

Leisure Life in Later Years: Differences between Rural and Urban Elderly Residents in China

Baoren Su

Zhejiang Gongshang University
People's Republic of China

Xiangyou Shen

Pennsylvania State University
United States

Zhou Wei

Zhejiang Gongshang University
People's Republic of China

This study was undertaken in view of the large and growing numbers of older adults in the People's Republic of China. We examined the differences in the leisure life between rural and urban elderly residents. Significant rural-urban differences were found in the pattern of leisure involvement and general perceptions about leisure life of aged people. The underlying social and economic reasons that may account for such differences, from the Household Registration System (HRS) and the massive rural-to-urban migration to the large-scale privatization in China's economic reform are discussed extensively. Implications for future research and China's elderly-population-related policies are also provided.

KEYWORDS: *Older adults, leisure, time use, rural residents, rural-urban difference.*

Introduction

There has been increasing interest in the use of time among older persons because of the unprecedented rapid aging of the world population. In the United States, for example, the number of persons ages 55 to 64 is projected to increase by 15.9 million between 2000 and 2015, contributing 86% to the population increase of people between the ages of 25 and 64 (Godbey, in press), while the number of persons 65 years of age and older in the U.S. will amount to 64.6 million in 2030 and 110 million in 2080 (23.5% of the total population) (USBC, in Carp, 1990). Other nations such as Japan, South Korea, and many European countries see a similar trend of population shift. As home to the world's largest population, China is undergoing rapid growth both in the proportion of the total population and sheer numbers of elderly people. Accordingly, the aged Chinese population and how this population uses free time, which becomes the primary form of time in later years, have drawn increasing attention both in China and the world.

Address correspondence to: Xiangyou Shen, Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Management, Penn State University, 201 Mateer Building, University Park, PA 16802. Phone: (814) 574-6362. Email: sshen@psu.edu

Aging Chinese Population

Over the past half-century, China has considerably slowed the country's rate of population growth through some of the world's most restrictive national birth planning policies, including the most controversial "one-child" campaign launched in late 1970s, which brought about rapid and extensive fertility declines in China in the past 30 years. However, the dramatic fertility decline has also sped up the aging of population in the country. It is reported that in 2000, the proportion of the population age 60 or older increased to more than 10% from just over 7% in 1953 (Riley, 2004). With a population of 134 million, elderly Chinese now account for 1/5 of the world's and half of the Asian older population (Yuan, 2004). On the other hand, the massive public health programs developed by the Chinese government since the 1950s have greatly decreased the mortality rate and prolonged people's life expectancies. According to official estimates, by 2001, Chinese life expectancy at birth had risen to 71.8 years from 64.0 years in the 1980s (UNESCAP, 2003, in Riley). Population aging is becoming one of the most significant demographic changes in China with the elderly share projected to reach 27% in 2050 (Riley). Such a demographic shift combined with the other two social economic changes, namely, increased living standard as the result of 1980s economic reform in general and an extended period of post-work life for older adults living in cities because of the institutionalization of retirement in particular, have made aged persons' lives, especially their leisure life, an increasingly important theme of social conversations in China.

Rural-Urban Differences

The issue of Chinese aged people's leisure life will be deceptively simple if we speak of it without taking a closer look at the country's demographic changes in relation to the changing social-economic realities. The two aspects intrinsically intertwine with each other and together complicate the topic of aged people's leisure life to a great extent.

China has seen a dramatic economic growth over the past ten years with its GDP increasing at a rate of 7-8% annually. However, many challenges have emerged along with the fast economic development. For one, rural-urban tension is becoming increasingly pronounced as the social and economic inequalities enlarge in the country.

The rural-urban gap in China has long existed as a result of the country's dichotomous societal structure since the establishment of the People's Republic, which had been imposed and enhanced by the well-developed system of household registration. Specifically, the household registration system (HRS) was meant to strictly control the movement of population, especially between rural and urban areas, in support of government's planned economy practice prior to early 1980s, including restrictive labor policies and tying distribution of food to official residence (Suyala, 2003). Except for effectively binding people to the locality in which they hold official household registration, the system also creates stark differences in the lives of rural

and urban residents, with the urban dwellers entitled to more social services such as favorable social security assistance, more and better education resources, lower income taxes (relative to the agricultural taxes and miscellaneous tolls on farmers), and many other privileges. The rural-urban differences, among other increasingly visible occupational, gender, ethnic, and educational differences, have become even more apparent since the massive economic reforms of the early 1980s, as China started to adopt aspects of a market economy and shifted the goal of the state from socioeconomic equality to economic development and growth (Riley, 2004). According to the World Bank, despite the great advancement in Chinese people's living standard over the past 20 years, 11.5% of China's rural population still lived below the poverty line in 1998 (Riley). Moreover, the urban/rural income ratio increased from 1.37:1 in 1985 to 2.05:1 in 2000 (Liu & Wen, 2004).

