

# Research and Analysis of Economic Factors Affecting Subjective Quality of Life of County Residents: The Study of Fengyang County

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**Abstract:** The nowadays cutting-edge trend in research on quality of life is to combine objective evaluations with subjective perceptions, one without the other. Subjective quality of life evaluation plays a greater role in understanding people's satisfaction with life, and therefore has gained widespread attention from the academic community. However, at present, the research on people's quality of life in China still mainly focuses on objective evaluation, leaving a lack of relevant facts and data to support subjective perceptions. This paper takes Fengyang County as a case study to investigate the local people's feelings about consumption, housing, education, health care and transportation, summarizing the influence of economic factors on them and their connections.

**Keywords:** Residents' living, Quality of life, Fengyang County.

## 1. Introduction

After the 18th Party Congress, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, the Party and the State have accelerated the construction of infrastructure to ensure that the residents' quality of life can be continuously improved. The China Economic Life Survey (2013-2014) shows that the national self-evaluation of life happiness index has decreased year by year from 59.1% in 2006 to 40% in 2014. Numerous factors have influenced this index. This paper will delve into the rating index of residents, explore the influence of economic factors, and conclude the connection between the two.

Fengyang County is under the jurisdiction of Chuzhou, located in the northeastern part of Anhui Province. As early as 2013, the population of Fengyang has already reached 765,600. With the growing population base and other factors, the quality of life of Fengyang residents has also changed.

## 2. Related Theoretical Basis and Research Status

The term quality of life first appeared in the book *The Affluent Society* (1958) by the American economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1908-2006). The United Nations World Health Organization defines this term as "an individual's perception of their status in life within the culture and value system in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns." Among the refined quality of life criteria are wealth, employment, environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time, social belonging, religious beliefs, as well as safety and guaranteed freedom.

Quality of life is generally assessed from both objective and subjective perspectives. The objective aspect refers to improvements and enhancements in living standards, while the subjective one refers to how people feel about the changes. Nan Lin (1938-) and his co-researchers Lu Hanlong and Wang Ling proposed that quality of life is people's satisfaction with their living environment and their overall evaluation of life, i.e., the evaluation and summary of life and its various

aspects (1987, 1989).

Early scholars believed that objective quality of life research is concerned with the objective living conditions provided by society and government for the people, and is mostly evaluated through statistics. On the other side, subjective quality of life is evaluated through people's subjective thoughts and feelings. The objective evaluation perspective of quality of life can highlight the conditions created by social and economic development, while the subjective evaluation can reflect the relationship between economic environment and people's psychological experience. In the current situation, the study of people's subjective evaluations of quality of life can provide important references and contributions in the decision-making and implementation of the government, and is therefore of great value for the development of the country.

## 3. Subjective Quality of Life assessment of Xiaogang Village's residents

### 3.1. Brief Introduction to Xiaogang Village

People's subjective quality of life is closely related to economic factors. Xiaogang in Fengyang County, Anhui Province is the birthplace of China's rural reform and one of the national ten most famous villages. Shen Hao, the former secretary of the village Party's Committee, has made great contributions to the development of Xiaogang. During his tenure, Secretary Shen adopted the residents' opinions and advise, confirming the "three-step" idea of revitalizing the village's development, which led to the rapid economic and social development of Xiaogang and a significant improvement in the living standard of the villagers. In 2004, the per capita disposable income of Xiaogang was 1,800 yuan, and in 2009 it increased to 5,500 yuan, and reached 30,500 yuan in 2022. In the same period, the per capita disposable income of rural residents in China is 18,931 yuan in 2021, which means the one of Xiaogang is much higher than the national average by 61.11%.

