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Life Course and Residential Mobility in Beijing, China

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Abstract

This paper analyses the residential mobility rate in Beijing over the period 1980-2001 as revealed by retrospective residential histories collected by way of a questionnaire survey conducted in early 2001. The results show that there was a sharp increase in residential mobility in the early reform period; however, from the mid 1980s onwards the mobility rate has been oscillating, with a slightly downward trend. Adjusting the gross mobility rate observed by means of logit regression estimation shows that this downward trend is more than a statistical artefact. Structural forces are at work to continually restrain residential moves under the reform. The regression results also show that while there are similarities between the effects of various life course variables on residential mobility in Beijing and those in cities in market economies, substantial differences are also found. Age exhibits similar curvilinear effects but mobility peaks at a somewhat later age. Homeownership with partial property right deters mobility by an even greater margin in Beijing than in cities in the west. Change in marital status is important, but does not automatically bring about a change in residence. Birth of an additional child, moreover, appears to carry minimal weight in residential change. In this sense, the thesis that residential mobility is a housing adjustment process is less applicable to the case of Beijing than it is in cities in the West.