4 Ambivalence in Place Attachment: the Lived Experiences of Homeowners in Danwei Communities Facing Demolition in Shenyang, China

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the influence of state-led urban redevelopment on the place attachment of deprived homeowners living in danwei communities that are facing demolition in Shenyang, China. It investigates lived experiences through in-depth interviews with homeowners at the pre-demolition phase. The paper reveals how these homeowners cleverly mobilize local resources, such as strong social bonds among homeowners, low living costs, flexibility on space usage and good neighbourhood location to cope with their life constraints, which is translated into their strong neighbourhood attachment. However, various forms of neighbourhood decline have decrease their quality of life. Meanwhile, they have to move due to the impending neighbourhood demolition. State-led urban redevelopment, therefore, confronts those deprived homeowners with a dilemma concerning their strong neighbourhood dependence and the desire for better living conditions. The impending neighbourhood demolition uncovers accumulated social issues in danwei communities in the context of market reforms and institutional changes in current China, such as the emergence of deprived social groups and their struggles for better housing.

Keywords: *Place attachment; Homeowners; Lived experiences; Declining neighbourhoods; State-led urban redevelopment; China*

Introduction

Neighbourhood redevelopment projects often involve the large-scale demolition of houses and the forced relocation of residents (Popkin, 2010; Posthumus et al., 2013). Forced relocation is highly frequent in urban redevelopment projects in China. It is estimated that between 2008 and 2012 approximately 12.6 million households were involved in the redevelopment of declining neighbourhoods initiated by the central government of China (Li et al., 2017; MOHURD, 2013). Previous studies in the United States and Western Europe have shown that the demolition of a neighbourhood involves more than tearing down physical buildings. It can cause dramatic changes to the daily routines and living strategies that residents have developed in their declining neighbourhoods over a long period of residence (Manzo et al., 2008; Vale, 1997; Popkin, 2010). Demolition and the associated forced relocation are especially threatening to less mobile residents, who are often low-income, aged, or have severe mental or physical problems (Fried, 1963; Gilroy, 2012; Manzo et al., 2008; Popkin et al., 2004; Posthumus and Kleinhans, 2014).

Place attachment is associated with the affection residents have for their neighbourhood (Anguelovski, 2013; Fried and Gleicher, 1961). The existing literature presents various findings regarding the influence of urban redevelopment on the place attachment of residents. Some argue that the extent to which urban redevelopment affects place attachment is closely related to the lived experiences of residents (Manzo et al., 2008; Manzo, 2014). For instance, several studies report that demolition of public housing disrupts place attachment, as residents are forced to leave their familiar environment and social networks (e.g. Fried, 1963, 2000; Fullilove, 1996; Manzo, 2008). However, other research has found that some residents may be less attached to their neighbourhoods due to the deterioration of various aspects (e.g. physical decline or high population turnover) (Bailey et al., 2012), with strong place attachment not necessarily translating into a strong willingness to stay (Wu, 2012).

The diverse research outcomes above about residents' place attachment and the impact of urban redevelopment on residents may be closely related to the ambivalent feelings that residents may have about their neighbourhood experiences. Residents can feel attached to their neighbourhood while neighbourhood decline may damage their attachment and further stimulate them to leave. It appears that ambivalence in the neighbourhood experiences of residents has not yet been adequately studied in relation to the influence of urban redevelopment on residents (Manzo, 2014; Vale, 1997). In addition, previous literature has focused on place attachment *during* and *after* forced relocation in Western Europe and the United States, or merely in deprived neighbourhoods, without any indication of whether they have been redeveloped or not.

There is a lack of research on residents' place attachment in declining neighbourhoods in the *pre*-demolition/*pre*-relocation phase (Goetz, 2013; Manzo *et al.*, 2008; Tester *et al.*, 2011). This gap is even larger in research focussing on China, despite its large-scale demolition of dwellings and the forced relocation of millions of residents (Li *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, the literature from the US and Europe almost exclusively concerns redevelopment of public or social housing, while redevelopment in Chinese cities targets neighbourhoods with owner-occupied housing. This difference in ownership in redevelopment areas is bound to have major implications for the impact of impending relocation on residents' lived experiences and place attachment.

Inspired by these concerns and knowledge gaps, this paper aims to investigate the lived experiences of homeowners in declining *danwei* communities that face demolition in Shenyang, China. It highlights (1) aspects of the declining neighbourhoods that residents are attached to and why, (2) the ambivalence in their place attachment, and (3) the influence of the impending demolition and forced relocation on their place attachment. The following section provides a theoretical background that locates place attachment in the context of declining neighbourhoods facing urban redevelopment. Section 4.3 introduces the research area and methods, while Section 4.4 analyses the results from the interviews, focussing on residents' lived experiences and dimensions of attachment. Section 4.5 explains the impacts of the impending demolition and forced relocation on residents. Section 4.6 discusses the empirical findings by placing them in the wider context of structural economic transitions, market mechanisms and urban redevelopment in China. The final section offers our conclusions.

Place attachment is defined as an affective bond between people and places (Altman and Low, 1992; Giuliani and Feldman, 1993; Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001; Lewicka, 2011; Scannell and Gifford, 2010). In the context of residential place, the development of place attachment is closely related to residents' living experiences within their neighbourhoods over time, i.e., how a neighbourhood can functionally and emotionally meet residents' demands (Corcoran, 2002; Jean, 2016; Livingston *et al*., 2010; Scannell and Gifford, 2010). Some research has highlighted the importance of place attachment for the residents living in declining neighbourhoods. For instance, the material and spiritual support that residents gain from a declining neighbourhood can alleviate the life constraints they must cope with, such as poverty, unemployment or mental and physical disability, which contribute to their social, physical and economic dimension of place attachment (Anguelovski, 2013; Brown *et al*., 2003; Corcoran, 2002; Fried and Gleicher, 1961; Wu, 2012). Some studies indicate that an involuntary movement can be disruptive to the residents involved as it interrupts residents' routines and social networks, and causes a discontinuity to their place identity (Brown and Perkins, 1992; Fried, 2000; Manzo *et al*., 2008). For example, Fried (1963) reveals the grief and affliction felt by residents after the forced movement out of their home in working-class communities.

