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Descriptive Finding

Living separately but living close: Coresidence of adult children and parents in urban China

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Descriptive Finding

Living separately but living close: Coresidence of adult children and parents in urban China

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Abstract

BACKGROUND
Studies in previous decades have shown that patterns of intergenerational coresidence in China have been diminishing. However, few studies have documented the level of intergenerational coresidence for a wide range of ages. Furthermore, most studies on the topic are based on data collected more than 10 years ago.

OBJECTIVE
In this study, we document the intergenerational coresidence patterns of a wide range of ages, from 25 to 60, in urban China. We employ updated national data collected in 2013 that covers 2,585 counties in China.

METHODS
We conducted three sets of analysis. The first set includes all cases. For the second set, we kept cases with at least one parent living in the same city and conducted the same analysis as in the first set. The dependent variable of these two sets of analysis is whether the adult child coresides with at least one parent. The third set includes only those adult children who do not live with their parents. We explore the probability of adult children at different ages living in the same city as their parents.

RESULTS
There is a U-shaped relationship between the age of adult children and the predicted probability of coresidence with parents. The predicted probability of intergenerational coresidence is higher among younger and older adult children, although it remains low at all ages. More importantly, among those living separately, we found a positive linear relationship between the age of the adult child and the predicted probability of living in the same city.

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CONTRIBUTION

The findings suggest that coresidence of parents and adult children is no longer a dominant intergenerational living arrangement pattern in urban China. Living separately but close has become a dominant pattern.

1. Introduction

The "extended, joint household with multiple generations co-residing along male lineages" (Chu, Xie, and Yu 2011) has been an important feature of the family institution in China. Such intergenerational coresidence is based on the fact that in this strong patrilineal system, males and their wives are supposed to take care of the male's aging parents. The expectation of filial piety and family responsibility is the cornerstone of the family, which has a long tradition in Chinese society as one of its strongest institutions (Chu and Yu 2010). However, studies in previous decades have shown that intergenerational coresidence patterns have been diminishing in China, similar to the world trend (Logan, Bian, and Bian 1998; Chen 2005; Zimmer 2005; Chu, Xie, and Yu 2011; Yasuda et al. 2011; Lei et al. 2015; Chen, Leeson, and Liu 2017). In this paper, we have updated the discussion in three ways.

First, we documented the level of intergenerational coresidence for a wide range of ages, from 25 to 60. It is important to determine the patterns to understand the extent of the low level of intergenerational coresidence among different age groups at different life stages, when there may be differences in socioeconomic resources and the need for support from parents. Covering a wider age range to include both younger and older adult children provides a larger picture of the changes in family structures and dynamics in contemporary China.

Second, we conducted the analysis based on updated data, the China Household Finance Survey (CHFS) collected in 2013. Most studies on the topic are based on data collected before 2008 (Logan, Bian, and Bian 1998; Chen 2005; Chu, Xie, and Yu 2011; Lei et al. 2015; Chen, Leeson, and Liu 2017). China has experienced rapid changes since then, especially in urban areas (Wu 2001; Wen and Goodman 2013). By 2011, more than half the population was living in urban areas. The urban private housing market continued to expand and boom. Children born under the one-child policy came of age. With all these changes, a more updated picture of urban China is urgently needed.

Finally, we employed the latest nationally representative data instead of focusing on only a few cities or provinces in China, as most previous studies have done. To generalize the findings to all of China, a data set that covers more provinces is needed.

2. Data and methods

We employed data from the 2013 CHFS for analysis. By using a stratified, three-stage, probability-proportional-to-size random sampling design, the 2013 CHFS provides a nationally representative sample with rich information about adult children and their parents, even when parents are not living with their children. We selected individuals aged 25 to 60 living in urban areas with urban *hukou* whose parents were both alive. All parents in our analysis are the adult child's own parents.[3]

We conducted three sets of analysis. In the first set, all cases are included in the analysis. The dependent variable is whether the adult child coresides with at least one parent. Living with at least one parent is coded as 1, and living separately from both parents is coded as 0. The key independent variable is age of the adult child. We ran models with the age variable in three different ways (linear term, a quadratic term, and three dummy variables [ages 25–34, 35–44, and 45–60]) to capture different relationships with coresidence patterns. We then used the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) to evaluate the best-fitting model. Four sets of control variables are controlled: demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the adult children (gender, migration status, number of siblings, marital status, number of children under age 7, educational level, and party membership), parental resources (highest educational level and employment status), physical and socioeconomic characteristics of the family and dwelling (home ownership, size of dwelling, and household disposable income), and region.