Rural-to-Urban Migration

The rural-urban inequalities signaled by the large income gaps between rural and urban residents, combined with the pervasive problem of labor surplus in Chinese rural areas, have spurred mass rural-to-urban migration since the economic reforms of the 1980s, when the government started to loosen the movement of population and free people to pursue new sources of income (Xu, 2003). The massive internal migration in the country had accelerated the process of urbanization, with the proportion of urban population doubling and increasing from less than 20% before 1980 to slightly over 40% in 2003 (see Figure 1). Meanwhile, the urban population increased by 452.1 million within 50 years, accounting for 63% of the total population increase (see Table 1).

In 1995, the Chinese government experimented with HRS reforms in 57 selected counties (Suyala, 2003). Starting from 2000, China launched a series of regional-level HRS reforms in nearly 50% of provinces and cities (Xu, 2003). New regulations substitute "conditioned-entrance" (gaining the permission to enter cities as legal migrants if certain conditions are met) for the previous strict "quota control," with an aim to eventually establish a unitary registration system based on the actual place of residence instead of the historical one. The effects of these reforms were reflected in the relative rate of changing of rural and urban population proportions. As Figure 1 indicates, the urban population increased by over 7% between 1995 and 2000, nearly twice the average rate prior to 1995.

The ongoing massive migration is mostly made up of streams of young migrants from the countryside. However, the influx of young people into cities has not significantly slowed the aging of urban population (Riley, 2004). Meanwhile, the aging of rural population maintains a high rate due to the exodus of young people, which cancels out the effects of higher fertility rates in the rural areas. According to Yuan (2004), the proportion of the elderly population in rural areas is at least one percent higher than that in urban areas, with the persons 65 years of age and older accounting for

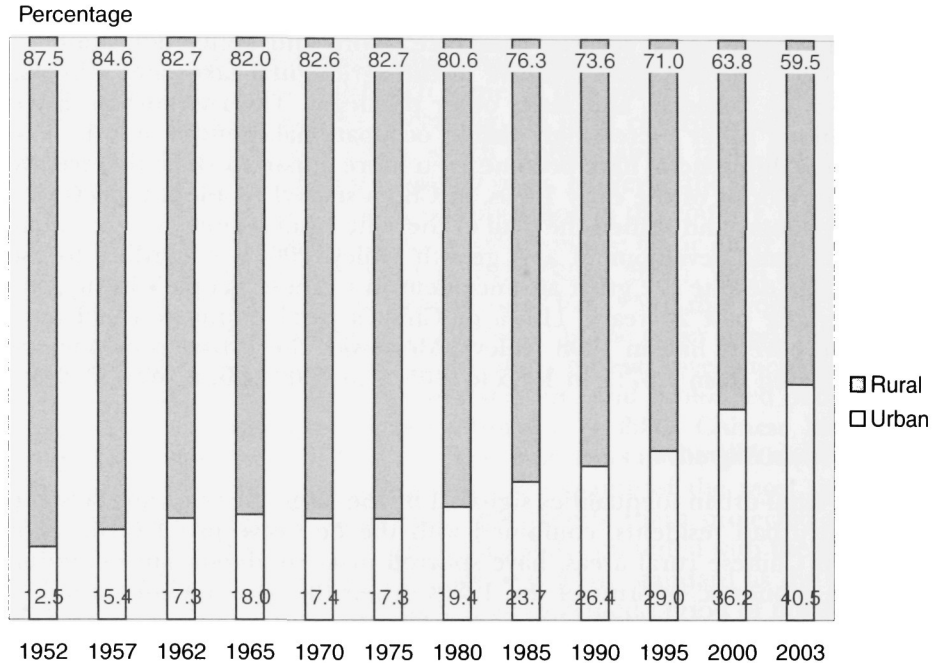


Figure 1. Proportion of rural and urban population in China: 1952-2003

TABLE 1
Change in Chinese Rural and Urban Population (in Millions): 1952-2003

Year	Total Population	Rural	Urban
1952	574.82	503.19	71.63
1957	646.53	547.04	99.49
1962	672.95	556.36	116.59
1965	725.38	594.93	130.45
1970	829.92	685.68	144.24
1975	924.20	763.90	160.30
1980	987.05	795.65	191.40
1985	1058.51	807.57	250.94
1990	1143.33	841.38	301.95
1995	1211.21	859.47	351.74
2000	1267.43	808.37	459.06
2003	1292.27	768.51	523.76

Note: the data before 1980 (including 1980) were from the household registration; the data from 1980 through 2000 were based on China 1989 and 2000 censuses; the data of 2003 was based on a sampling survey. Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, Statistical Communiqué, 1999, 2001, and 2003.

