



# The impact of place attachment on well-being for older people in high-density urban environment: a qualitative study

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## ABSTRACT

Aging in place has become a popular social policy worldwide. This paper argues that well-being is an important outcome of aging in place, upon which older people develop autonomy and environmental proactivity. The temporal dimension of aging in place highlights development of place attachment, which includes place identity and place dependence. The study explores how older people, who live in high-density urban environments, make sense of well-being and place attachment by articulating their daily lives. Community dwelling older people aged 65 and above, who came from neighborhoods with high aging population and residential density but high and low median household incomes, were invited for focus group discussions. Multifaceted meanings of well-being include various dimensions that cover individual-collective and material-spiritual (psychological) construct. Meanings of place attachment include values of, bonding ties to, and memories about places. Three pathways are identified linking place attachment and multifaceted well-being. The study finds that social welfare and material richness are not the only determinants of well-being. Fulfillment of higher psychological needs, such as positive evaluation of life and self-actualization, should be emphasized by which older people can make the most of their life in old age.

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## Introduction

The increasing number of older people has become a significant sign of social transformation in the twenty-first century. Specifically, Asia displays a faster rate of population aging. The United Nations (2015) projects that by 2050, nearly 62% of people aged 60 years and above will be from Asian countries.

However, the health of older people is not keeping up with their longer life expectancy (WHO, 2015). Addressing aging in place becomes a challenge for economic and social sustainability. Aging in place emphasizes the co-constitution of aging and various contextual features (a set of environments, forces, and events that exist apart from an individual) in supporting older people's positive functioning (Greenfield, 2012; Williams & Patterson, 2008).

In urban aging, older people are sensitive and vulnerable to changes in the surrounding environments (Phillipson, 2015). People's encounter with environment can lead to different health outcomes (Lawton & Nahemow, 1973; Wahl et al., 2012). Environmental docility occurs when older people's personal competence declines (such as being frail and decline in physical health). As such, living environment produces more barriers than stimuli for active aging. Contrary to docility, environmental proactivity develops when older people perceive where they live as focal areas for getting supports and recourses. They actively engage in and use different resources to maximize various goals in life (Wahl and Gerstorff, 2020). The presence of environmental proactivity articulates that older people can experience happiness, satisfaction, and prosperity when they develop positive attitudes and actions. This condition interfaces with various facets of well-being, making the latter a positive outcome for aging in place.

Moreover, people's interactions with environment are not a one-off "snapshot," but a process mediated by time. A place not only provides a space for living but also for sharing experiences with family, friends, and neighbors (Weil, 2020). Aging in place evokes not only attitudinal appraisal of but also bonding ties to where people live, giving rise to place attachment (Cattell et al., 2008; Wahl et al., 2012). Attachment is emotional, which is closely related to development of place identity. If older people feel placeless, they may reject self or suffer social exclusion (Wiles et al., 2012). Attachment also fulfills people's needs by providing resources and supports necessary for daily life (Gurney et al., 2017).

This paper conceptualizes aging in place as a process where older people's encounter with various environmental factors helps develop well-being. The articulation of aging in place as a meaning construction process highlights the importance of place attachment. The study extends the focal point of aging in place research from Western contexts to a densely populated Asian city, Hong Kong. Using a qualitative research approach, the researchers explore the meanings of well-being and place attachment, as well as how these two terms interact.

## **Impacts of place attachment on multifaceted well-being in urban environments: a conceptual framework**

### ***Place attachment and aging***

Place attachment is an important feature of aging. People's use of and interactions with environments are mediated by time; and older people link the evolution and change of places with their life course development (Wanka, 2017). The experience of living provides a sense of familiarity and belonging, whereby people identify strongly with their place of residence and develop positive behaviors to maintain their capacities of environment mastery (i.e., autonomy; Landon et al., 2021). Place attachment inspires motivations and actions to seek, stay in, and improve communities (Plunkett et al., 2018). A study shows that place attachment can offset perceptions of hardships in daily living: older people's senses of emotional attachment and social connectedness that are accumulated through time become major reasons for their staying in the original places of residence even facing difficulties (Sun et al., 2020).

Conceptually, place-attachment includes both the "attachment" feature and the "place" aspect (Low & Altman, 1992). The attachment feature suggests people develop place identity as an extension of self-identity (Sack, 1993). A person's sense of being is triggered by specific spatial contexts that serve as a reminder of the past and who they once were. Place identity ascribes strong personal, social, and community values to places, which are fundamental to individual's unique perceptions of self (Woolrych et al., 2021). Such identity is important to aging: "When older people talk about themselves, they express a sense of self that is ageless – an identity that maintains continuity despite the physical and social change" (Kaufman, 1986, p. 7).