In the second model, we kept cases with at least one parent living in the same city and conducted the same analysis as in the first. We included living in the same city rather than neighborhood to reflect the urban development in China. Today, family members living in the same city can meet with one another easily and frequently, and offer help if needed, because of low transportation costs and the availability of different modes of public transportation. In this analysis, we went one step further. We examined whether or not parents living far away, not in the same city, was the major pattern for adult children and their parents who lived apart.

The third analysis includes only those adult children who do not live with their parents. We explore the probability of adult children at different ages living in the same city as their parents. The purpose of the analysis is to explore patterns of living apart but nearby across different ages.

[3] In our sample, about 3% were living with one parent and about 2% were living with the mother only. These proportions are relatively small. For adult children, only 1% of adult daughters were living with the mother only.

3. Findings

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics of variables included in the analysis. Only 18% of respondents live with at least one parent. In other words, the overwhelming majority of adult children aged 25 to 60 do not live with parents. Even when they live in the same city as at least one parent, the coresidence rate is only slightly higher, about 26%. Findings suggest that the average respondents are in middle age. (The average age is about 38.) In our sample, there are slightly more females than males. Since we exclude those with rural *hukou*, only a small percentage of respondents (12.7%) have no local *hukou* status. Those without local *hukou* status most likely have urban *hukou* for other cities. The majority of respondents are married (84.6%), a small percentage have a child under 7 years old (27.7%), about half have completed postsecondary education, a small percentage are party members (about 21%), and a large percentage are homeowners (about 72%). Respondents on average have 1.8 siblings. These characteristics reflect the urban population in China. About half of their parents completed only junior or senior high school, and only 15% completed postsecondary education. More than 60% of both parents are still employed. These general patterns are similar to those of respondents whose parents reside in the same city. In other words, respondents who live in the same city as their parents are not a select group with characteristics different from others in the same age range.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for variables in regression analysis

	All				At least one parent in the same city				Not living with parents			
	Mean	Std dev	Min	Max	Mean	Std dev	Min	Max	Mean	Std dev	Min	Max
Dependent variable												
Living with at least one parent	0.183	0.387	0	1	0.262	0.440	0	1				
At least one parent living in the same city									0.626	0.484	0	1
Independent variable												
Age of adult child	38.001	8.405	25	60	38.862	8.511	25	60	38.630	8.368	25	60
Age of adult child 25–34												
25–34	0.389				0.346				0.352			
35–44	0.390				0.406				0.407			
45–60	0.221				0.248				0.241			
Control variables												
Characteristics of adult children												
Gender (0 = female. 1 = male)	0.456	0.498	0	1	0.464	0.499	0	1	0.424	0.494	0	1
Migrant status (0 = local, 1 = intercity migrant)	0.127	0.333	0	1	0.032	0.176	0	1	0.140	0.347	0	1
Have partner (0 = no. 1 = yes)	0.846	0.361	0	1	0.860	0.347	0	1	0.876	0.329	0	1
Number of siblings	1.801	1.498	0	0	1.798	1.511	1	10	1.918	1.499	0	10
Number of children aged 7 and below	0.277	0.480	0	3	0.284	0.490	0	3	0.261	0.469	0	3
Highest education completed												
Primary school and below	0.035				0.036				0.036			
Junior and senior high school	0.410				0.452				0.427			
Postsecondary education	0.555				0.509				0.538			
Party membership (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.209	0.407	0	1	0.197	0.398	0	1	0.209	0.407	0	1

Table 1: (Continued)

	All				At least one parent in the same city				Not living with parents			
	Mean	Std dev	Min	Max	Mean	Std dev	Min	Max	Mean	Std dev	Min	Max
Control variables												
Characteristics of parents												
Parents' highest education												
Primary school and below	0.302				0.316				0.315			
Junior and senior high school	0.551				0.542				0.544			
Postsecondary education	0.146				0.142				0.141			
Parents' employment status												
Both unemployed	0.145				0.188				0.047			
One employed	0.195				0.208				0.172			
Both employed	0.660				0.604				0.781			
Adult child's household information												
Household disposable income in 2012 (10,000 yuan)	11.707	23.153	–100	300	10.871	22.189	–100	300	11.373	22.659	–100	300
Dwelling ownership (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.721	0.449	0	1	0.787	0.409	0	1				
Dwelling size (square meters)	80.792	54.089	7	1000	84.849	60.019	9.5	1000				
Region												
Eastern	0.521				0.505				0.518			
Middle	0.236				0.267				0.237			
Western	0.243				0.228				0.245			
N	3234				2257				2642			

Source: 2013 China Household Finance Survey.