7.3% of the rural population in China. Additionally, the massive emigration of young people has produced large numbers of two-end households (with residents mainly made up of young children and old people) in rural areas, in which the old people have to take the role of primary caregivers at home (many of them have to do farming work in order to help maintain the family). This factor and other before-mentioned reasons together render rural aged people a more vulnerable group compared to their urban counterparts.

The Growing Floating Population

Another issue directly derived from the population movement is migrants. China's massive rural-to-urban migration has created a rapidly growing special group in the country: the "floating population." The term refers to the unsanctioned migrants: people who migrated to a new location where they do not hold official household registration (*hukou*). The fifth China census shows the floating population in the country to be between 110 and 140 million, which accounts for about 10% of the total population (Liu & Wen, 2004).

The direction of the flow of floaters tends to be from poorer areas, often in the interior and rural areas, to richer eastern areas and cities (Jiang, 2003; Riley, 2004). As mentioned before, the Chinese government has loosened control over the movement of population since the economic reform of 1980s. Since then, many rural residents have obtained the government permission to work in cities with the hope to earn more income. Many migrants working in cities eventually have "earned" the local *hukou* (i.e., they were officially approved to change residence and, hence, have the state's permission to use all social services enjoyed by *hukou* residents). The requirements for getting local *hukou* differ from city to city, but most cities enlist at least two requirements: a formal stable job and a legal place of living. This seemingly low threshold in reality excludes a large number of migrants from becoming legal *hukou* residents in the cities where they work (Jiang, 2003). As a result, the non-*hukou* migrants are denied or, if not completely denied, charged a very high fee for access to schools, health care, and other necessary social and economic services. Without the state support and institutional access granted regular *hukou* dwellers, floaters lead a particularly difficult life as second-class citizens at the margins of cities. In this sense, the floating population is a group of people who have been trapped in an ambiguous gray social zone between rural and urban by the incongruous government policies and flawed social systems in the country.

The way of life of floating populations may go beyond the domain of this research (see Q. Li (2004) and Zou (1999) for a review of the living conditions including occupational composition, leisure life, and other issues associated with floating population), but at least one thing is worth mentioning before we proceed. That is the development of the floating population directly affects rural, if not all, older adults' lives. As time goes by, the

floaters will continuously diverge into two groups: one that settles down in cities permanently—this group of new urban dwellers will bring into cities the children and old people they once left behind in villages (10 years from now, researchers may expect a sizable group of aged migrants in their urban samples); the other will return to the countryside after years of working in cities—they will bring back capital, knowledge, new values, and life styles that may fundamentally transform the traditional way of living in rural areas.

Leisure Life of Elderly People in China

The demographic changes in forms of population aging have drawn much attention in the academic world, particularly from within China. Numerous research efforts have been devoted to social-economic issues such as health care, housing of elderly people, and poverty among aged populations (e.g. Wang & Zhang, 2005; F. Li, 2004). By contrast, the time use in later years, particularly in reference to aged people's leisure life, has received relatively little attention despite the vital importance of the issue to elderly people's physical and psychological well-being. Specifically, there has been an extreme lack of research in the urban-rural differences in Chinese older adults' leisure life. Given the interest of this study and in an attempt to grasp the core relation in this issue, here we review a few most relevant studies on elderly people's leisure time use, which have been done in either rural or urban areas (including suburbs) in China.

Carp (1990) conducted one of the earliest studies of Chinese older adults' leisure life. He studied the leisure activities of retired persons in Shanghai and compared them to two United States samples. Carp primarily focused on the differences between the samples in terms of the range of discretionary activities participated in by retired persons and, thus, left the time use as well as other detailed information about Chinese older adults' leisure behavior untouched. Ma, Deng, and Cheng (2004) incorporated the results from a series of surveys by their collaborators and presented a detailed description of how "Chinese older adults" distribute free time across various leisure activities. They also discussed insightfully the problems in leisure participation that prevailed among Chinese elderly persons. However, noticing that their samples mainly consisted of older adults from a few urban areas, mainly Beijing, inferences from their results about the time use of older adults in other parts of the country, especially rural areas, were vastly misleading despite that the authors attempted to speak of the whole older population.

