



Social and cultural factors that influence residential location choice of urban senior citizens in China – The case of Chengdu city



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ABSTRACT

With the graying of Chinese society increasing, elderly people who do not live with their family's younger generations has become common. Social and cultural factors have powerful psychological implications for elders in residential location choice making, with the premise of affordability. This preliminary study, is one of the first to examine systematic social and cultural factors of residential location choice, and classifies senior citizens by pre-retirement occupation. Survey data were obtained via three in-depth interviews from 2013 to 2015, and a large-scale questionnaire survey from August 15 to September 16 in 2015. Structural equation modeling results show that perception of comfort, perception of presence, and perception of convenience have marked effects, and perception of affection is not conspicuous on decision-making. Moreover, there are differences in social and cultural factors of elders according to different age periods and pre-retirement occupations. These findings highlight social and cultural demands by elders in residential location choices, and provides a basis for subsequent study on elderly dwelling location choice.

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1. Introduction

Rapid urbanization and improvement of living standards are the driving forces of behavior in purchasing a living residence (Wang & Zhang, 2014). The elderly are no exception. Housing is not only a manifestation of their own quality of life (Akihiro & Iwai, 1976), but also symbolizes social class for the country's city dwellers (Veronica Caccdac & Francis E, 2008).

According to statistical standards provided by the UN, elders over 60 years amounted to 10% of China's population, and people over 65 totaled 7% by 2010, which means that society is aging (Banister, Bloom, & Rosenberg, 2011). China became a graying society at the turn of the 21st century, and this is rapidly increasing (Dong & Ding, 2009).

Ratio of people over the age (RPOA) of 65 in China leaped from 8.87% in 2010 to 9.70% in 2013 (China's sixth census data). Old-age dependency rate (ODR) rose from 11.90% in 2010 to 13.80% in 2013 (China's sixth census data), as shown in Fig. 1. China's population will reach its peak less than two decades from now, whereby adults

older than 60 will compose nearly one third of the population (Shideed, Sibai, & Tohme, 2013), and the RPOA 65 and over will exceed 20% in the year 2050 (Dong & Ding, 2009).

Aging is expected to strongly influence the current family structure and residence status of city dwellers (Attias-Donfut, Ogg, & Wolff, 2005), especially the elderly. China is in a social and economic transformation period, in which an imperfect health care and pension system make the elderly more dependent on their families compared to in the West. However, there is a potential reduction in realization that younger generations support the old through co-residence, in aging society (Sereny, 2011). Naturally, elderly people who do not live with their family's younger generations has become common.

Since residential location choice by China's urban senior citizens is closely associated with the problem of supporting older people, it is directly related to happiness of the elderly, and to the stability and well-being of society on a larger scale. Although there are many empirical studies about the residential location choice of China's urban senior citizens (Chen, 2005; Dong & Ding, 2009; Logan & Bian, 1999; Luo, 2012; Ma & Chow, 2006; Sereny, 2011; Wang, 2013; Wang & Zhang, 2014), few have considered the influence factors, and even fewer the social and cultural factors.

Residential environment, especially social and cultural factors, have powerful psychological implications for elders when they

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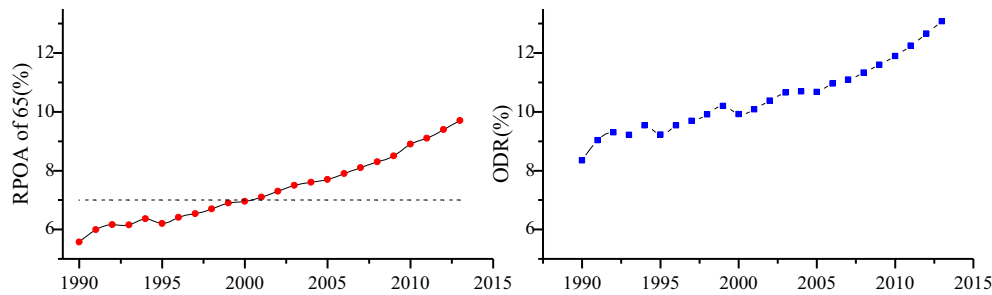


Fig. 1. Ratio of people over the age (RPOA) of 65 and old-age dependency rate (ODR) of China during 1990–2013. Note: $ODR = (\text{population aged 65 years of age or older} / \text{population of 15–64 years}) * 100\%$.

make their choice of accommodation. Nevertheless, there are surprisingly few results on systematic social and cultural factors of residential choices of the Chinese elderly with a view point on Chinese traditional culture and habits to date. The purpose of this paper is to investigate social and cultural factors of residential location choice by urban senior citizens within affordability.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section reviews the literature concerning the factors of residential location choice for urban senior citizens, with a focus on social and cultural aspects both in China and the West. In the second section, the study method is introduced, including the sample and study setting, measures, and statistical analyses. The third section discusses the results via descriptive statistics, which is followed by the discussion. The last section concludes the study.

