

The Changing Perception Towards the Elderly and Co-residence in Thailand**Yong Yoon, Chulalongkorn University¹****Nopphol Witvorpong, Chulalongkorn University²****Wiraporn Pothisiri, Chulalongkorn University³****Keywords:** Co-residence, Perception towards Elderly, Pseudo-panel, Thailand

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Relevant literature and theories

Thailand, as with many other Asian countries, is aging at an unprecedented speed. Traditionally, the family has played a central role in elder care in Thailand.

Co-residence is influenced by the interplay of multiple normative, relational, behavioral, and structural factors (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Bengtson & Oyama, 2010). One can identify at least two major theoretical perspectives on aging and the elderly that can account for how working-age adult's perception may influence co-residence (and vice-versa).

Modernization theory: The modernization perspective suggests that attitudes toward co-residence may shift when societies experience rapid economic development and modernization. More specifically, younger labor is required (and preferred) in the automated production process, thereby relegating the elderly, whose skills are no longer needed, into a lower socioeconomic rank (Cowgill & Holmes, 1972; Palmore & Manton, 1974; Eytsemitan et al., 2003; Basford & Thorpe, 2004; Palmore, 2004). The result is a poorer perception towards the elderly - now regarded as a burden.

Contact theory: The contact theory argues that intergenerational conflict is a result of the lack of high-quality interactions between younger and older generations (Allport, 1954). Such interactions can complete the missing information about the elderly that the younger generation may have, which forms the basis for their discrimination (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and facilitate a better understanding between the generations (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005; Gilbert & Ricketts, 2008). As such, co-residence can help improve perception towards the elderly.

There are of course other major theoretical perspectives that can account for the trend in co-residence such as the parental investment perspective (i.e. co-residence is more likely when the elderly can provide grandchild care and even financial support, and one would suppose usually when the emotional bond between working-age adult and elderly is strong), the altruism perspective (i.e. working-age adults are more likely to co-reside with their parents if the elderly parents are unmarried, disabled, or poor), the ideology perspective (for example in many East Asian countries such as in China, co-residence may be influenced to some significant degree by cultural traditions and values derived from Confucian ideologies, such that adult children who express greater filial piety are more likely to co-reside with their elderly parents), and so on. There are of course also other major theoretical perspectives that can account for changing perspectives towards adults, such as the social identity theory, otherwise known as the age stratification theory, which suggests that people are stratified by age, just as they are by race, gender and life experiences, and form their social identities in accordance with it (Weigert et al., 1986; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). The implication of identifying oneself with a certain group is that people may assess their own age group more positively than others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) or may alienate other age groups through an in-group bias process, which creates a wedge between the generations (Butler, 1969)

Be as it may, existing empirical literature are scant on understanding the relationship between co-residence and the perception of working-age adults towards the elderly. Chu et. al. (2011) is a recent study that found that children's filial attitude had a positive association with patrilocal co-residence in Taiwan but not in Zhejiang, Fujian or Shanghai. Zhang et. al (2014) found that the stronger the filial piety expressed by adult children in China, the higher their likelihood of co-residing with their parents. Furthermore, they find that married adult children are also more likely to co-reside with elderly parents who provide intensive grandchild care and financial support or with those in need of financial, physical, and emotional support.

Research methodology

Using data from 3 waves of the Survey of Knowledge and Attitudes on Elderly Issues, conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO), Thailand, in 2007, 2011 and 2016, we empirically examine the relationship between co-residence and the changing perception of working-age Thai adults towards the elderly.

Data from the nationally representative surveys are unique and comprehensive containing information on personal characteristics and multiple questions on opinions and attitudes that of working-age Thai adults (defined as those between the ages of 18-59) have towards the elderly (defined as those aged 60 and over in Thailand).

A main problem is that given that perception may influence co-residence, empirical estimations can be biased due to unobserved heterogeneity or individual specific effects that are not accounted for in a typical regression. Two conventional methods to mitigate the bias are the instrumental variables (IV) technique and panel data regression with fixed effects.