Sun, Chen, and Han (2001) studied the spatial pattern of older adults' leisure behavior using time diary method and a small quota sample ($N = 50$, $r = 4$) of elderly persons aged from normal retirement age (60 for males and 55 for females) to 90 in Beijing. They classified participants into four categories ranging from downtown urban to suburb based on the place of residence. They found no significant difference in the leisure time availability among older people living in different areas. However, mixed evidences, with

most differences being minor or non-significant, were found in the amount of time spent on various types of leisure activities, which did not consistently relate to the proximity of a living place to downtown. One of the plausible explanations is that in China's traditional dichotomous social system, suburban residents are considered and treated as urban residents, or literally "citizens" both institutionally and customarily. Thus, the place of residence does not likely play a significant role in the life of urban and suburban residents. Zheng, He, and Chen (2004) examined the free time distribution and the types of leisure activities participated in by rural residents across the year in Hunan (an inland province in the Southeast of China). They found seasonality still played an important role in most rural residents' leisure behavior, which sharply contrasted with what researchers have found about urban residents in China (e.g., Sun et al., 2001) and the diminishing seasonal effects on people's leisure behavior in developed countries (Robinson & Godbey, 1999, in Godbey, in press). Maybe the most important finding from their study was how rural residents' leisure activity closely related to regional economic development, which rendered the pattern of leisure involvement significantly varied from place to place even within the same province. With their focus being on the rural population rather than older rural residents, however, Zheng et al. study did not tell much about the leisure life of elderly rural residents.

No research has been done on the time use of rural older adults in specific, nor is there any study that directly compares the leisure behaviors of rural and urban elderly residents. This research aims to shed some light on these issues by comparing the use of free time among rural and urban elderly persons in Zhejiang, a coastal province in the eastern part of China. Based on the review we made above, we hypothesize that there will be significant differences in leisure life between rural and urban elderly residents.

Methods

During April and May in 2004, we conducted a questionnaire survey in the urban area and surrounding villages of Hangzhou city, the provincial capital of Zhejiang province. Purposive sampling method was used in this study for two reasons: first, places of survey were selected with the consideration of availability of cooperation from communities or villages, which was critical in gaining access to the aged population; second, due to the absence of an existing sampling frame of aged population, we employed local community/village surveyors to identify senior residents in each household for our purpose. Specifically, elderly persons were identified and recruited by the staff in local community/village committee offices who consented to provide assistance during the survey. The recruiting was done household by household and was closed once the required number of participants (here, 400) were obtained.

Three categories of questions were asked: (a) the types of leisure activities, (b) subjective evaluation of leisure life in later years, and (c) demo-

graphic information, including age, sex, education, income, marriage status, and number of children. In this research, the term "leisure activity" refers to the activities participated in by elderly persons during their non-work or post-work time in the day. This definition is different from the typical one used by American and European scholars in that it may include both non-discretionary and discretionary activities or either depending on the subjective perception of participants. In this research, such a broad definition is desirable because it allows us to collect a wide range of information about how daytime is used in daily life, which will be very informative when we probe the full picture of the time use of elderly persons. Additionally, the literature suggested that it was common for Chinese older adults to spend a considerable amount of time in housework and attending children, which are not necessarily always thought of as strictly obligatory activities. Indeed, it is very possible that many Chinese aged persons find genuine fun in attending and playing with grandchildren.

Data Collection

Guided by the above-mentioned considerations, two areas, the Shangcheng district in Hangzhou city and the Yuhang County (outside the suburb of Hangzhou, consisting of over 10 villages) were selected to obtain urban and rural samples of elderly persons, respectively. With the assistance of the staff in community committee offices, 400 questionnaires were administered to residents 60 years of age and older in each area. For those who could not read, the local surveyors read questionnaires to them and assisted them in completing the questionnaires.

Altogether, 352 and 369 completed questionnaires were returned from Yuhang County and Shangcheng district, of which 335 and 356 were usable, respectively. Response rates were 83.8% and 89.0% for rural and urban sample, respectively. We compared our samples with the elderly population in the two areas and confirmed that the two were similar with regard to demographic characteristics. The descriptive characteristics for rural and urban samples are presented in Table 2.

Results

The two samples are similar in gender (chi-square = .13, $df = 1$, $p = .719$, ns) and age (chi-square = 6.52, $df = 3$, $p = .089$, ns) composition. We conducted Chi-square tests to examine whether the two samples differed in the following two main aspects: (1) the pattern of leisure involvement, including the type of activities participated at the daily base, preference for activities, and traveling in terms of frequency and expense, and (2) general subjective evaluations, including perceived availability of recreational resources, sense of security about life in later years, and general satisfaction about leisure life.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Characteristics for Rural and Urban Samples

Variable	Rural %	Urban %
<i>Sex</i>		
Female	44.0	45.0
Male	56.0	55.0
<i>Age</i>		
60-65	30.2	38.6
66-70	29.1	27.7
71-75	22.9	20.4
76 and older	17.8	13.3
<i>Education</i>		
Below elementary school	80.3	27.6
Elementary school-junior high school	14.8	41.8
Senior high school/vocational school	3.5	14.5
3-year college	1.4	9.8
4-year university or higher	0	6.3
<i>Current steady income per month</i>		
No steady income	31.1	1.4
Less than ¥500 ^a	50.2	8.3
¥501-1000	11.6	50.7
¥1001-2000	5.7	31.5
¥2001-	1.4	8.1
<i>Source of income</i>		
No steady source	18.1	2.4
Work income	9.1	2.5
Offspring	61.6	5.9
Pension	4.3	86.5
Others	6.9	2.7
<i>Marriage status</i>		
Never married	8.3	4.7
Married	67.9	68.6
Widowed	21.7	19.1
Divorced	2.1	7.6
<i>Number of Children</i>		
0	2.2	4.9
1	19.7	26.4
2	33.5	37.4
3 or more	44.6	31.3