The place feature addresses older people's reliance on a place based on its instrumental values, which is also called place dependence. It articulates the supportive quality of the living environment (Woolrych et al., 2020). A place to which older people attach themselves should possess assets and opportunities for goal attainment and activity fulfillment (Budruk et al., 2009; Bradley S Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). Older people with strong place dependence are willing to explore and make use of environmental resources. They know how to navigate and engage where they live in order to fulfill various needs in daily life (Lim & Barton, 2010).

### ***Well-being and aging***

Well-being is linked with human flourishing, illuminating a condition of good feelings and positive functioning (Michaelson et al., 2014). Functioning is also described as "eudemonic" well-being, referring to purposes and

meanings in life (Steptoe et al., 2015). Keyes (2003) proposes a triadic well-being framework, including emotional (i.e., positive affect, happiness, and life satisfaction) well-being and two functioning aspects, that is, psychological (i.e., self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others) and social (i.e., acceptance, actualization, contribution, coherence, and integration) well-being.

Discussion of well-being gains considerable importance in the urban environments, considering that cities become the foci of human settlement and economic activities. What well-being means to cities has been evolving, and recent discussions of well-being reveal closer links to aging. For example, in the 19th century, well-being was shaped as a societal problem. Well-being equated to less inequality, particularly in terms of one's share of and access to ecological resources (Milton et al., 2019). For example, garden city was a popular planning concept, which aimed to provide green spaces to citizens through relocating people from downtown to urban environs (Clapson, 2016). In the 1950s, the concept of well-being reflected aspirations for better life where working, living, and recreation were all provided in new towns (Morris, 1987). Being self-sufficient became fundamental principles for healthy cities, whereby different land uses were integrated in new towns to provide employment as well as opportunities for getting close to nature and participating in social and recreational activities.

The demographic changing and urban decay in new towns challenged the well-being concept in the beginning of 2000. Increasing levels of non-communicable diseases, mental health issues, unhealthy behaviors, and health inequalities become major challenges (Watts et al., 2020). Besides, demographic aging casts more attention to older people's well-being. First, a significant variance reveals in the relationship between well-being and aging across different countries (Steptoe et al., 2015): For example, in rich and English-speaking countries, old-olds tend to develop higher levels of well-being. However, in Latin America, there is a progressive decline in well-being with age. Second, older people's quality of life is largely affected by their physical and mental illness (Wikman et al., 2011). When people age, there is a generally decreasing trend in incidence of common chronic diseases but an increasing trend toward mental, cognitive, and functional decline, which is rooted in physical and social environments (Woo, 2017). That means a pure emphasis on disease prevention cannot achieve the best aging in place outcomes. Well-being becomes a popular term, essential to aging in place. Well-being is closely related to the characteristics of living environment. Older people's encounter with various environmental resources provides mediums for people-place interactions, which can potentially increase their positive perceptions of and attitudes toward homes and communities (Bircher & Kuruvilla, 2014).

## ***The relationship between place-attachment and well-being***

Place attachment is conducive to promoting well-being. Theoretically, place attachment adds to older people's stronger inclination to maintain closeness with their familiar place of residence (Sun et al., 2018). The environment-related belonging can compensate for age-associated functional impairment thus maintain some levels of environmental proactivity (Wahl et al., 2012). People's understanding of self is influenced by the characteristics of where they live, through ideas, feelings, values, preferences, skills, and behavior tendencies developed in a specific environment (Peng et al., 2020). Those feelings, preferences, and behaviors produce identity consistency over time, whereby people are assertive with more positive perceptions of life (Suh, 2002). Place dependence strengthens the instrumental connections between people and communities: a place meets persons' needs, thereby they are dependent on it (Anton & Lawrence, 2014). Place dependence is conducive to developing environmental mastery, autonomy, and life satisfaction.

A review of existing literature reveals two inter-related gaps. First, although the conceptualization of well-being is well developed with different terms, what well-being means for older people, particularly how older people make sense of well-being by articulating their daily life routines, remains unknown. Second, many quantitative studies have evidenced the impacts of place attachment on well-being. However, the mechanisms and reasons behind need more qualitative approaches to enrich, whereby new theories could be developed. To close both gaps, this study adopts a qualitative approach to explore multifaceted meanings of well-being and its relationship with place attachment, using focus group discussions with ground theory driven analysis methods.

