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Staying in the nest? A study of young adults' co-residence with parents in the United Kingdom, mainland China and Hong Kong

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Abstract

Academic research and social media suggest that parent-adult child co-residence is a growing trend in both Western and Chinese societies. This trend differs from the general perception of the spread of individualism accompanying economic development and modernisation. Less is known about who co-resides with their parents and why.

This study aims to examine how and why the co-residence of young adults (aged 21-35) with their parents has changed over the past 25 years in three societies with different family cultures: the United Kingdom (UK, Western culture), mainland China (Chinese culture) and Hong Kong (Chinese culture with a British colonial history). Drawing upon multiple waves of representative data since 1990, this study will address two main research questions: (1) **how the parent–adult child co-residence changed over the past 25 years**, specifically, (1.1) what are the main characteristics of co-residing adult children and their parents and (1.2) how these characteristics changed; and (2) **why young adults co-resided with their parents**. To answer the second question, this study will first analyse how the changes in co-residence associate with the key factors derived from three main perspectives: the perspective of cultural norms, the life course perspective and the social inequality perspective on intergenerational transfer. To examine the causal relationship between co-residence and the factors identified in the data analysis, this study will conduct a random telephone survey with vignettes in Hong Kong, a modern city that mixes Chinese and Western cultures.

This study will make four contributions. First, to the PI's best knowledge, it will be the first study to describe the co-residence trends in the past 25 years of the societies. The potential findings will provide a better understanding of the changes in co-residence and highlight this living arrangement as an important domain of youth transition.

Second, unlike the cultural norm perspective with its emphasis on filial piety and adult child–to–parent support in co-residence, this study will present a new perspective of social inequality that addresses the intergenerational transmission of parental resources to their offspring in an effort to explain parent–adult child co-residence. Also, this study will assess the quantitative importance of the key factors in determining co-residence.

Third, this study will identify the causal relationships between co-residence and the key contributing factors of the theoretical perspectives. Finally, the potential findings will provide policy recommendations for planning residential policies, mitigating intergenerational inequality, and supporting youth development in Hong Kong.