However, these studies have not paid adequate attention to residents' ambivalent feelings towards their declining neighbourhoods as a result of their negative lived experiences, which might affect their perceptions on neighbourhood redevelopment and in turn their moving behaviour (Manzo, 2014; Oakley et al., 2008). Vale (1997) used the concept of 'empathology' to refer to the ambivalent attitudes of residents toward an environment that is both 'a source of empathy as well as a locus of pathology' (Vale, 1997, p. 159). He displayed the ambivalence in the experiences of residents who are living in declining public housing communities, demonstrating that residents are both socially and economically dependent on their neighbourhoods, while their quality of life is negatively affected by various forms of neighbourhood disorder, such as drug dealing and gang violence (Vale, 1997). In fact, the development of place attachment is the outcomes of residents' cost-benefit evaluation about their positive and negative neighbourhood experiences (Brown and Perkins, 1992; Brown *et al*., 2003; Bailey *et al*., 2012; Giuliani and Feldman, 1993; Manzo, 2014; Wu, 2012). Residents living in declining neighbourhoods are very likely to have negative

lived experiences resulted from various neighbourhood declines, which cause the degradation of their quality of life, disrupts residents' sense of place and further drive some of them to leave (Feijten and van Ham, 2009; Livingston *et al*., 2010;Wu, 2012).

Recognizing this ambivalence in residents' lived experience and place attachment in declining neighbourhoods may help us clarify vital issues, revealing which dimensions of place attachment – and to what extent and why – are significant to residents and how urban redevelopment can affect residents. Residents' interaction with the physical, social and economic dimensions of the neighbourhoods can lead to residents' dependence and emotional affection with their neighbourhoods, which leads to their social, physical and economic dimensions of place attachment (Bailey *et al*., 2012; Corcoran, 2002; Jean, 2016; Lewicka, 2011; Manzo *et al*., 2008; Ramkissoon *et al*., 2013; Stokols and Shumaker, 1981; Vale, 1997; Windsong, 2010; Oakley *et al*., 2008). The *physical dimension* of place attachment is achieved via residents' interaction with the tangible physical attributes (e.g. facilities, dwelling quality and sanitation condition) of a neighbourhood, which meet their needs in relation to surviving and achieving their longer term goals (Fullilove, 1996; Lewicka, 2011; Scannell and Gifford, 2010). The *social dimension* of place attachment is on the basis of the cultural and social attributes of a neighbourhood (e.g. numbers of acquaintance, mutual help, neighbourhood socio-economic status), which generates a sense of belonging, familiarity and affection (Fried, 2000; Lewicka, 2011; Relph, 1976; Scannell and Gifford, 2010). The *economic dimension* is developed via the economic benefits that residents gain from their neighbourhood (e.g. neighbourhood-based income and living cost) by living close to job opportunities, paying low rent or running neighbourhood-based businesses (He *et al*., 2010; Luo, 2012; Manzo *et al*., 2008).

This paper focuses on the influence of urban redevelopment on residents at the pre-demolition/pre-relocation phase in China, through revealing the ambivalence in the physical, social and economic dimensions of residents' place attachment. Currently, only a small body of research focuses on the influence of urban redevelopment on residents' place attachment in the pre-demolition/pre-relocation phase (Manzo, 2014; Oakley *et al*., 2008; Tester *et al*.,, 2011; Tester and Wingfield, 2013). This means that there is a lack of knowledge about an important phase - pre-demolition stage - of urban redevelopment (Kearns and Mason, 2013), which limits our capacity to develop a deeper understanding and create an overview of the impact of redevelopment on residents, especially in relation to issues such as time and context (see also Kleinhans and Kearns, 2013).

Place attachment and urban redevelopment in Chinese cities

This paper investigates homeowners' place attachment to declining *danwei* communities facing demolition in Shenyang, a Chinese city. *Danwei* communities were originally established to reside employees from state-owned enterprises (SOEs), collectively-owned enterprises (COEs), government departments or institutions such as universities, etc. Previous studies of residents' attachment to declining neighbourhoods have usually focused on renters who are living in public or social housing in Western Europe and the US. The resulting body of knowledge may not be applicable to the Chinese situation because of the differences in development history, social composition and the physical environment of neighbourhoods in China and Western countries.

In the socialist era, residents of *danwei* were socially, physically and economically dependent on these communities. The *danwei* contains sources of employment associated with industrial production and other enterprises, and also provide those employed with other services and social welfare (Bjorklund, 1986; Bray, 2014; Wang and Chai, 2009). *Danwei* communities provide residential accommodation to *danwei* employees in a relatively homogenous social space, where neighbours are also work colleagues. Residents living in *danwei* communities thus often have strong social capital and close relationships due to the long length of residence and shared work and social experiences. In addition, the residents develop a strong place identity embedded in the *danwei* system because 'A *danwei* identity hinders the freedom of mobility of workers, because mobility without permission (from a worker's *danwei*) will cause the loss of personal identity (income, position, etc.)' (Lu, 1989, p.77).

However, under market transition and rapid urbanization in China, *danwei* have experienced disinvestment and decline at multiple levels (He *et al.*, 2008; Wu and He, 2005). Also, most *danwei* have retreated from these neighbourhoods in providing housing, employment and even community management. Population turnover, social stratification and residential changes have become more common in these neighbourhoods as well, with those who have more resources moving out, while those who are less mobile, due to poverty or ageing, remaining trapped (He *et al.*, 2008). Also, many residents who were employees in *danwei* became unemployed due to the collapse of these companies. These neighbourhoods have increasingly become enclaves characterized by a migrant population of renters on the one hand, and homeowners in the aged or low-income categories, on the other (He *et al.*, 2008). These transitions have diverse impacts on homeowners' sense of place, residential satisfaction and residential mobility. Some research has revealed that place attachment and social interaction remain stronger in these neighbourhoods than in newly built

neighbourhoods, however this strong place attachment does not contribute to the residents' willingness to stay (He *et al*., 2008; Wu and He, 2005; Wu, 2012; Zhu *et al*., 2012). The strong sense of place alongside an intention to move reflects ambivalent feelings of residents in relation to their neighbourhood experiences.