In the first analysis, all respondents are included in the sample. As mentioned, we ran models with the age variable in three different ways to understand how age is related to patterns of coresidence. We reported only the best-fitting model suggested by the BIC statistics. Figure 1 shows the plot of the relationship between age and probability of coresidence of parents and adult children predicted by the best-fitting model. The curve shows that the probability of coresidence is low, even for younger adult children. Although the rate increases after adult children reach 45.9, it continues to be lower than for younger adult children, even at age 60.

Table 2: Estimated odd ratios of the best-fitting logistic regression models

Sample	**All**	**At least one parent in the same city**	**Not living with parents**
Dependent variable	**Living with at least one parent**	**Living with at least one parent**	**Living in the same city as at least one parent**
Age	0.693	0.685	1.050
	(0.047)	(0.051)	(0.008)
	0.607–0.792	0.592–0.792	1.034–1.067
Squared age	1.004	1.004	
	(0.001)	(0.001)	
	1.002–1.006	1.002–1.006	
Gender (ref: female)			
Male	2.226	2.293	1.074
	(0.296)	(0.338)	(0.105)
	1.715–2.890	1.717–3.061	0.888–1.300
Migrant status (ref: local)			
Intercity migrant	0.342	3.008	0.041
	(0.079)	(1.056)	(0.008)
	0.218–0.539	1.512–5.984	0.028–0.062
Having partner	0.267	0.254	1.141
	(0.051)	(0.057)	(0.181)
	0.183–0.388	0.164–0.394	0.836–1.556
Number of siblings	0.801	0.861	0.836
	(0.046)	(0.055)	(0.032)
	0.715–0.897	0.760–0.976	0.776–0.901
Number of children aged 7 and below	1.550	1.235	1.285
	(0.224)	(0.196)	(0.142)
	1.168–2.056	0.904–1.686	1.035–1.595

Table 2: (Continued)

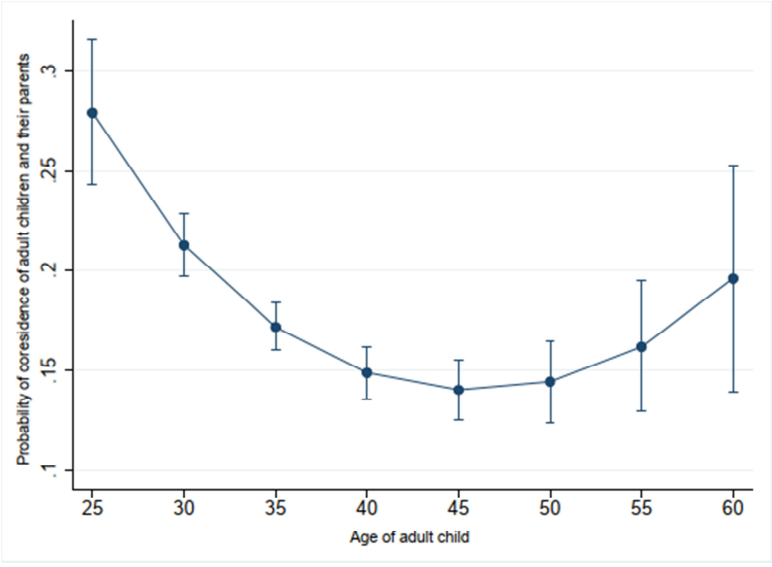
Sample	All	At least one parent in the same city	Not living with parents
Dependent variable	Living with at least one parent	Living with at least one parent	Living in the same city as at least one parent
Highest education completed (ref: primary school and below)			
Junior and senior high school	0.775	0.767	1.240
	(0.300)	(0.317)	(0.322)
	0.363–1.654	0.341–1.726	0.745–2.063
Postsecondary education	0.774	0.932	0.764
	(0.305)	(0.393)	(0.204)
	0.358–1.674	0.408–2.131	0.453–1.288
Party membership	0.983	1.181	0.744
	(0.165)	(0.226)	(0.088)
	0.707–1.366	0.812–1.719	0.591–0.937
Parents' highest education (ref: primary school and below)			
Junior and senior high school	0.930	0.984	0.955
	(0.159)	(0.185)	(0.109)
	0.665–1.301	0.682–1.422	0.764–1.194
Postsecondary education	1.138	1.244	0.904
	(0.257)	(0.313)	(0.146)
	0.730–1.773	0.759–2.037	0.658–1.241
Parents' employment status (ref: both unemployed)			
One employed	0.116	0.110	0.861
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.220)
	0.085–0.159	0.077–0.157	0.523–1.420
Both employed	0.009	0.009	0.736
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.172)
	0.006–0.013	0.006–0.013	0.466–1.164
Household income in 2012 (10,000 yuan)	1.005	1.005	0.998
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)
	1.000–1.010	1.000–1.011	0.994–1.002
Dwelling ownership	2.163	1.805	
	(0.365)	(0.341)	
	1.554–3.011	1.247–2.612	
Dwelling size	1.006	1.005	
	(0.001)	(0.001)	
	1.003–1.008	1.003–1.007	