## **Design and methods**

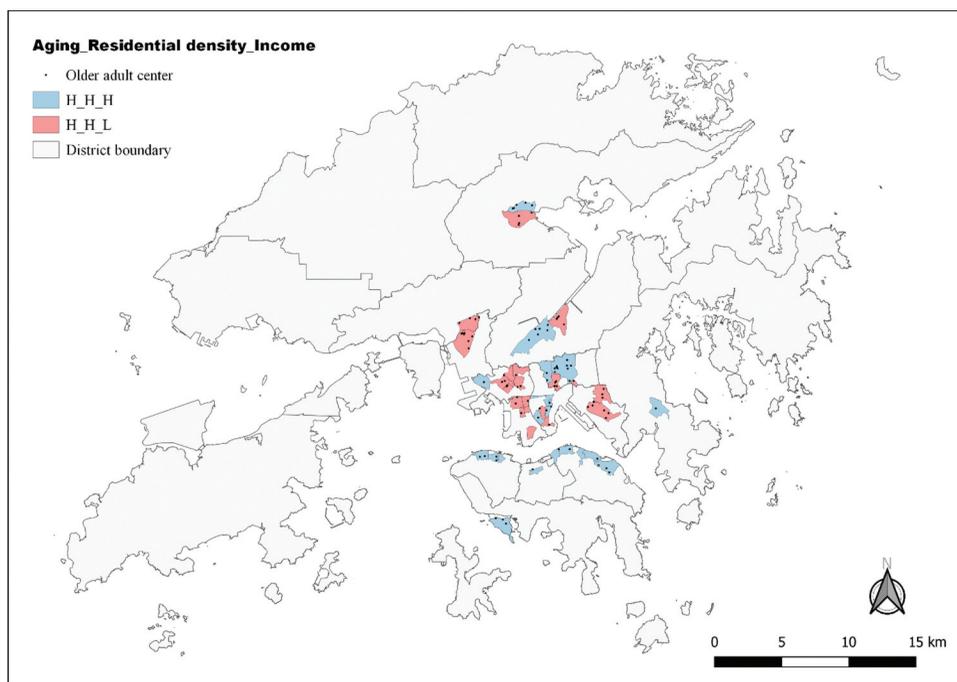
### ***Participant recruitment and setting***

The research is concerned with the question of how older people perceive and make sense of place attachment and multifaceted meanings of well-being, by referring to their daily life. Moreover, the research explores mechanisms underlying the relationship between place attachment and well-being.

Inspired by Weil (2020), ground theory approach was used whereby participants themselves contribute to develop and enrich the conceptualization of place attachment and well-being. Participants were purposively selected in order to solicit their lived experience and views (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Qualitative data were collected via focus group discussions with community dwelling individuals aged 65 and above.

Geographic Information System (GIS)-assisted quota area sampling enabled a selection of older people living in neighborhoods stratified on the basis of age, residential density, and median household income (as income variation explains differences in well-being outcomes, See: Woo et al., 2020). Tertiary Planning Units (TPUs) linked with census data suggest an appropriate scale for selecting candidate neighborhoods (Cerin et al., 2016). TPUs are the street-block clusters representing small spatial units for Hong Kong's urban-planning purposes. Based on the 2016 Population By-census (published every five years), GIS classified and mapped TPUs in the whole of Hong Kong, based on the three criteria: (1) higher percentage of population aged 65 and over, (2) higher residential density, and (3) higher/lower median household incomes. A total of 33 TPUs were selected of which 9 (24) were in the aging/high density/high income (aging/high density/low income) category (see, Figure 1). The research aimed to obtain an age and sex distribution proportional to the percentages observed in the population and a balanced number of participants living in the two categories of TPUs.

Older adult centers located in the candidate TPUs were approached for participant recruitment, as Hong Kong's Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance restricts access to residential addresses and other contact data (phone numbers) of the potentially eligible participants. Within each center, eligible participants attending the center were invited by research staff to participate



**Figure 1.** Selection of study areas and older adult centers.

in focus group discussions. Flyers were posted at these centers and the research team also sent e-mail to selected centers for getting their supports. To allow for a greater mix of respondents, research staff visited open spaces and parks near the older adult centers/ major housing estates in the selected study areas and recruited participants. The research team aimed to recruit participants with a wide range of age, as young-olds and old-olds may develop different types of lived experience whose place attachment also vary.