In China, numerous old neighbourhoods (including but not exclusively *danwei* communities) have undergone demolition, initiated by governments and/or developers (Hin and Xin, 2011; Li *et al*., 2017). The central government has initiated two rounds of national-scale Shantytown Redevelopment Projects (SRPs, Peng-hu-qu in Pinyin) aimed at improving the living conditions of the low- and middle income residents from seriously declining neighbourhoods in 2008 and 2013 respectively (MOHURD, 2013). The dilapidated *danwei* communities discussed in our paper are involved in the SRPs, which will undergo neighbourhood demolition and the forced relocation of their residents. This will have a major impact on these neighbourhoods, their residents and their place attachment. In this paper, we focus on how SRPs and forced relocation can affect the place attachment of homeowners who are currently living in these declining *danwei* communities at the pre-demolition stage. Many scholars found that the homeowners who stay in these neighbourhoods are mostly among one of the most deprived social groups, facing multiple challenges such as unemployment, low-income, or increasing infirmities related to ageing (He *et al*., 2010; Liu and Wu, 2006; Wu, 2004). Specifically, we firstly explore homeowners' lived experience from the ambivalence in the physical, social and economic dimensions of their place attachment, based on the theoretical discussion in section 4.2.1. Following this, we investigate the influence of SRP-related demolition on the place attachment of homeowners, and reveal their opinions towards SRPs and the forced relocation process. The following section will introduce our research area and methods.

§ 4.3 Research Area, Data and Methods

The *danwei* communities in our research are located in the city of Shenyang in Northeast China (Figure 4.1). Shenyang is a typical old industrial city, and has been called the 'Ruhr of the East'. The city once had many state-owned enterprises and established many *danwei* during the era of centralized economic planning. Most of them are located in the old industrial areas. Shenyang, therefore, had – and still has – a lot of industrial workers and *danwei* communities. The empirical basis for this paper consists of in-depth interviews conducted in March, April, September and October in 2015. We interviewed residents living in a number of neighbourhoods in

Shenyang that will be demolished according to the national redevelopment policy – SRPs. Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1 show the location and detailed information about the six *danwei* communities included in this paper. Neighbourhoods *I, II, II and IV* were affiliated to the state-owned manufacturing enterprises for machine or rubber production. Neighbourhood *V* was affiliated to a government apparatus (prison). Neighbourhood *VI* belonged to a state-owned farm, of which homeowners mainly conduct farming activities and agriculture production. These neighbourhoods were constructed during the socialist era around 1950s-1970s by *danwei* organizations to reside their employees. These *danwei* have resigned their responsibility on neighbourhood management to local housing bureaus during SOE reforms around 2000. Meanwhile, many state-owned enterprises in Shenyang went bankrupt and many residents from these neighbourhoods were laid-off. Some original residents have become rich and moved out of these neighbourhoods because they can successfully adjust to the economic reforms and find business opportunities from the market. However, there are also those who stay in these neighbourhoods and have been mainly relying on the pension or basic living fees provided by their *danwei* and local government. We recruited respondents from the latter group of residents (stayers) through a combination of snowball sampling and door knocking. All of the interviews were conducted face to face using a semi-structured interview schedule. A total of 33 interviews were conducted in six *danwei* communities (see table 4.2). The physical conditions of the dwellings and neighbourhoods have severely deteriorated. The dwelling size of the respondents ranges from 20 m² to more than 100 m². The residential composition of these neighbourhoods is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, including homeowners who have lived there all of their lives, and renters who are mainly from rural areas to work as construction workers, porter, servants etc. In this research, we focus on stayers, i.e. homeowners who have not (yet) moved out the *danwei* communities. They have been living in these neighbourhoods for at least ten years, in some cases, for their whole life (more than 60 years). Most of the respondents or their family members used to have work in the *danwei*.

The total amount of interviewing time is 21 hours, and the average interviewing time is 41.9 minutes (median: 39.6 minutes). The time range differed quite substantially, with the shortest interview taking 15 minutes and the longest interview 2,5 hours. The ages of the respondents range from around 30 to more than 80 years. All of the respondents were homeowners. Some respondents were approached more than once to obtain supplementary information.

TABLE 4.1 The information for the neighbourhoods

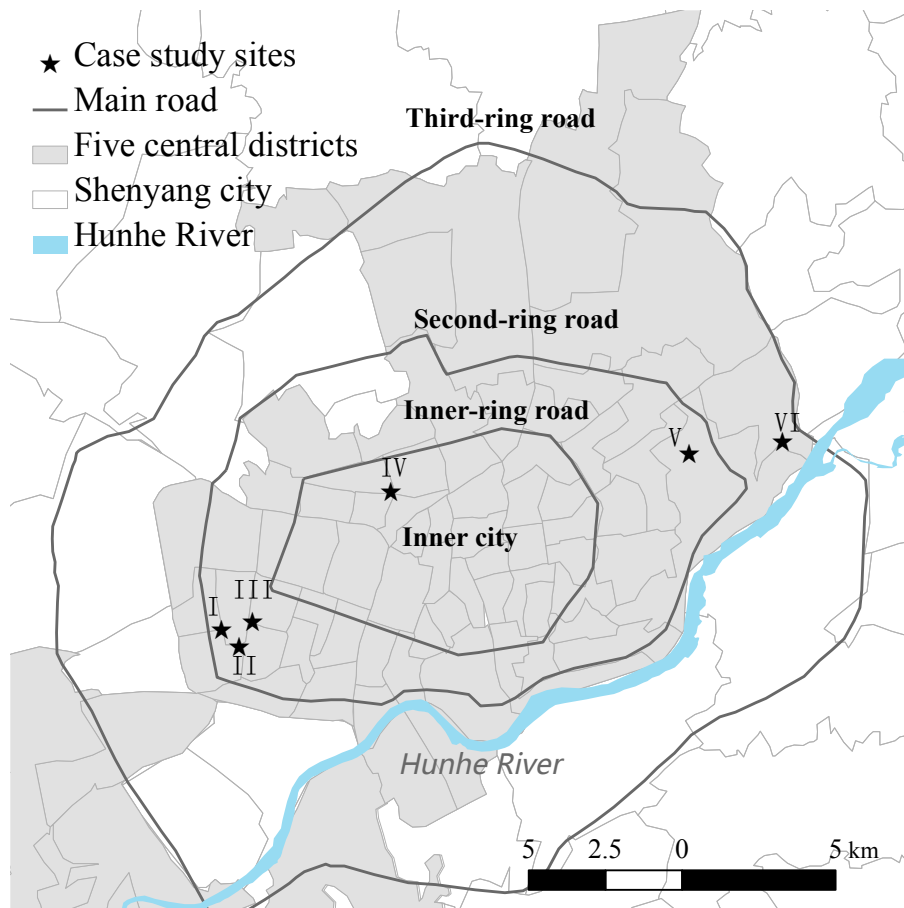| NEIGHBOURHOOD ID	HOUSEHOLD NUMBER	LOCATION	RESPONDENTS NUMBER
I	Around 600	Urban area	4
II	Around 70	Urban area	2
III	Around 75	Urban area	1
IV	Around 30	Urban area	1
V	Around 150	Suburban area	10
VI	Around 450	Suburban area	15