Table 2: (Continued)

Sample	All	At least one parent in the same city	Not living with parents
Dependent variable	Living with at least one parent	Living with at least one parent	Living in the same city as at least one parent
Region (ref: eastern)			
Middle	0.926	0.671	1.878
	(0.153)	(0.121)	(0.234)
	0.670–1.279	0.471–0.955	1.471–2.396
Western	0.952	0.889	0.921
	(0.153)	(0.162)	(0.103)
	0.694–1.306	0.623–1.270	0.739–1.147
Constant	9,286	23,499	0.601
	(12,881)	(35,793)	(0.284)
	612.4–140,808	1,187–465,146	0.238–1.518
N	3,234	2,257	2,642
BIC	1751.754	1434.199	2905.054

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; 95% confidence interval; source: 2013 China Household Finance Survey.

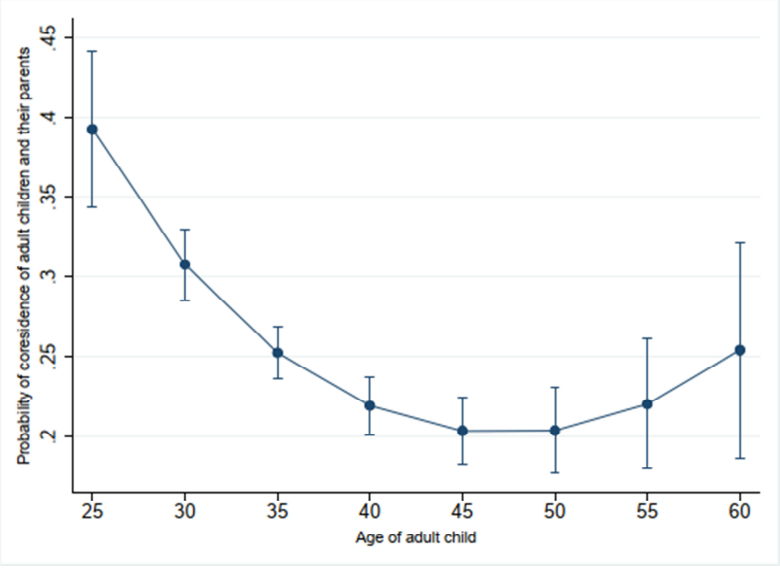
Figure 1: Predicted probability of coresidence of adult children and at least one parent by age (predicted margins with 95% Cls)



The findings also suggest that adult male children who have local *hukou*, are single, are without siblings, have children under 7 years old, are not party members, and own larger dwellings are more likely to live with parents. The likelihood of coresidence does not relate to the educational level of either children or parents. If one or both parents are unemployed, they are more likely to live with their children.

In the second model, we then report results for only those cases in which both parents are alive and at least of one is living in the same city as the adult child. The sample size is about two-thirds of the full sample. In other words, the majority of adult children and their parents live in the same city. We ran the same analysis to understand different possible relationships between age and patterns of coresidence. The findings still show that the model including the nonlinear relationship is the best fit.

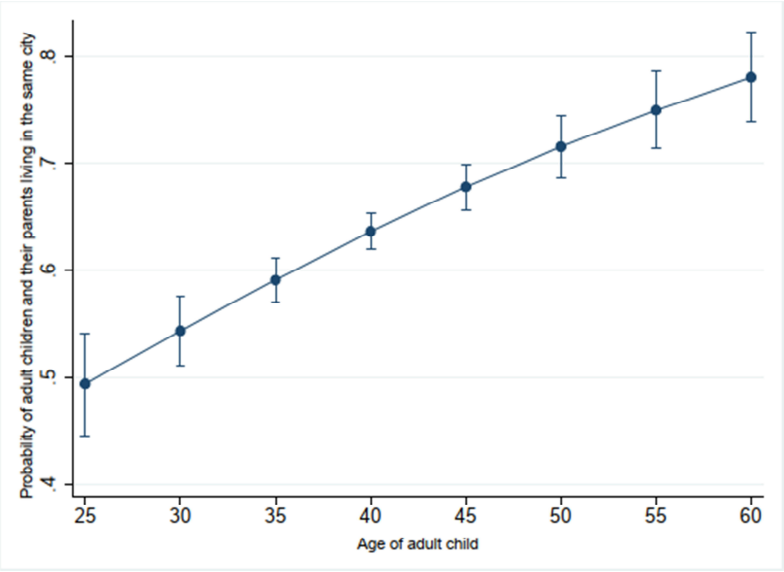
Figure 2: Predicted probability of coresidence of adult children and at least one parent by age among those adult children and their parents living in the same city (predicted margins with 95% CIs)