Eight face-to-face focus group sessions were organized from April to September 2020, and a total of 42 older people participated. The number was limited by Government's gathering restriction order (the maximum number of gathering ranged from 2 to 6, in different periods of time) due to the outbreak of COVID-19. In order to overcome such limitation, participants were recruited with maximum variations, considering age (range: 65–89 years old, aged 75 and over: 21%), gender (male: 60%), and housing types (public housing dwellers: 24%). They also need to live in their current place of residence for at least six months. Each session lasted 2 to 2.5 hours.

Each focus group was led by one faculty (moderator) and one graduate research assistant (observer and notes taking). The moderator first introduced the purposes of the meeting and asked some primary questions: "Where do you often go? Which place do you like or dislike in your community? Why?" Then, the moderator invited participants to share their insights on well-being, with particular reference to how participants frame and make sense of well-being through a wide range of ideas and concepts, as well as what lived experience or life stories they mention when describing well-being. Questions on place-attachment were informed based on existing studies to include both the place and attachment aspect (Bradley S. Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Weil, 2020). The moderator asked: "(1) Do you think where you live means a lot to you? Why? (2) Do you have special connections to the place? Why? What factors are important to sustain the special links? and (3) If you have a chance to move, what are the things in your current residence that you are most reluctant to part with? Why?"

### **Analysis**

Contents of focus groups were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed. Transcription followed an established protocol that included words and speech particles (Hendry & McVittie, 2004). One faculty and one graduate research assistant were responsible for data analysis. Faculty and graduate assistant met and collectively reviewed each transcript, taking 2.5 to 3 hours every time. A three-level coding was employed (Chun Tie et al., 2019). First, two researchers read through every sentence (a total of 1,163 sentences) and assigned initial codes to a sentence or a segment (i.e., words, sentences, or

incidents). Initial codes were inspired from the existing literature, which also included those new terms used by participants. Initial codes were then compared with other codes before they were collapsed into categories.

Second, similar categories were merged. Thus, the core codes and categories were identified. Lastly (i.e., advanced coding), simultaneous inductive approach was used whereby researchers were free to develop concepts and ideas arising from those identified categories and codes (Weil, 2017). Notes were taken during the discussions and a matrix was made indicating the flow of logics behind the creation of categories from codes and that of codes from sentences. After every transcript was discussed, one additional discussion was organized to review all categories, ideas, and concepts generated in each transcript, upon which systematic frameworks and story lines were made for place attachment and well-being.

## Results

### *Multifaceted meanings of well-being*

Discussions of well-being include both individual and collective aspects. Individually, physical health was perceived to be essential to well-being, whereby people can engage with different social life in community.

Well-being is not all about the abundance of material resources in daily life. Your body is number one. I like hanging around in the daytime, and I can go wherever I wish . . . this is crucial for me . . . (Female, 67, from Yau Tsim Mong)

Our discussion with a social worker, who mentioned that “getting downstairs, which seems easy, has become the first challenging task for many older people to go out, particularly for those who are less ambulatory or living in blocks without a lift,” confirmed this.

Some participants framed well-being as having sufficient personal competence for autonomy and self-determination, with which older people are willing to learn and explore new things in life. The term personal growth was mentioned as integral to well-being.

Well-being is being capable of doing what I used to do. (Female, 65, from Yau Tsim Mong)

Well-being should include independence, such as mobility without bodily limitations. It means I could do what I want to. It should also include being able to take care of myself without bothering others. (Male, 65, from Sha Tin)

By learning how to use information and communication technology, such as laptops and smartphones, I know new things and I feel the process of personal growth. (Female, 65, from Yau Tsim Mong)

Collectively, well-being depicts positive effects from a group of individuals who develop close social relationships. Meeting friends and neighbors in open spaces near the estate or the community center becomes one routinized activity.

The moment when I feel quite happy and satisfied is when I stay with and talk to friends and neighbors, most of the time in the community. We share the joys. I feel like I have lived the best of the day. (Female, 70, from Eastern)

Relationships create social cohesion, with which community members care about and support each other.

Staying with friends generates momentum for doing things together, which forms a strong cohesion among us. We do physical activities together every morning, and we quite expect to meet again the next morning. If you do not have such cohesion, you will feel excluded. (Female, 70, from Eastern)

Close social ties create a sense of familiarity that strengthens people-place relation. The familiar faces and streetscapes develop a strong sentimental root to people's living environment, which has a positive bearing on aging in place.