Source: Authors

FIGURE 4.1 Locations of the case study areas in Shenyang
Source: Authors

TABLE 4.2 Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents

INTERVIEW NO.	RESPONDENT NO.	GENDER	AGE[3]	HOUSEHOLD SIZE (PERSONS)	RESIDENCE LENGTH (YEARS)	FICTITIOUS NAME
1	1	M	58	2	51	
2	2	M	46	3	18	
3	3	F	82	3	24	
4	4	M	36	2	36	
	5	M	34	3	20	
	6	F	est. 60	2	35	
5	7	F	est. 70	1	46	
6	8	M	85	2	30	Meng
7	21	M and F	M: est. 80 F: est. 70	2	M: est. 60	
8	22	F	35	5	est. 20	Ai
9	23	M	65	2	65	
10	24	M	est. 50	3	50	
11	25	F	est. 60	5	60	Hui
		M	60	5	40	
12	26	M	est. 70	2	23	
13	27	M	est. 60	2	27	
14	28	F	est. 80	3	63	
15	29	F	40	3	40	
16	30	F	50	5	est. 30	
17	31	F and M	76	2	40	
18	32	M	est. 70	est. 4	21	
19	33	M	est. 60	est. 5	not known	
20	34	M	48	3	16	Jun
21	39	F	75	1	36	
22	41	F	45	5	14	
23	43	F	60	3	est. 30	Mei
24	44	F	70	2	est. 30	
	45	F	56	6	est. 30	
	46	F	est. 60	1	est. 30	
25	55	F	60	2	60	
26	60	F	est. 75	1	45	
27	61	F	est. 70	1	49	Wen
28	62	F	57	2	47	
29	63	F	83	2	62	

TABLE 4.2 Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents

INTERVIEW NO.	RESPONDENT NO.	GENDER	AGE[3]	HOUSEHOLD SIZE (PERSONS)	RESIDENCE LENGTH (YEARS)	FICTITIOUS NAME
30	66	F	est. 70	not known	est. 40	
	67	F	est. 70	not known	est. 40	
	68	F	est. 70	not known	est. 40	
31	70	F	est. 50	2	50	
32	71	F	est. 50	3	Not known	
33	72	F	est. 70	1	Not known	

During the interviews, questions were asked about topics such as family and moving history, moving intentions (regardless of the impending relocation), residential satisfaction, various dimensions of place attachment, perceptions of the impending demolition and recent neighbourhood changes. All interviews, with the exception of three (either because of the author getting no permission to record or due to a recording device failure), were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim, enabling content analysis of the transcriptions. In addition, the emotions and tones of voice of the respondents were noted while analysing the transcription. As a preparation for the coding procedure, the transcriptions were read and listened to several times to gain familiarity with the stories and mentioned elements related to place attachment and lived experiences. Atlas.ti was then used to code and categorize these concepts and elements in relation to residents' place attachment into social, economic and physical dimensions. For example, friends, relatives, family members, acquaintances and mutual assistance were coded as social dimensions of place attachment. Information about and comments on the physical environment, such as dwelling quality, toilets, roads, transportation, schools and other neighbourhood features were grouped under physical dimension. Their economic activities such as their income, pension and living cost within the neighbourhood are categorized as the economic dimension. To guarantee the anonymity of respondents in the analysis, the quotes are accompanied by gender, age category and fictitious names.

**Lived Experiences and Place Attachment in
Declining Danwei Communities**

§ 4.4.1   **The ambivalence in the social dimension of place attachment**

High population turnover and increasing social heterogeneity have taken place in
danwei communities against the context of neighbourhood decline, rapid urbanization,
housing market development and the dismantling of *danwei* system, which causes
a shrinking of social networks among our respondents. Many original neighbours
have moved out of their neighbourhoods or died, while many renters who are mostly
migrants from rural areas have moved into the neighbourhoods for cheap apartments.
This population turnover has disrupted the homeowners' established social networks.
Many respondents, especially the older ones have strong negative opinions about the
renters. They regard migrant renters as outsiders who lack a place-based identity. This
might be because that these renters are not homeowners, and their family history
is also not embedded in the neighbourhoods. Therefore, they consider that migrant
renters lack the sense of rootedness as they are since renters will neither stay in the
neighbourhood for a long time nor will they consider the neighbourhood as home.
Moreover, most of the migrants are from rural areas and are participating in low-end
labour market. Their relatively low socioeconomic status further contributes to these
homeowners' negative opinions on them. Many homeowners consider these migrants
to be the cause of a neighbourhood deterioration and of enhanced levels of crime. They
distrust these renters and feel unsafe to live together with them.

