

Housing, Aged Care and Migration: The Housing Careers of Older Chinese Migrants and its Implications

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Abstract

This paper builds on the Confucian concept of filial piety to explore housing experiences of older Chinese migrants who move to New Zealand in their later life. In the Chinese culture, filial piety refers to the traditions of respect, reverence, care, obedience, and fulfilling duty to one's parents. Traditionally, co-residence with one's parents has been paramount in practicing filial piety. Family members are expected to reside under the same roof, and adult children have obligations to share resources and look after aged parents. Using the concept of housing career which is concerned with the succession of dwellings occupied by individuals over their lives, this paper focuses on the homeownership of older Chinese migrants and their housing trajectories by investigating their living arrangements. Participants include 32 older Chinese migrants who took part in three interviews between April 2008 and September 2009. Results reveal that the participants owned their homes in China before they migrated to New Zealand. None of the participants however acquired homeownerships in New Zealand after migration, although a majority of them still retained their homeownerships in China. The findings also reveal that older Chinese migrants' housing trajectories moved from parent-adult children co-residence towards filial piety at a distance where children practiced filial piety and offered support to their ageing parents at a distance instead of co-residence. For older Chinese migrants, housing career is a process through which they tackle challenges and adapt changes, caused by migration and ageing. The findings suggest that there is a need for policy makers and service providers to understand the housing career of older Chinese migrants through the perspective of transnationalism and to place more attention to interpreting the issues of migrant housing and aged care through the cultural lenses of those concerned.

Methods

- Three semi-structured interviews were conducted between April 2008 and September 2009.
- A total of 32 participants, 18 females and 14 males, ranging in age from 62 to 77 years ($M=69.8$, $SD=4.05$) participated in the present research.
- Data collection techniques included episodic interview, go-along interview and *fangtan* (an indigenous Chinese interview method).
- Interviews were digitally recorded and were transcribed in Chinese.
- Preliminary data analysis was processed in Chinese and translated into English for further analysis using holistic structural, thematic and visual techniques.

Results: Participants' housing careers

- All participants reported that they lived in mortgage-free apartments as homeowners in China.
- A large majority of the participants retained their apartments in China. Some had their married children and their families living with them in their homes before they moved to New Zealand.
- At the time of the first interview, 10 participants lived with their adult children; 22 participants lived with their spouse only or lived alone.
- Of those who lived with their spouse only or lived alone, 7 lived in state houses while 14 lived in private rentals and 1 lived in a retirement village.
- The participants' housing trajectories are presented as Figure 2.



Figure 1 Participants' Houses (A. A state house where a participant lived; B. An adult-children owned house where a participating couple co-resided with their children; C. A private rental house where a participant lived; D. A children's investment property where a participant lived and looked after 5 tenants)