If I travel out of town for a long time, I miss the shop owners in the market. For me, they are more than running business in my community. I meet them, either passing by or on purpose, quite often, and I feel that we have close links. Greeting each other has almost become a daily routine in my life. This sense of familiarity and continuity underpins my well-being. (Female, 70, from Wan Chai)

Being able to share cheerfulness (the positive affect) and support others are characteristics developed from close interpersonal relationships. People feel they are valued and discover meanings in life.

I was diagnosed with lung cancer several years ago. I joined a patient group in my community where we support each other. One day, I met a man who was diagnosed with prostate cancer. The doctor said his life remained only half a year. I asked him to join us. We met each other in the group and did handcrafts together. He was really good at it . . . He stayed with us for four years and just passed away. By supporting him, I acquired well-being. (Female, 70, from Eastern)

Apart from with neighbors, older people's relationship with the society at large is critical to well-being. They perceive social ambience as essential for developing a good mood and a sense of security. Many people mentioned that the social movement in 2019 made them feel unhappy.

. . . I watched the news, and I felt there was chaos in our city. Although I was not at the spot of protest, I felt emotionally sad. I avoided talking about this with my children because I did not want disputes. (Female, 72, from Eastern)

Family relations are essential to collective well-being, which are not frequently reported in the Western literature. Many older people put considerable weight on family relations and goodness of family members. As such, well-being includes maintaining close ties with family members, especially their children and grandchildren.

A sense of well-being includes the presence of family ethics, that is, the responsibility of family members to care for each other. I feel sad when I see some older people left alone by their family members. They live alone and their family members seldom visit them. (Female, 65, from Sha Tin)

Well-being includes filial affection from children and harmonious family life. (Female, 70, from Eastern)

I have been retired for several years. All my children have married. I am the grandma now. I cannot think of anything more I need to be happy and fulfilled. (Female, 70, from Eastern)

Discussions of well-being also bridge material and spiritual (psychological) aspect. To begin with, income was perceived as essential to material well-being.

If you do not make enough money to make a living, you feel you are deprived of dignity. You dare not go out and participate in social activities . . . Some people must consider every dollar they spend . . . (Female, 65, from Sha Tin)

Some people's reflections on well-being go beyond the material and relational domain, to include positive mind.

Your positive mind is a catalyst for positive actions, such as being friendly to your neighbors, contacting your friends, staying in harmony with family and doing voluntary work . . . (Female, 65, from Wan Chai)

Goodness is more than happiness. It means less worry. Mentality is quite important. Since the pandemic, some people are always panicked whether they are staying at home or going outside . . . Our mind should not be dominated by these unpleasant episodes. (Female, 65, from Yau Tsim Mong)

Perceptions and views of life and living constitute to a frequently mentioned well-being dimension. People commented that how they appreciate life and living was essential to well-being, such as the feelings of gratitude and contentment in life.

There are so many challenges in life, and you are not able to overcome all these difficulties every time. If you are satisfied with and grateful for what you have at present, you will achieve well-being, which is a state of mind. I live in a community that provides me a lot of convenience and a sense of security. I quite appreciate where I live, and I do not take it for granted. A mind with peacefulness and happiness is what well-being means in senior life. (Female, 66, from Yau Tsim Mong)

If you look at what you have instead of what you lack, you will be satisfied and happy . . . (Female, 69, from Kowloon City)

**Table 1.** Meanings of well-being.

Domain	Indicator	Meanings
<b>Individual</b>	Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body and physical health come first.</li> <li>• Being able to walk out and about.</li> </ul>
	Personal competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being able to live independently and cope with challenges in community life.</li> <li>• Self-determination: Being active users of community resources and opportunities instead of passive recipients.</li> </ul>
<b>Collective</b>	Close social ties and social relation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying with friends and meeting them regularly.</li> <li>• Sharing cheerfulness with and supporting others in community.</li> <li>• Developing a sense of familiarity that strengthens people-place relation.</li> </ul>
	Social stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Society functions with order.</li> <li>• Less chaos.</li> </ul>
<b>Material Spiritual/ Psychological</b>	Family relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goodness of family members and filial affection from children.</li> </ul>
	Incomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient incomes to support living (with increased dignity).</li> </ul>
	Positive mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being friendly and nice to others.</li> <li>• Being less worried and affected by unpleasant incidents in city (such as pandemic).</li> </ul>
	Life evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A balanced view of living and hardships.</li> <li>• Being grateful and satisfied with what you possess.</li> </ul>
	Self-actualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing meaningful things and voluntary work.</li> <li>• A feeling of making contribution to the goodness of others.</li> </ul>

Following positive mind and life satisfaction, well-being also includes higher level of psychological needs, such as a sense of self-actualization. People develop well-being when they feel like contributing to the goodness of others. Voluntary work was frequently mentioned.