*The old neighbours have already moved out … I don't know them [renters] … I am
not able to put stuff outside [any more] … my cabbages were stolen! … These old
neighbours won't steal cabbages. I know who stole them. (Meng, 80s, male, resident of
Neighbourhood III for more than 30 years)*

Therefore, many respondents try to avoid contacts with the migrant renters. In
combination with the deaths of old acquaintances and moving out of other original
residents, the stayers' social networks within the neighbourhoods are subject to
continuous shrinkage.

Meanwhile, stayers retain their (remaining) strong social bonds with each other
within their enclosed social networks. Although the *danwei* system has disintegrated
over time, the close relationship between many original residents has been reserved.
Some stayers reported a family-like relationship with their neighbours because they

have grown up in the same neighbourhood and worked in the same place. Residents know each other due to frequent interaction, including chatting, playing mahjong or providing mutual assistance. Most of the respondents think they can still maintain their current social networks after demolition if local governments provide them with in situ relocation opportunities. Also, their family history and that of their neighbourhood are intertwined with each other and have developed into collective memories and neighbourhood-based identity.

My parents worked in this danwei … Then I came back to work in this danwei. At that time, it was common [in danwei] to succeed your parents' positions … (Hui, 60s, female, retired with a pension, resident of Neighbourhood VI for more than 60 years)

Every evening about ten households came out and ate their dinner at the corridor… they walked around and shared food with neighbours from this side of the corridor to the other … It used to be such a great time here! Mr Liu is the joke master of this floor, … These guys were quite active and humour! Their jokes can make you laugh for the rest of a day.… It used to be a lot of fun here! (Wen, around 70s, female, 50 years' residence in Neighbourhood V)

Meanwhile, the social bonds among the stayers are enhanced because they have similar multi-deprived experiences. They have similar disadvantaged socio-economic status such as poverty, unemployment, ageing or disability, compared with their old neighbours who has moved out. This has made them develop a sense of belonging to the same social group as they understand each other's hardships compared with the out-movers. The stayers' shared social resources (e.g. mutually physical and social assistance), which have developed on the basis of the long-term residence, help to relieve some of the constraints and hardships in their daily lives. For example, Mei (60s, female) had been living in a small apartment in *Neighbourhood V* with her family for about 30 years. Her husband was seriously ill and the family relied on her pension to make ends meet. She appreciated the mutual support in the neighbourhood as *"they [neighbours] treat me very well. They help to look after my husband when there was nobody at home…"* . She also felt not judged as neighbours appear to understand each other's hardships:

80 per cent of the stayers are in poverty … Some families are in difficult situations, just like us: some have health issues and [even worse] don't have a pension or insurance; some have mental illness …Her son is addicted to drugs…She [a neighbour] doesn't need to ask for a favour, and I will help her … You cannot ignore her situation, because you know she is suffering … You [I] have to help her…

However, many respondents also reported the decrease of their sense of place about their neighbourhoods, which is related to the dismantling of the *danwei* system, the influx of migrants, the increased social inequality and the perceived decrease of stayers' socioeconomic status. The stayers regard themselves as the most deprived households compared with those who has moved out of the neighbourhoods. Therefore, many respondents felt that their self-esteem was being undermined due to the decline of their neighbourhoods and their deprived situation. One respondent (30s, male) said he was attached to the neighbours and felt convenient living in *Neighbourhood I*. However, he explained that the neighbourhood stigma had a negative influence because nobody would like to marry a guy and then moves into a declining neighbourhood like this.

§ 4.4.2 The ambivalence in the economic dimension of place attachment

Most of our respondents are economically deprived. They live in their neighbourhoods because they cannot afford to move out. Those who have retired or were laid-off at an early age from their *danwei* can rely on the pension which ranges from approximately 2000 RMB to around 3000 RMB per month. Their income is just sufficient to maintain their basic living costs. In order to make ends meet, they have developed coping strategies by clever use of neighbourhood resources. This echoes a Chinese saying: 'kai yuan jie liu' (tap new sources and reduce expenditure). For instance, some older respondents go around to pick up firewood for heating through which they can save money.

These neighbourhood-based economic strategies and opportunities have become part of the respondents' daily life. For example, some respondents rent out rooms (rental fee around 200 RMB per month), have part time jobs or run restaurants or supermarkets, which have become the dominant source of income. Jun (40s, male) had been living in Neighbourhood *VI* for about 20 years. Recently, he built many rooms in his yard and above his own rooms to rent out to incoming migrants from rural areas. He considered this as an achievement that has increased his self-esteem, as he is able to make a living on his own rather than rely on government subsidies.

It is vital for those who are deprived to find ways to make ends meet. Most respondents reported they need much less to maintain their life in the declining neighbourhood than they would in the high-rise apartments which may be made available by the local government as part of the relocation process. Firstly, they have to pay little, if any, housing management fees compared to residents living in newly built neighbourhoods. Local residents do not need to hire and pay for a real estate management company

to undertake general neighbourhood maintenance. Secondly, by mobilizing local resources, such as building hot-brick beds[1] and collecting firewood, etc., residents can save money on living cost. For instance, respondents living in *Neighbourhood I* and *II* reported that they really enjoy the open market near their neighbourhoods because they can save money by buying good quality goods for a low price.

Local residents are also economically dependent on job opportunities in or close by the these neighbourhoods. In addition, these traditional neighbourhoods are often in relatively desirable locations (e.g. close to the public transportation) making these parcels of land potentially expensive after redevelopment. Thus, some respondents consider remaining in occupancy as a positive strategy that will result into an increased amount of compensation from the redevelopment agencies. Actually, the disparity between their expectation of the increased value of the land in the future and the current compensation criteria makes most residents dissatisfied with the redevelopments and unwilling to move (He & Asami, 2014). For instance, some respondents reported that the housing prices in the adjacent newly built neighbourhood are higher than the amounts of money in line with the compensation criteria that local governments offer to them. This means that they cannot afford the dwellings from surrounding neighbourhoods with merely the monetary compensation from local governments, and that they are not fairly compensated based on the market price.