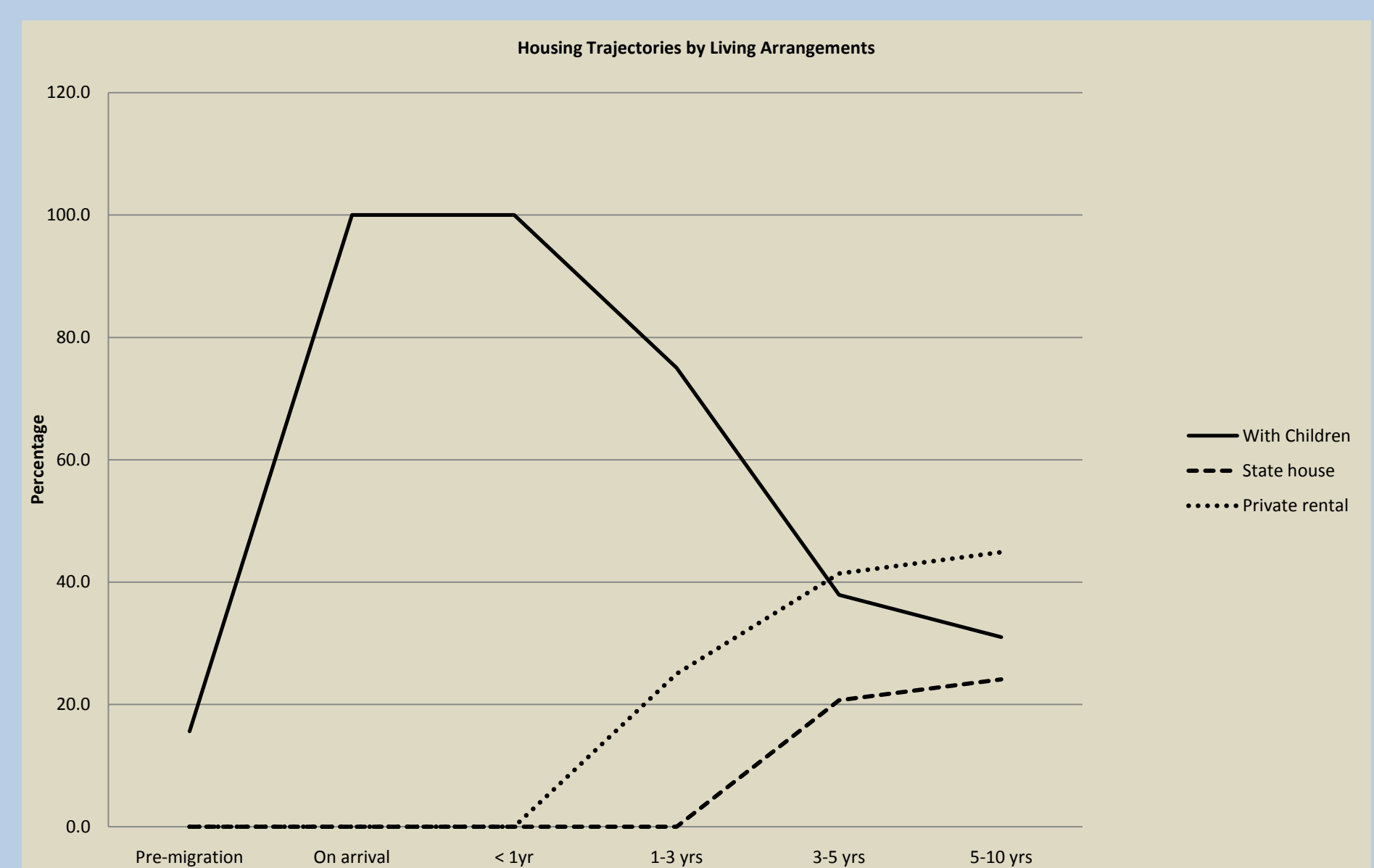


Figure 2 Participants' Housing Trajectories by Living Arrangements

Results: From co-residence to filial piety at a distance

- Parent-child co-residence: Multiple desires, expectations and needs
 - Different lifestyles between the parents and the children/grandchildren
 - Financial issues
 - Chinese grandparenting VS Westernised parenting
- Filial piety at a distance
 - Some participants took the initiative to move out from their adult children's house and exert a sense of control over their lives.
 - Some children decided to move away and lived at a distance.
 - Virtual co-residence - distance can serve as an intergenerational communication broker.

Results: The driving force of the participants' housing pathways

- Children's home ownerships
- Children's career developments
- Children's migration pathways
- Intergeneration relationship issues

Discussion and implications

- The participants' living arrangements are evolving as families adapt to social and cultural changes when living in New Zealand.
- Filial piety at a distance is regarded as a new form for children to demonstrate filial piety.
- The older Chinese migrants' culture-specific housing and ageing experiences warrant further attention by policy makers. Such work is crucial at a time when Chinese people continue to migrate to New Zealand and other Western countries.



As a community social and health psychologist, Wendy positions herself between the East and West, informing Western social sciences with Eastern knowledge and vice versa. Wendy's research is centred on and around health and wellbeing, ageing, home, place, family, community, culture and acculturation, international students, and migration. Wendy has been active in the New Zealand voluntary sectors for many years. She was the founding Chairperson of the Hamilton Chinese Golden Age Society, New Zealand.