^a100 U.S. dollars equal 828 RMB or 1 RMB equals 0.12 U.S. dollars, approximately

Leisure Activities Participated by Rural and Urban Elderly Residents

Table 3 presents the distributions of the types of daily activities and favorite leisure activities for rural and urban elderly persons. There were significant differences in the type of major leisure activities between rural and urban elderly residents (chi-square = 194.95, $df = 5$, $p < .000$). Specifically, taking care of children (20.6%) and doing housework (39.4%) were more commonly selected as daily leisure activities by the rural respondents. Urban respondents in general participated in leisure activities more often for the sake of individual's interest, such as attending senior school (20.8%) and recreation (48.1%). By contrast, only 1.9% and 15.6% of rural respondents selected attending senior school and recreation, respectively. Moreover, 10.6% of rural elderly residents selected idling or doing nothing, which is almost twice of their urban counterparts (5.6%). Finally, social visiting (11.9%) was more often selected by rural respondents, more than twice of their urban counterparts (4.9%).

With regard to preference for leisure activity, playing with children (30.3%) and chatting with friends or relatives (24.2%) were most commonly selected by rural respondents. These two types together accounts for over 50% of rural elderly persons' favorite leisure activity. Traveling was most com-

TABLE 3
Major Leisure Activities of Rural and Urban Elderly Residents in China

	Rural %	Urban %
<i>Daily Activities</i>		
Taking care of grandchildren	20.6	5.2
Housework	39.4	16.1
Attending senior school	1.9	20.8
Social visiting	11.9	4.2
Recreation ^a	15.6	48.1
Idling/doing nothing	10.6	5.6
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Favorite Activity</i>		
Traveling	15.1	33.1
Playing with children	30.3	10.8
Chatting with friends/relatives	24.2	10.7
Community volunteer work	9.7	16.1
Personal hobbies	11.2	15.7
Outdoor exercise	4.3	7.4
Other	5.2	6.2
Total	100.0	100.0

^aIncluding playing card/board games, reading newspaper/magazines, watching TV/movies, listening to radio, physical exercise, singing & dancing, shopping, personal hobbies, and contemplation

monly selected by urban respondents as favorite activity during free time (33.1%), more than twice of the rural participants. Both rural and urban respondents less commonly selected outdoor exercise as favorite leisure activity, but the responses of urban elderly residents were more evenly distributed across the remaining four categories (playing with children, chatting, volunteering, and hobbies). Overall, rural and urban elderly residents significantly differed in their preference for leisure activities (chi-square = 84.4, $df = 6$, $p < .000$).

Traveling Frequency and Expense of Rural and Urban Elderly Residents

Table 4 shows the frequency of traveling and yearly expenditure on traveling by rural and urban respondents. There were significant differences in both the frequency (chi-square = 205.21, $df = 3$, $p < .000$) and expenditure (chi-square = 221.3, $df = 4$, $p < .000$) between rural and urban elderly residents. Specifically, urban elderly residents traveled more often, with 76% traveling once or twice a year, while the majority of rural elderly residents rarely traveled (72.9% traveled less than 1 time/year). This mode is in accordance to the following distribution of expenditure on traveling. Rural elder residents in general spent much less than their urban counterparts, with 64.4% of them spent less than 500 RMB and 82.6% spent less than 1000 RMB per year on traveling. By contrast, only 11.6% of urban elderly residents spent less than 500 RMB, while 67.1% of urban elderly residents spent between 500-2000 RMB and over 20% spent more than 2000 RMB per year on traveling.