I teach older people physical exercise and I do not charge them money. When I see they are making progress and their health condition improves, I feel this is where my well-being comes from . . . I have earned value in this process. (Male, 65, from Sha Tin)

I do voluntary work, visiting institutionalized older people. Although they are suffering from physical limitation, they are open and optimistic when they see me. I have a feeling that I am able to affect their mood and pass positive energies to these residents. (Female, 65, from Wan Chai)

Table 1 summarizes multifaceted meanings of well-being.

***Place-attachment: values of bonding ties to, and memories about place***

Older people put considerable weight on the instrumental values of a place in supporting their daily life. Living convenience becomes the primary reason that people feel they are dependent on where they live. Convenience includes an easy access to facilities and shops, well-connected transportation, various choices for food, and pleasant natural environment.

. . . Many older people have to use wheelchairs when they go out, and they find no problems at all. From the flat to community facilities, there are covered ramps and paths. Where I live is close to shops and facilities. Some friends suggested that I move closer to them, where

friends can take care of each other. I would not substitute other places to live for mine. Besides, the natural environment, such as the Tolo harbor, Pat Sin Leng mountain, and the fresh air, make me enjoy living here more than any other places. (Female, 69, from Sha Tin)

No other place could be as convenient as where I live. There are many food choices and shops around—you have many places to go, right downstairs. A place like Discovery Bay (a residence resort with a good harbor view) is attractive. However, I am more satisfied with and inclined to live in a convenient community. (Female, 68, from Kowloon City)

... I have many transport choices apart from subway and buses. I can take the ferry, and I am fond of traveling by ferry. When I see the harbor view and the color reflected by the water, I feel quite peaceful and comfortable. I enjoy living here more than in other places. (Female, 65, from Kowloon City)

Natural environment plays a significant role for discovering the values of a place.

I see the sky is blue and clouds are in nice shapes, there are trees and flowers beside the pedestrian lanes, and I hear birds' singing ... I feel I am quite attached to where I live. (Female, 65, from Kowloon City)

Bonding ties to neighbors and friends constitute to another aspect of place attachment, leading to a sense of belonging. As such, the residence means more than simply a place to live. Close connections among people and feelings of social inclusiveness compensate for the hardships that older people encounter in community living, thereby they can adapt to the changes and overcome the difficulties.

My son has asked me several times to move to his residence ... I would rather remain living in my present residence. I cannot be far from my familiar neighbors. Frankly, I stay longer with my neighbors and friends than with my son. We play and eat together. That's how one day passes. (Female, 70, from Eastern)

When you are used to living here, you will have a sense of belonging, especially older residents ... My building does not provide lifts. However, I would rather climb the stairs than moving to another estate. (Female, 70, from Eastern)

I have been living here for 20 years, and there are many familiar faces around. A 'hello' to start your day makes me feel a sense of human touch. (Female, 72, from Eastern)

The bonding ties to a place further create a strong place identity in a way that people's perceptions of where they live are linked with fine characteristics of themselves and other people living around. For example, some residents felt proud as they thought people who live here were civilized and friendly, which further strengthened positive self-perceptions. As said, positive self-perceptions and identity consistency are conducive to developing autonomy, mutual help, and social inclusion.

**Table 2.** Meanings of place attachment.

Domain	Indicator	Meanings
<b>Values</b>	Convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy access to shops, restaurants, and facilities without going too far.</li> <li>• Different choices for public transportation.</li> <li>• Presence of facilities in line with personal preferences.</li> </ul>
<b>Bonding</b>	Natural Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blue and green features add to place fondness.</li> </ul>
<b>Ties</b>	Close social connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense of belonging, social inclusiveness, and human touch.</li> </ul>
	Consistency between place a self-identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciation of good place features, whereby positive sense of self is developed.</li> </ul>
<b>Memories</b>	Enabler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A place where people live is filled with experiences, sentiments, and important life events that remind people of the past and provide them a sense of continuity.</li> </ul>

I have a sense of pride whenever I think that I am a part of where I live . . . People are polite and behave well. We embrace diversity and are tolerant of people of various social statuses. (Male, 66, from Sha Tin)

Many people feel a strong friendship when they come to Wan Chai. Not only are the facilities user friendly but also the people are friendly . . . Asking the way is the easiest thing in Wan Chai. (Male, 70, from Wan Chai)

From the focus group, the researchers find that place attachment has a temporal dimension. It implies a continuity of people's engagement with living environment and communities (Lewicka, 2014). Memories act as glues that link people with their places, making people themselves as parts of the long histories. This offers strong sentiments about staying in the original residence.