The 3 waves used in this study are cross-sectional data captured 4 to 5 years apart, i.e. these are not panel data. However, following Deaton (1985), Veerbeek (1992) and others, we construct a pseudo-panel of cohorts built on the 77 Thai provinces. We employ the pseudo-panel approach to control for unobserved heterogeneity or individual specific effects.

We also use principal component analysis (PCA) to measure separately “negative” and “positive” perception as captured by the survey questions. As a measure of perception, the surveys contain a section that asks what the respondents think about the elderly. That is, respondents were asked to disagree or agree with a number of statements, or, could simply express their uncertainty to various statements that can be categorized into two groups, depending on how they were phrased: “Negative” statements refer to those that were unfavorably worded with reference to the elderly, i.e. older people are outdated (a70), older people are boring (a71), older people complain too much (a72), older people belong in nursing homes (a73), older people belong in temples (a74), older people are not particularly useful or productive (a75), older people are a burden to their family (a77), while “positive” statements are favorably worded, i.e. older people have useful experiences (a76), older people set good examples for later generations (a78), older people deserve preferential treatment (a79), older people can contribute to the community and the society (a80), Older people should be respected (a81).

The baseline pseudo-panel regression model is:

$$\overline{cores}_{ct} = \beta_1 \overline{negPC}_{ct} + \beta_2 \overline{posPC}_{ct} + \overline{\alpha}_{ct} + \overline{u}_{ct}$$

where *cores* is the percentage of elderly living with nonelderly members in a household at the provincial level, *negPC* and *posPC* are “negative” and “positive” perception principal components scores respectively, $\overline{\alpha}_{ct}$ captures the cohort-provincial effects, and u_{ct} is the usual stochastic term. We also include in the regression model survey year dummies (see results later). The subscript *c* represents cohorts constructed around provinces and time *t* representing survey year.

Further analysis is also done including robustness checks as well as adding more regressors/controls.

Analysis and preliminary findings

The empirical analysis looks at whether the co-residence rate (cores) defined here as the percentage of elderly living with nonelderly members in a household at the provincial level may be influenced by both “negative” and “positive” perception towards the elderly (note: the elderly is defined as age 60 and above, while the working-age Adult population is 18–59).

First, as explained earlier and because both sets of questions and their responses are highly correlated, we apply principal components analysis (PCA) method verified with a number of statistical test on the seven statements representing “negative” perception (a70, a71, a72, a73, a74, a75, a77) and five statements representing “positive” perception (a76, a78, a79, a80, a81) separately to establish 2 principal components representing “negative” perception and one representing “positive” perception (pc1n, pc2n, and pc1p, respectively).

Next, we construct pseudo-panel and run the baseline model (and an additional model) shown below:

Results for Pseudo-panel Fixed Effects Regression

Dependent variable: cores	Model 1	Model 2
pc1n (negative perception principal component 1)	-0.0412 *** (0.012)	-0.0365 *** (0.012)
pc2n (negative perception principal component 1)	-0.0196 (0.023)	-0.0281 (0.025)
pc1p (positive perception principal component)	0.0005 (0.014)	-0.0017 (0.013)
Dummy survey year 2011	-0.1248 (0.013)	-0.0176 (0.015)
Dummy survey year 2016	-0.0338 *** (0.011)	-0.0341 *** (0.012)
a3 (education)		0.0187 (0.023)
a17 (income)		0.2961 (0.067)
constant	0.3839 *** (0.007)	0.2961 *** (0.067)
Number of observations	229 (with 3 groups/surveys)	229 (with 3 groups/surveys)

() SE in parenthesis; *** p > 0.01

Our econometric analysis shows that negative perception is statistically significant and negatively related to co-residence, suggesting that growing ageism in Thailand in recent times may potentially erode the filial responsibilities of traditional Thai families.

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