TABLE 4
Frequency and Expenditure on Traveling by Rural and Urban Elderly Residents in China

	Rural %	Urban %
Frequency (per year)		
Zero	72.9	19.2
One	16.7	56.1
Two	6.9	19.9
Three or more	3.5	4.8
Total	100.0	100.0
Expenditure (per year)		
Less than ¥500	64.4	11.6
¥500-¥1000	18.2	30.4
¥1001-¥2000	8.8	36.7
¥2001-¥3000	6.2	10.7
¥3001-	2.4	10.6
Total	100.0	100.0

General Perceptions about Leisure Life in Later Years

The results of rural and urban elder residents' general perception about leisure life are presented in Table 5. Overall, the two samples differ significantly in the evaluations of all the three aspects of leisure life: the availability of community recreational resources (chi-square = 210.68, $df = 2$, $p < .000$), sense of security (chi-square = 222.98, $df = 3$, $p < .000$), and leisure satisfaction (chi-square = 94.83, $df = 4$, $p < .000$). Specifically, 63.6% of rural respondents selected "low" and only 11.6% selected "good" when asked about the availability of recreational facilities around their residential area. By contrast, 54.1% of urban respondents selected "good" or "high" and only 13.4% selected "low" when answering the same question. Similarly, a much higher percentage of rural respondents perceived a lower level of satisfaction toward leisure life, with over one-third of rural elderly residents feeling strongly dissatisfied or dissatisfied, while less than 10% of their urban counterparts feeling the same way. With regards to the sense of security about life in general, about 17.8% of rural respondents felt hardly secure and nearly

TABLE 5
General Perceptions of Life in Later Years by Rural and Urban Elderly Residents in China

	Rural %	Urban %
<i>Availability of community recreational facilities^a</i>		
Low	63.6	13.4
Fair	24.8	32.5
Good	11.6	45.3
High	0.0	8.8
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Leisure satisfaction</i>		
Strongly dissatisfied	13.4	3.1
Dissatisfied	24.2	6.3
Satisfied	26.3	30.4
Very satisfied	30.7	40.1
Strongly satisfied	5.4	20.1
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Sense of security about life in later years</i>		
Hardly secure	17.8	3.5
Secure	30.2	71.2
Highly secure	3.2	16.8
Unknown/unsure	48.8	8.5
Total	100.0	100.0

^aThe two levels: "good" and "high" were combined when conducting Chi-square tests because of the presence of 0 count in rural*high cell (such cases are invisible to statistical procedures)

a half remained unsure or unknown. In contrast, the majority of urban elderly persons felt secure (71.2%) or highly secure (16.8%).

Discussion

Differences in Leisure Life between Rural and Urban Elderly Persons

The data provided strong supporting evidences for our hypothesis: there were significant differences in both the general pattern of leisure involvement and subjective perceptions about leisure life between rural and urban elderly residents. This finding is important in the sense that although the leisure life of Chinese rural and urban residents has been examined separately (mainly discussed conceptually), the rural-urban differences in older adults' leisure life have not been formally examined empirically.

Also, as expected, rural elderly residents were more occupied by responsibilities as caregivers, such as attending children and doing housework during daytime. Accordingly, they reported participating less in recreational activities that entertain personal interest. Moreover, the distribution of data suggested that personal preferences for leisure activity might be largely shaped by day-to-day life experiences, which are not necessarily driven by personal interest. For instance, nearly one-third of rural elderly residents chose playing with children as their favorite leisure activity. It is possible that traditional Chinese culture that places high value on family plays a role in such a choice. However, a comparison of the responses between rural and urban samples (the two samples supposedly should share similar cultural values) revealed that daily practice may exert a powerful impact, if not stronger than the cultural value, in shaping leisure preference: only 5.2% of urban respondents (about one-quarter of the percentage for rural respondents) attended children during non-work time. Accordingly, only 10.7% of them (about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the same percentage for rural respondents) took playing with children as their favorite leisure activity.

On the other hand, rural elderly persons appeared more active in social visiting/chatting. This finding is consistent with the study by Zheng et al. (2004), in which they found rural elderly residents in Hunan spent much time in visiting neighbors or friends. Two of the reasons for this may be that many Chinese villages remain blood-relationship-based and rural residents maintain frequent contacts and interactions with other village members. However, this result might also reflect the relatively low availability of recreational resources and less choice for alternative activities for rural elderly residents.

Moreover, the data implied that rural elderly persons might be less active both physically and mentally in using their leisure time. Compared to their urban counterparts, less rural aged people attended senior schools (a popular educative activity among urban older residents) and more of them spent time in idling or doing nothing. Meanwhile, rural residents less frequently traveled to other places. It seems that to a large degree the prosperous tour-

ism industry in contemporary China has been taking place within urban populations. The pattern we observed can be explained, at least partially, by the differences in education and income between rural and urban samples. The two groups significantly differed in levels of education (chi-square = 198.34, $df = 3$, $p < .000$), level of steady income (chi-square = 359.54, $df = 4$, $p < .000$), and source of income (chi-square = 476.79, $df = 4$, $p < .000$). Urban elderly residents were obviously at a more favorable position in all the three aspects compared to rural older people: they were better educated (speaking of years of schooling) and received higher steady monthly income that was mostly supported by the social security system in forms of pension. Nonetheless, the lower availability of recreational resources (also educational resources such as senior schools) in rural areas may partially accounts for the relative inactiveness of rural aged people's leisure life. We will address this in more details in the following section.