We found that many respondents are generally in a position to maintain their current living conditions, but are not able to improve them, or to achieve upward social mobility, due to limited resources, including basics such as education or social networks that include 'outsiders' that may be a link to employment opportunities. Thus, those who stay in these declining neighbourhoods are to some extent economically trapped there. This may explain why some respondents said that they had been looking forward to redevelopment as they would like to move into newly built neighbourhoods. They want to escape the stigma of the declining neighbourhood. However, they are also concerned about their economic situation, because after relocation it seems almost impossible for them to mobilize local resources again to gain income and reduce their living costs:

I prefer the current undesirable living conditions, and at least I still have my income as a safeguard … After this [demolition and relocation] my conditions will be better… but I will be nothing …I will have no money in my pocket anymore… (Jun, 40s, male, Neighbourhood VI)

The ambivalence in the physical dimension of place attachment

Respondents have developed their own patterns of using neighbourhood and housing space, reflecting activity patterns established over a long period of residence. Many respondents reported that their neighbourhoods provide good access to public transport, schools, hospitals, open markets, etc. Most of the residents live on low incomes and cannot afford taxis or a private car, making the proximity to these facilities highly important, especially for the aged people.

Most of our respondents are satisfied with the physical aspects of their current dwellings. The residential buildings are from one to three stories, which enables residents to get out of their private rooms easily for daily activities such as cooking or exercise. This is especially important for the aged or the disabled since their mobility can be greatly affected by the physical barriers. They are worried about moving into the high-rise buildings because they would be less motivated to go outside. Unlike high-rise buildings, these low-storey buildings are more open and their neighbourhoods provide more public space than the apartment in the high-rise buildings, which makes it easier for residents to meet and interact with their neighbours. This was important for most respondents as it allowed them maintain their social network. Ai (30s, female, Neighbourhood *VI*) gave her opinion on moving to a high-rise building after demolition, compared with her current courtyard:

Residents living in the high-rise building apartment are trapped in it … Now you see I live in this courtyard, and I feel very comfortable to go outside and inside … and it is very convenient. If I live in the high-rise building, it will take time to go up into the apartment and go down to the ground …

Residents in these traditional neighbourhoods have the flexibility to change some of the characteristics and lay-out of their dwelling space. This is because these neighbourhoods have more open space and less rigid construction management than the newly built neighbourhoods. As we saw above, for example, residents can employ empty spaces in their yard to construct more rooms to house other family members, store furniture or rent to others. Also, some of the respondents have their own gardens, which are scarce or non-existent in the high-rise buildings that may provide relocation options. More importantly, homeowners have more autonomy than those who are living in the recently-built commodity dwellings in relation to construction within their dwellings. For example, they can build their own heating systems, such as hot-brick beds, to warm the rooms. However, this will not be possible when they move into the high-rise buildings. In addition, some respondents considered that the actual amount of living space they will have will shrink if they move into apartments

in high-rise buildings after relocation. Respondents recounted the many advantages of their current dwellings and how they better meet their lifestyle, both practically and emotionally. As Jun (40s, male, *Neighbourhood VI*) indicated:

Here [in my courtyard] I can grow vegetables and raise chickens or a dog. I like animals. My children like animals ... I don't think there will be enough space in the high-rise apartment [even] for my furniture ....

Nevertheless, residents feel ambivalent about the overall physical state of their neighbourhood. Many respondents reported that they were not satisfied with the deterioration of the sanitation conditions. The decay in the physical conditions, such as the lack of toilets and sewage system in their dwellings, as well as the poor sanitation conditions in their neighbourhoods generally, have motivated their moving intention. Some respondents would prefer that the living conditions of their existing dwellings be improved or redeveloped, while others would prefer that the neighbourhood conditions were improved while their dwellings remained unchanged. A third category would prefer to leave both their current neighbourhood and dwellings. Ai (30s, female) recounted her ambivalence about moving:

Now these residents have all occupied the streets with constructed dwellings, so there is no room for sewerage at all on the street. It is very dirty here ... I never wear my good shoes and walk here ... I have an ambivalent feeling. I want to move out and also don't want to (laugh, observed hesitation). I want to move out into the apartments in the high-rise building just because it is very neat and clean.

As mentioned above, respondents claim that the lack of investment by *danwei* and local governments and the perceived antisocial behaviour of migrants (see section 4.4.1) have contributed to the physical deterioration of the neighbourhoods. However, Ai's statement implies that local residents are also abusing their own neighbourhood environment. In addition, many homeowners have stopped investing in their dwellings to maintain good dwelling conditions due to the extent of neighbourhood degradation and the strong likelihood of redevelopment. In fact, many local residents have established many illegal constructions merely to enlarge the floor area of their dwellings, because (the amount of) compensation is partly dependent upon the size of the current dwelling. Some of these illegal constructions have almost no residential function and they only serve to accelerate the degradation of the neighbourhood and disturb the residents' sense of place.

Perceptions towards the impending demolition and relocation

Most respondents have reported that they feel that the redevelopment is necessary. Some of them discussed their neighbourhoods in terms of 'you cannot find another place as worse as this in Shenyang'. These respondents intend to move into newly built neighbourhoods if the opportunity arises. In fact, some of them have been anticipating the redevelopment for a long time since they expect to 'live a happy life [after moving into relocation neighbourhoods!]'. Some of them even went to the office of the local government to make appeals for the redevelopment of their neighbourhood.

Many factors contribute to their willingness to accept the redevelopment and the associated forced relocation. The aforementioned perceived neighbourhood decline and deprived socio-economic status have negatively affected their quality of their life and self-esteem. As part of wider societal changes, the changing meaning of 'home' under market transitions in China also raises their aspiration for state-led neighbourhood redevelopment. The meaning of home is not limited to the dwelling, but it has also increasingly becoming an asset of growing financial importance, reflecting the resources and social status of an individual or a household. For instance, in current urban China, a dwelling is required for a marriage in most cases, which was also reported by several interviewed residents. Also, based on the fact that it has become increasingly difficult for these stayers to afford dwellings under current housing market, SRPs with large government subsidies can be a chance for these residents to improve their living conditions.