2. Literature review

For many years under China's planned economy, urban housing depended mainly on houses in work units or danwei (Li, 2003). Given the limited availability of "commodity housing" (Li & Siu, 2001a) three decades ago, it was rare to see that individual households buying a house directly in the market (Zhang, Yan, & Lu, 1992). The market of commercial housing formed, since mid-1990s (Li, 2000; Li & Siu, 2001a; Wang & Li, 2004; Wu, 1996; Zhang et al., 1992).

Welfare allocation of housing in work units was pronounced to cessation by Zhu Rongji, the premier of China from March 1998 to March 2003, which made a reform in China's urban housing market (Jiang & Ren, 2005; Li, 2000). Thus, the houses in work units or danwei were sold to staffs or others. Since then, house purchasing by individuals became normalization, housing price increased sharply following the prosperity of the real estate market, that resulted in inflated the price-to-income ratios for commercial housing (Rosen, 1974; Sheppard, 1999; Veronica Cacadac & Francis E, 2008). In transformation period, home purchasing became the largest cost for a family of China (Huang, 2012), and symbolized social class and treasure of the family, in a potential way.

To be fair, the urban homeownership increased as unprecedented in the history of China (Wang & Li, 2002), in transitional period, meanwhile, households can now exercise more choice in housing location (Pynoos, Liebig, Alley, & Nishita, 2005), correspondingly, factors that influence residential location choice of urban citizens in China is undergoing great diversification.

Increasing factors of residential location choice were given attention, affordability was deemed as a main obstacle in home purchasing (De Leeuw, 1971; Follain & Jimenez, 1985; Huang & Clark, 2002; Huang, Haab, & Whitehead, 1997; Huang & Jiang, 2009; Lau & Li, 2006). Meanwhile, study results have confirmed the importance of housing policy (Ho & Kwong, 2002; Wang & Li, 2002).

Moreover, a number of mechanisms controlled residential location choice also, such as public service (Liu, 2010; Friedman, 1981), transportation (Prashker, Shifan, & Hershkovitch-Sarusi, 2008), neighborhood attachment (Li, Zhu, & Li, 2012), etc.

Factors of residential location choice of specific population groups were under study as well, such as low-income earners (Huang, 2012; Huang & Clark, 2002; Huang & Jiang, 2009; Kovács, 1998), migrants (Liu, Wang, & Tao, 2013), etc.

Increased significantly residential mobility was formed by residential location choice (Li & Siu, 2001b; Li & Fung, 2001), researches on residential mobility based on the life cycle became focus (Li & Donggen, 2004). With the aging of population becoming increasingly severe, residential location choice of Chinese elderly attracted researchers' eyeball.

Housing choice is a multi-dimensional exercise, having a large amount of attributes (Wang & Li, 2004). How individuals and households of urban China do housing decisions in a confined market context, which is ambiguous (Wang & Li, 2006). On the premise of affordable, people would choose more comfortable living environments as their age increases and bodily functions decrease after retirement. Once in a comfortable residential location, however, they will achieve adaptive function and higher living quality (Addae-Dapaah & Juan, 2014). Previous studies on the elderly have focused on residential satisfaction (Addae-Dapaah & Juan, 2014; Hwan, 2003; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002), and the relationship between housing of elderly people and the real estate market (Megbolugbe, Sa-Aadu, & Shilling, 1997).

Studies of the Chinese elderly in existing researches mainly concentrate on the following aspects: living arrangement (Chen, 2005; Liu et al., 2013; Ma & Chow, 2006; Sereny, 2011), intergenerational support (Dong & Ding, 2009; Logan & Bian, 1999; Luo, 2012; Tian, 2012), housing policy (Chen, Guo, & Wu, 2011), and housing market (Li et al., 2012; Wang & Zhang, 2014).

Residential location choice of older seniors in cities is influenced by aspects of their sense of comfort regarding the location (Fokkema, Gierveld, & Nijkamp, 1996; Lundholm, 2012; Smith & House, 2006), such as cultural atmosphere (Addae-Dapaah & Juan, 2014; Henke & Petropoulos, 2013; Krit, 2013), cultural activities, public security (Wu, 1996; Zhang et al., 1992; Zheng & Ge, 2008; Zhu, Breitung, & Li, 2012), and reputation (Chevan, 1982; Evans, Kantrowitz, & Eshelman, 2002; Golant & LaGreca, 1994; Groves & Wilson, 2010; Hartman, Horovitz, & Herman, 1976; Hogan, Steinnes, Hogan, & Steinnes, 1993).

Chinese elders prefer to live near their families (Logan & Bian, 1999; Sereny, 2011), so affection is an important influence on elders' living location choice; thus, distance from parents or children is one focus of existing literature (Chen, 2005; Islam, 1985; Pernia, 1985; Wang & Zhang, 2014).

Perception of presence makes it easier to live independently; thus, living location choice is necessary. Distance from friends/

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