General Perception about Life in Later Years and Its Implications

The striking differences found in rural and urban elderly residents' leisure satisfaction and sense of security about life may be explained by China's current discriminatory social security system which generally only covers urban residents. Although rural residents received very basic health care and "Five Guarantees" support (for those who could not self-support or so-called "three-nos" seniors who have no legal supporter, no work ability, and no source of income) from the government, these services have been considerably cut since the country started to shift toward a market-oriented economy in the early 1980s (Zhou, 2004).

On a related note, most state investments in infrastructure, communications, schools, and other institutions have been made in urban areas. This was reflected in our findings about elderly urban residents' perceptions of public recreational resources. However, considering the fact that the municipal facilities in Hangzhou are relatively well built, we suspect our findings may to a certain degree mask the general situation in other cities. Instead, we caution against blind optimism in this regard as the Chinese government withdraws much of state support from providing and managing public recreational resources. In fact, the large-scale privatization of many government functions has started to take its toll on older residents in many cities. For example, it was reported (e.g., Sun, 2000; Ma et al., 2004) that in Beijing, while the limited and old public community recreational facilities remained poorly managed and received little funding for maintenance and updating, the majority of new leisure facilities and services had been privately invested in by commercial programs, which aimed to serve young consumers, particularly the emerging class of "Yuppies" who live a more active life and make a highly profitable target market compared to the older persons living on pension income. Consequently, many elderly urban residents spent a great amount of time at home (Sun et al., 2001). Although this is in part due to the low mobility of elderly people in daily life, the lack of appropriate rec-

reational resources should be held largely accountable. After all, it is low mobility that renders elderly people's leisure participation heavily reliant on the ease of access to recreational resources. While multiple sources of funding are in need, the government should also increase rather than cut back its investment in community-based recreational resources for both rural and urban elderly residents.

Public support in other areas such as health care and personal care will also be in great demand as the impacts of changing family structure take shape in China. Currently, many aged people, especially elderly rural residents, are used to turning to offspring (if they have any at all) for support and relying on family or relatives for care in later years. Although the state-supported rest home system in urban areas is relatively well developed, only a very small portion of Chinese urban older adults lives in nursing homes. According to a survey conducted in Shanghai, only 5.7% of people aged 50 and older are willing to move into nursing homes (Chen & Zhang, 1999). On the other hand, the "Five Guarantees" system in rural areas has been poorly maintained due to long-existing financial problems (Wu, 2003). A survey conducted in 10 counties/villages in Hunan province revealed that over 7000 *three-nos* seniors were left unattended (Zhou, 2004). Accordingly, the public supporting system has been playing a very limited role in providing personal care for older adults in China. However, family will become less likely to be the primary source of care for elderly persons as Chinese family structure undertakes deep changes. The country's birth planning policy has resulted in increasing numbers of families of inverted pyramid shape with children at the bottom, which means in each family fewer children will be available to care for elderly members. It is almost inevitable that a large number of older people in China will have to rely on public services for support in the future. Now and in the future, the government needs to invest heavily in developing a comprehensive supporting system for its growing aged population.

Limitations

Due to a lack of literature on Chinese older adults' leisure life, the leisure activities asked in the survey were determined largely based on researchers' personal knowledge. This may cause the problem that some activities were left out. Additionally, the fact that a wide range of recreational activities were put into one category caused a loss of the intricacy of information about the pattern of time use among older people to a great extent. Moreover, it may cause the problem of underrepresentation—some items were not selected simply because they were not listed or at least not listed separately. However, it is hard to estimate this underrepresentation effect unless there are independent comparable studies that provide the information of interest. For example, in a study of urban residents' time use, Wang, Li, and Shi (2004) reported that older adults spent the greatest amount of time—over 4 hours a week—on watching TV, but since he did not cover the

time spent on obligations such as doing housework and attending children, the relative time distribution across these different activities remains open to speculation. Future researchers may develop more refined and more inclusive items in this regard based on our findings and other Western rural-urban studies in aged people's leisure life.

A further caution should be noted when interpreting the results from our study. The findings may not be generalized to other parts of China due to the existing large regional differences within the country or even within the same province as observed by Zheng et al. (2004) in their Hunan rural study. Zhejiang is one of a few developed eastern coastal provinces in China. In particular, as the provincial capital of Zhejiang, Hangzhou and its surrounding rural areas are relatively better off than other parts of the province and much of the rest of China in terms of economic development and people's living standard. Moreover, large differences are also emerging within rural populations as China's economic reform proceeds (Riley, 2004). Rural households with members working in nonagricultural enterprises and having multiple sources of income are likely to rise into the upper class in rural areas while those who completely rely on farm income are now falling into the poorest group among rural populations. All these factors may add to the variations of aged people's leisure life in China. Researchers interested in capturing the full picture should take more diverse and balanced samples. Specifically, data gathered regarding the lives of older adults living in other parts of China such as less developed Western or Southwestern provinces would be very informative.