Residents living in these deprived neighbourhoods cannot afford better housing. Now [with the compensation] you can buy a dwelling slightly better than the current one. That is fine. We should be happy with this improvement although it is very tiny (Mei, female, 60s, Neighbourhood V).

However, when they are informed that their neighbourhoods are going to be redeveloped, many respondents show obvious ambivalent feelings, as mentioned in the previous subsections. Because the *danwei* neighbourhoods provide them with housing and various resources with which they can relieve their life constraints, forced relocation can be very disruptive. In the post-relocation situation, it is highly unlikely that they can mobilise the same resources as in their *danwei* communities.

The perceived lack of autonomy in relation to the impending forced relocation process also bothers many respondents. They feel insecure about the forced relocation process. They have witnessed many examples in adjacent neighbourhoods or within Shenyang about how local governments or developers fail to realize their promises

on rehousing the affected residents on time. Residents can now reveal their opinions on whether they agree with the redevelopment or not and to choose the real estate assessment company which sets the compensation criteria by assessing the value of residents' dwellings. However, the influence of residents on the redevelopment process is limited. As soon as the local governments start the redevelopment process, it is impossible for the residents to stop it. Therefore, they feel uncertain about whether their living conditions will improve or not, as the current relocation neighbourhoods provided by local governments are distant from and lack many public facilities. Some stayers reported that it would still difficult for them to afford bigger dwellings to accommodate their family members after the redevelopment. These stayers expect the current redevelopment to lift themselves out of their multi-deprived situation before the redevelopment, which is out of the scope of the current SRPs focusing merely on improving the living conditions of these residents. Therefore, some stayers realize that there probably will be limited improvements in their life after redevelopment:

We cannot afford the new buildings and we have to buy another one just like this …. The redevelopment is like sun shining into dark corners, but we are so dark and cold …. The redevelopment cannot improve our situation fundamentally…(Mei, 60s, female, Neighbourhood V)

Meanwhile, most of them are concerned about how they will adapt to the physical environment after forced relocation. Ai (30s, female) regarded moving to a high-rise building after relocation as becoming '*trapped in it*'. Most respondents reported that the location of their current neighbourhood has obvious advantages over that of the relocation neighbourhoods provided by local governments (see also section 4.4.3). They reported that the proposed relocation neighbourhood provided by local governments to rehouse them is far from the city centre and that it currently lacks many public and commercial facilities, increasing their reluctance to relocate. Moreover, they were concerned about a potential dramatic reduction in neighbourhood contacts once they moved to a high-rise building. Respondents regard the level of social engagement in high-rise relocations neighbourhoods as relatively superficial and generally showing indifference. This echoes previous research, which found that residents currently living in newly built neighbourhoods in urban China cherish privacy and prefer to maintain anonymity and a distance within their communities (Zhu et al., 2012).

Discussion

The paper unravels the influences of the impending demolition and relocation on residents by revealing the ambivalence in their place attachment on the basis of interviews with 33 homeowners from *danwei* communities. These stayers' lived experience and ambivalent feelings show how those urban residents who are in multi-deprived situation mobilise local resources to relieve their life constraints, which translates into a strong place attachment. This is playing out in a changing context, in which the joint effects of market forces, institutional arrangements and individual situations have contributed to the declines of their *danwei* communities, the emergence of the deprived social groups and their struggles for decent housing. We will now discuss the influence of these developments in more detail.

A series of SOE reforms has led many *danwei* to transfer their obligations regarding neighbourhood management to local governments such as local housing bureaus. However, these departments invest little in these neighbourhoods and the homeowners themselves also lack the motivation for investing in their declining neighbourhoods because they are financially incapable and expect neighbourhood redevelopment in the near future, which would surely destroy their investment. Return on investment is not only important for the residents themselves. Redevelopment of declining neighbourhoods in China has been selective as it is mostly driven by market mechanisms (Liu and Wu, 2006). While declining neighbourhoods with high profit potentials (e.g. good location, large-scale and relatively simple homeownership[2]) have become the priority for redevelopment, those neighbourhoods with high redevelopment costs and less economic profits (e.g. complicated homeownership structures, relatively small scale or poor location) have remained underdeveloped by both the governments and the market (Liu and Wu, 2006).

Parallel to the increasing importance of market transition, the unemployed and laid-off residents from *danwei* communities have developed into one of the most deprived social groups in urban China (He *et al.*, 2008, 2010; Liu and Wu, 2006). Wu (2004) has indicated these laid-off workers may "slip into poverty, becoming segregated from mainstream society in terms of their consumption and life styles" (p. 414). He and her colleagues (2010) further explained that social welfare entitlement and market remuneration are the two dominant factors that lead to these residents' trap in deprivation. The pension or Minimum Living Standard Scheme (MLSS) subsidies from *danwei* or local governments can only maintain these residents' basic living. Sudden family changes or events such as enrolling at universities, serious illness or buying dwellings, can lead these households into severe poverty. Also, the unemployed residents cannot sell their labour capital with a decent price in current labour force

market, because of their low education and limited skills; they cannot meet the job requirements under industrial restructuring and upgrading in China (Wu, 2004). In addition, they are also not willing to work in the low-end service or labour intensive industries (He *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, these residents become socially, physically and economically dependent on and trapped in their neighbourhoods. Specifically, they are in a multi-dilemma relationship with their declining neighbourhoods: (1) poor residence but enough space for accommodating their family members by adapting their dwellings and constructing illegal extensions, (2) low-income but also and low-cost living in these neighbourhoods, (3) and shrinking but strong social networks among the stayers.