My special connections to a place come from people, including neighbors and family members. Those people have accompanied you through many joyful and challenging moments. They offered you a helping hand when you needed it. Your connections with people bring you many memorable events and experiences, so I am strongly attached to where I am living. (Female, 66, from Yau Tsim Mong)

I used to live in Canton Road, where there had been a ferry pier before. I watched people fishing when I was young . . . Close to Temple Street, there used to be a vacant space with many street vendors. My mom brought me there. We watched fireworks together . . . The place changed a lot, with much of it replaced by the high-rises. The street is crowded now . . . It is true that you cannot anticipate everything staying unchanged. Development continues, which is common all over the world . . . I will keep those memories. For me, the place means a lot, which also keeps my connections to mom. (Female, 67, from Yau Tsim Mong)

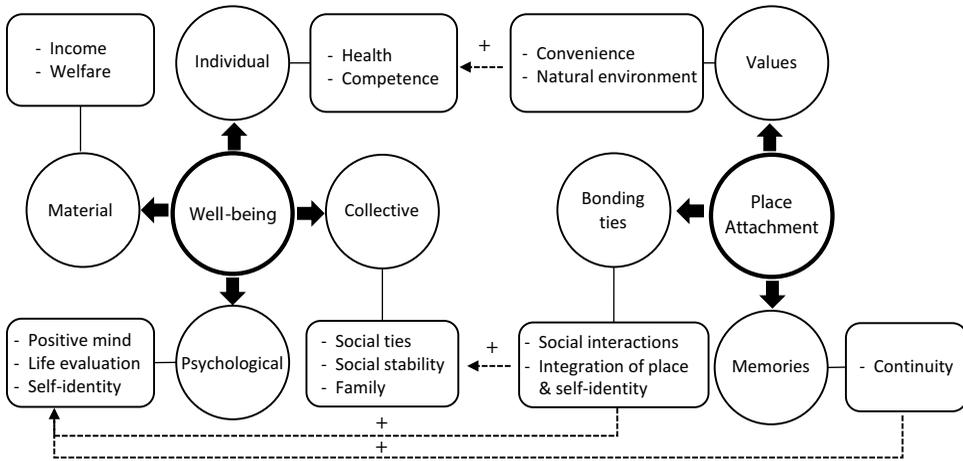
Table 2 summarizes meanings of place attachment.

## Discussion: relationship between well-being and place attachment

The findings reveal multifaceted meanings of well-being that bridge individual and collective dimensions. The emphasis on physical health (including mobility) and independence explains well-being from an individual perspective, emphasizing the importance of personal competence for making better use of resources and supports in the living environment. Individual well-being supports environmental proactivity theory for aging in place (Liao, 2021). Collective well-being addresses interpersonal relations and social interactions in a community. The majority of older people attributed their well-being to frequently meeting with neighbors, friends, and ultimately, development of mutual supports and collective behaviors. Collective well-being confirms the role of social environment (such as quality of social relationships and social inclusion) in achieving well-being (Waite, 2018). In this case, inter-personal relationships also include the goodness of family members and strong family cohesion. People commented that less conflict and strong filial affection from children were essential to well-being.

Older people's perceptions of well-being articulate the dialectics where the material and spiritual (psychological) aspects interface and interact with each other. Incomes and material welfares were frequently mentioned as conducive to independence and life satisfaction. This confirms that income is a predictor of well-being (Killingsworth, 2021). Simultaneously, well-being was perceived to include positive mind and life evaluation, such as developing a balanced view of living, feeling grateful, and being less worried. Our findings are in line with the previous research that identifies "eudemonic" well-being as a critical aspect for older people (Steptoe et al., 2015). Moreover, well-being reflects the fulfillment of higher levels of psychological needs. For example, helping and supporting others brings older people a sense of self-actualization, and they feel they contribute to the good of others.