Conclusion

In this study we examined the demographic changes in China in relation to the changing social-economic conditions in the country and how these changes combined to exert profound and far reaching effects on the life of aged people living in rural and urban areas. We found large rural-urban differences both in the patterns of leisure involvement and in general perceptions about (leisure) life of elderly persons. Relating these differences with the underlying historical and contemporary social-economic realities in China, we see how deep a trench China's profoundly rooted dichotomous societal structure has dug between rural and urban residents.

Indeed, China has been of increasing interest to the world with its extreme demographic importance and dramatic economic growth and success in the past two decades. Meanwhile, with the fast development of economy, Chinese people's living standard has advanced greatly. However, the demographic changes in the country also pose emergent challenges to the country's social and economic development. The growing social inequalities best represented by the rural-urban differences have left a heavy imprint on aged people's leisure life. Deep changes in the traditional dichotomous social systems in China are needed to diminish the rural-urban gap and ensure a balanced and sustainable development of the country. Finally, as one of the first few groups of researchers studying Chinese aged people's leisure life,

we look forward to future research efforts to expand this increasingly important topic area.

References

- Carp, F. M. (1990). Leisure activities of retired persons in the United States: Comparisons with retired persons in the People's Republic of China. *International Journal of Ageing and Human Development*, 31(1), 45-55.
- Chen, Y., & Zhang, Z. (1999). A study of older adult's attitude toward nursing homes in Shanghai. *Market and Demographic Analysis*, 5(4), 31-35.
- Godbey, G. (in press). The future of work and leisure: More customized and contingent across time. In K. T. Weiermair & H. P. Bieger (Eds.) *Time shift: Impact on leisure and tourism*. Berlin, Germany: ESV Publishing.
- Jiang, Y. (2003). Household registration system reform and the migration of rural population. *Modern Economy Research*, 11, 46-48.
- Li, F. (2004). A study of the occupational composition of the floating population in Sichuan. *Journal of Chengdu Municipal Party College of C.P.C.*, 12(4), 55-56.
- Li, Q. (2004). The life reality of elderly people living in China's rural areas. *Journal of Nanjing College for Population Management*, 20(4), 13-17.
- Liu, J., & Wen, Z. (2004). The economy and policy background of floating population. *Journal of Yibin University*, 5(5), 79-83.
- Liu, J., Yi, X., & Yang, B. (2004). A review of rural surplus labor transfer in China. *Population and economics*, 1, 32-36.
- Ma, H., Deng, L., & Cheng, S. (2004). The leisure problems in the aging Chinese society. In J. Zhang & H. Ma (Eds.). *Survey studies of the state of leisure life among the Chinese public* (pp. 192-207). Beijing: Chinese Economy Publishing.
- Riley, N. E. (2004). China's Population: New Trends and Challenges. *Population Bulletin*, 59(2), 1-34.
- Sun, Y. (2000). An analysis of urban older adults' leisure behavior. *Urban Studies*, 2, 29-30.
- Sun, Y., Chen, T., & Han, Y. (2001). A study on leisure behavior of the aged in Beijing. *Geographical Research*, 20(5), 537-546.
- Suyala, Q. (2003). The break-through point of rural labor force migration: Household registration system reform. *Frontline*, 10, 103-105.
- Wang, D., & Zhang, L. (2005). Chinese elderly: How they live and how many of them are in poverty. *Chinese Population Science*, 1, 58-66.
- Wang, Q., Li, X., & Shi, L. (2004). A study of the leisure time distribution of Beijing Residents. In J. Zhang & H. Ma (Eds.). *Survey studies of the state of leisure life among the Chinese public* (pp. 144-156). Beijing: Chinese Economy Publishing.
- Wu, Q. (2003). A reflection on the current situation of five guarantees in the countryside. *Journal of Changsha Social Work College*, 10(1), 23-24.
- Xu, J. (2003). Urbanization and "farmer" workers under the regulation of household registration system. *Journal of Finance and Economics*, 20(12), 50-54.
- Yuan, Zh. (2004). An analysis of the population aging and social insurance system in China. *Journal of Yunnan Finance and Economics University*, 19(5), 85-87.
- Zheng, Q., He, X., & Chen, G. (2004). A study of the features of recreation of rural residents: A case study of Hunan province. *Human Geography*, 19(1), 17-21.
- Zhou, W. (2004). A historical analysis of the "Five Guarantees" system in China. *Exploration*, 1, 61-63.
- Zou, Q. (1999). An analysis of the leisure life of floating population in the Pearl River Delta. *Journal of Guangdong College of Young Cadres*, 38, 66-70.