



Review article

Evaluating the life satisfaction of peasants in concentrated residential areas of Nanjing, China: A fuzzy approach

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ABSTRACT

Centralized peasant residence (CPR) is a typical phenomenon in rapid urbanization. The majority of farmers passively change their living and residential styles. The phenomenon has aroused wide concern because it reflects the peasants' life satisfaction and determines their well-being. In this paper, resident satisfaction is evaluated based on six typical CPRs in Nanjing using a fuzzy approach. Results indicate that residents in rural residential areas are satisfied with their social life and location. However, they have a relatively lower satisfaction with their economic situation and community facilities. Nearly 57.5% of respondents are concerned more about their employment and economic situations and less about community life and housing conditions. Considering the life satisfaction priority from four dimensions, improving the life satisfaction priority of rural-concentrated residential areas is suggested. We propose that the CPR location should be increasingly emphasized, and the best approach for ensuring satisfied people in CPRs is simultaneously improving their living condition, job accessibility, and public service. Furthermore, increased attention should be given to jobs, commute time, and cost of living. Rural communities should be surrounded by a new industrial park to realize employment and live integration.

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1. Introduction

Rural China has been experiencing rapid urbanization and rural-to-urban migration; hence, the phenomena of rural depopulation,¹ land fragmentation,² and hollow village have received worldwide attention (Long, Li, Liu, Woods, & Zou, 2012; Tan, Heerink, Kruseman, & Qu, 2008; Tan, Heerink, & Qu, 2006; Tin Nguyen & Findlay, 1996). Despite the Chinese government's emphasis on building small towns and villages in China (*xinmongcunjianshe*), large cities and metropolitan regions have increasingly become the primary driver of urbanization in recent years (Fahmi, Hudalah, Rahayu, & Woltjer, 2014; Lin, 1993; Liu & Lin, 2014; Liu et al., 2015b). The complex pluralistic model of Chinese urbanization has determined its complex nature and characteristics (Ma, 1994; Liu, Liu, & Qi, 2015a; Liu et al., 2015b; Sun & Fan, 2008).

The ongoing rural transformation process in China is hybrid and contested; at the same time, it has been strongly shaped by national macroeconomic development strategies. However, until recently, the majority of studies on rural transformation have focused on its land use efficiency, infrastructure construction, and service facility of rural areas (Chen, Ye, Cai, Xing, & Chen, 2014; Chen, 2014; Lin & Ho, 2003; Long, Heilig, Li, & Zhang, 2007; Xiao et al., 2006). Rural residential areas in China are typically referred to in existing studies as the traditional scattered villages (Leaf, 2002; Wang, Zhang, & Cheong, 2014; Zheng, Long, Fan, & Gu, 2009). However, centralized peasant residences (CPRs) are entirely different from the traditional scattered villages. In CPRs, scattered rural settlements are concentrated in the new rural communities through certain measures to let the people live a life similar to that of urban residents (Ji-hong, 2007; Long et al., 2012; Wang, Liu, Li, & Li, 2016; Yansui, 2007). The aim is to ensure the convenience of farmers in terms of going to work and using public facilities, in addition to addressing the problems of land fragmentation and sustaining rural development. Since 2001, peasants have primarily centralized in Suzhou, Wuxi, and other cities in Jiangsu Province. Eventually, the peasants' centralized residence has been gradually carried out in Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Shandong, Sichuan, and other provinces. Existing studies on CPR in China have examined and summarized the means of realizing village concentration and land potential (Huang, Li, Chen, & Li, 2010; Jun-ming, 2009; Long et al., 2007; Long, Liu, Wu, & Dong, 2009), explored the economic, socio-cultural, institutional–managerial, and environmental factors underlying rural depopulation and housing modernization (Li, 2013; Li, Liu, Long, Cui, & Li, 2014; Long et al., 2012), and evaluated the effects on CPR ranging from farmland protection and rural reconstruction to village agglomeration (Li, 2013; Xu, Jiang, Cao, Li, & Deng, 2013; Xu, Tang, Chan, 2011). These studies have particularly examined CPR as a research object.