We plot the nonlinear relationship for better understanding. In the sample with at least one parent living in the same city, the overall probability of living together is a little bit higher than in the full sample. This finding indicates that a high rate of geographic mobility in society can reduce the chance of coresidence for the two generations. The probability of coresidence first decreases when the adult child gets

older and then slightly increases after he or she reaches the threshold, which is estimated to be age 47.4. Control variables affect the coresidence decision in the same way, except for the number of children aged 7 and below. Regardless, the probability of coresidence is still low across the whole range of ages of adult children. The finding clearly indicates that adult children remain less likely to live with parents even when living in the same city. In other words, they live nearby but do not live together.

Figure 3: Predicted probability of adult children and at least one parent living in the same city by age among those adult children not living with parents (predicted margins with 95% CIs)



Finally, we analyze the pattern of living apart but nearby. In this analysis, we include only those adult children who do not live with their parents. The dependent variable is whether at least one parent and adult child are living in the same city. We include the same set of variables as in the previous analysis, except for dwelling conditions. The BIC value suggests that the linear relationship is the best-fitting model. The findings show that older adult children are more likely to live in the same city with parents but not together.[4]

[4] We took a further step to check whether this pattern occurs only when both parents are alive. We ran the same analysis for respondents with a widowed mother. Similar to previous analyses, the findings show a low

4. Discussion and conclusion

Our study explores the intergenerational coresidence patterns of a wide age range of adult children in urban China. The analysis is based on recently collected nationally representative data. The findings clearly suggest that coresidence of parents and adult children is no longer a dominant pattern in urban China. There is a U-shaped relationship between age of adult children and probability of coresidence. The patterns may reflect the life stages of the respondents. Younger adult children have practical reasons to live with their parents, while older adult children may have to take care of aging parents. In between the two groups are adult children whose finances have become secure and who have their own families. Despite variations, the low probability of coresidence holds for adult children at all ages from 25 to 60. Though the probability is higher for younger and older adult children, the rate remains low. This pattern persists even when we adjust for the socioeconomic and demographic background of the adult children, the socioeconomic background of the parents, characteristics of their dwellings, and regional variations. In other words, most adult children between ages 25 and 60 do not live with their parents. Our study also shows that adult children do not stay with their parents even if they live in the same city. More importantly, we found that when they do not live with their parents, the age of adult children is positively related to living in the same city as their parents. Our study documents that living apart but living close has become the dominant intergenerational living pattern in urban China.

Our study has some major implications for studying intergenerational family living arrangements in China. First, despite younger and older adult children having a higher likelihood of coresidence with parents, the likelihood of coresidence of parents and adult children is persistently low among all ages between 25 and 60. The diminishing trend of intergenerational coresidence has significant implications for family dynamics in China. One possible change is the growing importance of the nuclear family rather than the multigenerational extended family in the foreseeable future. Given that there may be differences in the likelihood of coresidence with a mother or father, future studies should make the distinction.

Second, our study shows that for adult children, a higher probability of living with parents is associated with a higher socioeconomic background, a larger dwelling, and home ownership. Given the increasing cost of housing in urban China, especially in first-tier cities, young adult children will have more difficulty becoming homeowners or owning a larger dwelling (Wen and Goodman 2013; Wu 2001). Therefore, the chance of adult children and parents coresiding will further decrease.

probability of adult children at any age residing with a parent. Results of the analysis are available upon request.

Thirdly, adult children and parents living apart but nearby seems to be a dominant trend in urban China. This intergenerational living arrangement requires further study and understanding. Studies should explore how such patterns emerged. Equally important, future studies with longitudinal data should compare how the period effect shapes intergenerational coresidence of people in different time periods.

In short, our study shows that coresidence is low throughout the whole spectrum of ages in urban China, although parents and adult children often live in the same city. Our paper has not focused on explaining this pattern or its consequences in urban China, but we believe it may have significant effects on family structures and dynamics, and therefore may require urgent attention. Future study should be extended to compare the patterns in urban and rural areas in China.

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