Neighbourhood deterioration has negatively affected the capacity of our respondents to live a decent life and motived them to leave. However, the rising housing price cuts of alternative housing. This dilemma is closely related to the fact that housing access in current urban China is largely dependent on a household's income and status and whether people qualify for subsidized housing provided by the state or work units (Chen *et al.*, 2014; Lee, 2000; Wang *et al.*, 2012). Therefore stayers in *danwei* communities are, to a large extent, excluded from current housing provision system in China. They have to rely on the state-led neighbourhood redevelopment projects, such as the SRPs, which focuses on improving the living conditions of these deprived homeowners by strong governmental subsidies. SRPs to some extent resemble the prevalent social housing redevelopment projects in Western Europe and the USA, which aim to tackle issues such as poverty concentration, disorder and segregation (see e.g. Goetz, 2013; Kleinhans and Kearns, 2013; Lelévrier, 2013). However, many scholars have criticized that such redevelopments are very likely to cause gentrification and displacement of low-income residents, and that often the aim for social welfare delivery is substantially moderated for the achievement of general economic growth (Goetz, 2016; Marom and Carmon, 2015). Similarly, current SRPs are featured by large-scale physical demolition of dwellings and spatially involuntary movement of residents. The social, economic and physical appeals of these deprived stayers have not yet draw full attention form governments, which is very likely to cause disruption to these stayers who are strongly dependent on their neighbourhoods.

In the US and Western Europe, renters can get compensation from local governments (Goetz, 2016; Kleinhans and Kearns, 2013), which is quite different with the experiences of their counterparts in China. In China, renters in declining neighbourhoods are mostly migrants seeking for cheap apartments. They are usually excluded during the redevelopment process. They can neither get compensation from the governments nor developers, because homeownership determines residents' accessibility to different social resources such as compensation during urban redevelopment. Also, unlike the case in the UK which displays that migrants are more

attached to their neighbourhoods compared with the natives (Egan et al., 2015), Wu (2012) shows that migrants in China have slightly lower level of attachment than local residents. Nevertheless, he (Wu, 2012) found that migrants have stronger wiliness to remain in these neighbourhoods than local residents. This might be because that compared with their former living conditions in rural areas, migrants can economically and socially benefit from the job chances, low-living cost and the social networks based on their acquaintances from their origins (laoxiang) by living in these *danwei* communities, which makes them more tolerant with the deteriorated living conditions than the stayed homeowners (He et al.,2010; Wu, 2012). Overall, the access for better housing of deprived social groups in declining neighbourhoods, including homeowners, the renters and migrants, is challenged under market transition in China. They can neither afford commodity dwellings nor obtain access to subsidized housing, which shows the dysfunctioning of the marketization of the Chinese housing market (Chen *et al.*, 2014; Lee, 2000; Meng, 2012).

§ 4.7   Conclusions

This paper has focused on the lived experiences that affect the place attachment of homeowners living in declining Chinese *danwei* neighbourhoods which face demolition. We found that these homeowners, often long-term stayers, have become increasingly ambivalent regarding their place attachment in the face of neighbourhood redevelopment and impending forced relocation. While they report a sense of satisfaction with and dependence on their neighbourhoods, they simultaneously report dissatisfaction and an inclination to move due to the decline in the quality of life in their neighbourhood. The impending demolition forces residents to face a dilemma concerning the relative importance of various dimensions of their attachment to the neighbourhood and the desire to relocate to achieve better living conditions. This paper contributes to the literature on relocation and urban redevelopment by showing how the affliction (i.e. a sense of loss and grief), which may manifest itself during or at the post-relocation stage of urban redevelopment (Fried, 1963), may already emerge strongly at the pre-relocation stage in the case of poor Chinese homeowners in *danwei* communities. Our findings for this particular group of residents fills a clear gap in the literature that is dominated by experiences of public or social housing tenants in the United States and Europe.

Exploring the ambivalence in their neighbourhood experience helps us understand how these homeowners have coped over time with changing conditions in their neighbourhood which are currently amplified by their almost certain relocation if

redevelopment actually starts in their neighbourhood. These (neighbourhood) changes to some extent disrupt their place attachment. Due to serious physical decline and high population turnover, deprived homeowners living in these neighbourhoods have already experienced the sense of discontinuity even before the start of the redevelopment project. On the other hand, their place attachment in some cases is even enhanced while they are suffering from negative neighbourhood changes. This is because these changes force and stimulate these homeowners to transfer the challenges caused by them into resources from which residents can benefit. In light of this, place attachment can be regarded as the outcome of a combination of the living strategies of residents over time under changing socioeconomic and institutional contexts. These deprived homeowners are attached to their neighbourhoods emotionally based on the long term of residence, family history and the collective memories in the socialist era. However, their strong dependence and attachment on the functional (tangible social and economic resources) aspects of the neighbourhood might be more significant as it is related to their living strategies.

To summarize, it is vital to focus on residents' lived experiences and place attachment at the pre-relocation phase, because it can help us better understand the coping strategies of residents facing urban redevelopment. Gaining an understanding of their perspectives while they are living through this phase may provide better insights than asking ex-residents in the post-relocation phase, i.e. making a retrospective assessment of their pre-demolition life (Goetz, 2013). During the pre-relocation phase they need to make compensation choices based on their current household, dwelling and neighbourhood situation. They also need to evaluate the merits and demerits of staying in their declining neighbourhood and the potential outcomes of redevelopment. It is vital that policymakers and local governments take these factors associated with residents' lived experiences and living strategies into consideration if they wish to improve the living conditions of those who are deprived.

Notes

1 The hot-brick bed is a traditional type of bed found in northern China, designed to provide a warm bed when it is cold. They are made from bricks or clay and can be connected to either or both the stove and the central heating system in the dwelling.

2 The homeownership composition in an neighbourhood affects local governments' willingness on neighbourhood redevelopment. If the homeownership is complicated, it means that local governments need to spend more efforts on mediating the interests between different households and family members, which not only involves a lot of conflicts, but also might increase the cost and time for the development.

3 Table 4.2 shows the basic socioeconomic information of the respondents such as age, gender, household size and the length of residence in their neighbourhoods etc. We had to estimate the age of some respondents because they did not report their exact age but give a rough range of age. For instance, if they are 74, they would report it as 'about 70'. It was very difficult to further ask their exact age because some respondents were cautious about their personal information especially against the context and forced relocation and urban redevelopment.

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