Nevertheless, rural depopulation and rural-to-urban migration have occurred not only in “hollow villages” but also in CPRs in China. Moreover, the actual needs and self-satisfaction of peasants in CPRs should be considered while taking into account the central village integration type and evaluation system. For these reasons, CPR in rural China cannot be understood adequately without scientifically investigating the peasants' actual needs and human-oriented standards.

Life satisfaction has been an intense topic in the literature on the

evaluation index across communities and regions at the national, regional, city, and neighborhood scales. The dominant role played by the city and community in promoting life satisfaction and quality has been reported in numerous studies (Chen, Zhang, Yang, & Yu, 2013; Huang & Du, 2015; Tao, Wong, & Hui, 2014). The existing literature has scarcely examined the satisfaction of peasants. Life satisfaction directly reflects the peasants' quality of life and determines their well-being. In western countries, scholars have argued that stakeholder opinion should be increasingly considered. In particular, community-based rural residential land consolidation can help revitalize hollow villages (Liu & Lin, 2014; Liseč, Primožič, Ferlan, Šumrada, & Drobne, 2014; Thapa & Niroula, 2008). Therefore, life satisfaction is an effective tool for promoting public participation and influencing public policy (Chen et al., 2013; Huang & Du, 2015; Tao et al., 2014). However, a number of local governments have been attempting to construct CPRs to improve rural settlement development as the rural population continues to decline during the rapid urbanization in China. The effects of these policies and the relationship between the life satisfactory of peasants and the policy design of CPR in China require a systematic assessment.

In addition to CPR expansion, land consolidation³ and the “increasing versus decreasing balance”⁴ of peasant's cultivated land in China have also received considerable scholarly and political attention in recent years. CPR has often been closely connected with land consolidation by policy makers, planners, and scholars. Land consolidation is an essential tool for improving the effectiveness of land cultivation and supporting rural development (Pašakarnis & Maliene, 2010; Pašakarnis, Morley, & Malienė, 2013; Sklenicka, 2006; Thapa & Niroula, 2008; Zhang, Wang, Li, & Ye, 2014a, Zhang, Zhao, & Gu, 2014b) China rural land, which comprises state-owned land and village collective land, is faced with fragmentation and dual-track land use legislation; hence, the rapid urbanization process requires additional lands in cities, and achieving a balance between urban and rural land signifies a key issue in this process. The Chinese government has published a policy of “increasing versus decreasing balance” to promote land conservation, optimize supporting facilities, and improve rural residential environment. CPR is an innovation under the umbrella of this policy. More importantly, it can address the problems of land fragmentation and sustain rural development. However, the analysis of peasants' life satisfaction and effectiveness of CPR policy remains limited until now. The core of CPR policy may be attributed to China's incomplete land reform and the ambiguity of house-site property rights. With the concentration process, several experts on rural issues point out that the effect of CPR has obvious disadvantages in arbitrary site selection, such as inadequate rural public service facilities, employment problem, disregard for livelihood resources and living willingness according to the pattern of urban community construction, and deficient communication with peasants during the planning and construction processes (Dandong & Chen, 2010; Yansui, 2007). CPR also triggers the aggregation of

¹ Rural depopulation indicates that rural-to-urban migration reduces population in rural areas, which diminishes farming activities, thereby triggering food insecurity. Young people leave the farm, and the remaining population is older.

² Land fragmentation primarily affects the agriculture sector. When state farmlands were distributed according to equity principles, the parcels that farmers received were either extremely small or were badly shaped, thereby inducing difficulty in utilizing machinery and appropriate technologies.

³ Land consolidation is the most favorable land management approach for solving land fragmentation. The classical form involves changing land tenure structure and providing the necessary infrastructure for efficient agricultural development. In the 1960s, the conceptual expansion led to increased modern consolidation with multiple goals (Demetriou, Stillwell, See (2012), Land consolidation in Cyprus: Why is an Integrated Planning and Decision Support System required?, Land Use Policy, 29, 131–142, van Dijk and Beunen (2009), Laws, People and Land Use: A Sociological Perspective on the Relation Between Laws and Land Use, European Planning Studies, 17, 1797–1815.

⁴ This policy aims to achieve equilibrium in the land supply in China by balancing increases in rural construction land with decreases in rural construction land by at least the same scale.

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