wenzhou? What are the determinants of migrants' overall residential

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