Place-attachment includes of place, bonding ties to, and memories about place (Table 2). The first two aspects are in line with place attachment constructs identified in the existing literature, that is, place dependence and place identity (Woolrych et al., 2021). The instrumental values of place, such as living convenience and pleasant natural views, constitute to older people's place dependence. Consequently, older people are fond of their residence as it supports their daily life. Bonding ties to place result from close inter-personal relationships that provide older people a sense of human touch and quality social relations. Bonding ties add emotional links to where people live, which, at the same time, strengthen the social connectedness and social values. Bonding ties to place positively reshape older people's self-perceptions as they integrate personal characteristics to those good qualities of where they live.



**Figure 2.** Impact of place attachment on multifaceted well-being.

Memories act as glues that link place with people's living experience, feelings, and emotions, which create a sense of continuity and place attachment. Memories are an enabler of place attachment, leading to what Rowles (1983) described as the "autobiographical insideness," a co-constitution of experience, social "ambiance," and past-present nexus. The sense of continuity also strengthens older people's sense of being-in-the-world, essential to development of positive self-identity (Ash & Simpson, 2014).

There are three pathways from place attachment to multifaceted well-being (see, Figure 2). Older people's reliance of the instrumental values of a place (i.e., place dependence) is conducive to developing environmental proactivity, leading to enhanced independence and autonomy. The frequent use of environmental resources is also conducive to maintaining environmental mastery and a high level of personal competence when aging in place.

Bonding ties to place creates close inter-personal relations, contributing to collective well-being that can potentially initiate mutual help, social integration, and quality social relations. Place identity is conducive to producing positive self-identity and collective social identification, which contribute to all facets of well-being, such as positive mood, social integration, and high life evaluation. This finding enriches the existing literature that identification brings not only happiness but also social and psychological benefits to older people (Westerhof et al., 2011).

Memories are an enabler of place attachment that creates a sense of continuity and rootedness. Memories touch on common experiences, feelings, and emotions that are not only nostalgia triggering but also conducive to social cohesion and a strong commitment to older people's original communities. Such commitment is helpful to developing autonomy, positive self-evaluation, and strong hedonic well-being (Moyano-Díaz & Mendoza-Llanos, 2021).

## **Limitations**

Although the study was designed to include older people who were less ambulatory, residents who were home-bound or had difficulties getting down-stairs were excluded. This may hinder a more comprehensive understanding of well-being among older people with different cultures. Sample size for this study was limited due to a set of gathering restriction orders imposed by the government. As such, the generalization of the findings needs future study with more diversified participants.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, the researchers explored the meanings of multifaceted well-being and place attachment for older people living in densely populated urban environments. Although existing literature identified core constructs for both terms, how older people make sense of well-being and place attachment by articulating their daily life remains relatively unknown. This paper identifies that older people's perceptions of well-being bridge individual and collective domains, as well as material and spiritual (psychological) domains. Meanings of well-being go beyond a simple reference to material richness and include higher level of psychological needs such as self-actualization. Place attachment derives from the appreciation of the instrumental values of, bod-ings ties to, and memories about a place. Three pathways are identified from place attachment to multifaceted well-being.

The findings above have rich implications for future research. The framework and analysis methods can be used for generalization of aging in place in other social and cultural contexts based on a comparative study. Key components identified in this research can be converted to several measurable factors so that a large-scale questionnaire survey is possible to identify more generalized pathways between place attachment and well-being.

This study also sheds light on implications for promoting well-being in cities. First, urban health policies should abandon the narrow focus of physical health and social welfare to include a more holistic view of well-being. Promotion of well-being should consider ways to strengthen interpersonal relations (as well as inter-generational relations) in a community by which older people care and support each other. Interventions oriented to promoting social participation is essential as many older people express strong wills to do meaningful things that can contribute to the goodness of others and the society as a whole. Specifically, providing opportunities for voluntary work can potentially increase older people's perceptions of purposes in life and self-actualization. Second, place attachment is essential for older people, which has

also become a feature of aging. Living convenience (integrating facilities and amenities within walking distance and providing well-connected public transportation with good natural environment) should be considered as one priority for building age-friendly communities, which is conducive to promoting place dependence and well-being. Third, social environment (such as interpersonal relations and a sense of collective) is important to building up positive place identity, which will contribute to a positive self-perception and autonomy. Last, as memories are an enabler of place attachment, future urban renewal and redevelopment projects should pay attention to preserving those social and cultural landscapes which resonate with older people's past experience and their sense of continuity. Community programs that invite older people to share life stories, although simple, can help build up identify, leading to high life satisfaction and strong rootedness in their place of residence.

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