In Xiaogang Village, a main road paved by asphalt runs

through the whole village, houses are built in a uniform black and white color scheme and appearance, and there is almost no garbage on the ground, making the whole environment neat and tidy. Xiaogang is surrounded by perfect infrastructure, including bus stations, post offices, water and power supply facilities, along with culture, education, health care and other municipal public service facilities. The old village site is also preserved, which is the birthplace of “household contract responsibility system”(大包干). In 1978, 18 villagers in one of the houses made a “trust” in the way of life and death, and pressed their red handprints on the contract of “farming households with the collective economic organizations”. The village spirit of solidarity and pragmatism has been inherited to this day, and they can easily get help from neighborhood when it is not necessary to reflect the problems to the superiors. The survival of this spiritual tradition is actually due to the construction and maintenance of several generations.

### 3.2. Hierarchy of Needs and Quality of Life

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was first proposed by American psychologist Maslow(1908-1970) in 1943 to

explain the relationship between human motivation and different needs. Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, the subjective quality of life of Xiaogang's residents is analyzed and summarized from five aspects, which are:

(i) Physiological needs, whether the villagers have access to clean air and water, adequate food, safe shelter, healthy sleep, warm clothing, and necessary reproductive conditions;

(ii) Security needs, whether the villagers' personal and property security is protected;

(iii) Love and belonging needs, whether villagers have a healthy family organizational structure and atmosphere, and whether interpersonal relationships are good;

(iv) Self-respect needs, whether villagers respect themselves and can receive respect from other members of the village;

(v) Self-actualization needs, whether villagers have achieved their ideal life state.

At the same time, these five levels are divided into three stages, namely, the subsistence stage, the well-off stage and the affluent stage. These five levels and three stages are combined to assess and analyze the subjective quality of life of villagers.

The Table of Observation: Details

		Fengyang County	Xiaogang Village
Shelter	Rent	10000~15000 RMB per month	Perfectly affordable
	Housing Price	5000~9000 RMB per square meter	
Public Sectors	Transportation	Bus lines(extensive) and online ride-hailing services	Bus lines and online ride-hailing services
	Health Care	157 hospitals and clinics	
	Educational Services	11 schools	Schools
Income (of small shopkeepers and owners of one-man business)	Clothes	Sales of well-doing stores: 2000~40000 RMB a day	Under 100000 RMB
		Sales of ordinary stores: 900~3000 RMB a day	
	Food	Strawberries: 15 RMB per kilogram Grilled Squid: 6 RMB each	
Consumer Price	Rent for Stores and Shops	20000~90000 RMB	Reasonable
Living Quality and Social Welfare		Ordinary	Good

### 3.3. Subjective Quality of life in Xiaogang's Residents

The residents in Xiaogang are very plain and welcoming, and all three interviewees, Ms. Jin, Mr. Zhou and Mr. Yan, spoke highly of the village. The real feelings of local people can help to understand the economic factors and their relationships that affect the subjective quality of life. The research interviews covered various aspects including infrastructure construction, prices, and environment.

Ms. Jin is the head of the youth practice base in Xiaogang Village. From her perspective, Xiaogang is a perfect small village. In terms of housing, the majority of villagers live in rural self-built houses with little housing pressure; in terms of transportation, it is very convenient to commute by bus or online ride-hailing, and the price is moderate. Ms. Jin has a high level of happiness and has put her love into her work in Xiaogang, having completed the highest level of “self-fulfillment”.

Mr. Zhou is a plain old villager who runs a daily baked sweet potato business. He thinks Xiaogang is good enough now, with concrete floors everywhere, which provides great convenience for his work. Mr. Zhou says that when business is good, he can earn tens of thousands of yuan a month. This level of income is relatively high in the area, enough to easily

cover daily living expenses and provide for his richer social life, such as dinners with friends. Mr. Zhou's state has reached the higher level of Maslow's needs and is leading a well-off life.

Mr. Yan is an ordinary villager in Xiaogang. He believes that living here is extremely happy and “villagers can have whatever they want”. There is a police station and a fire station right near his house, which gives him basic security. Besides, the banks, health clinics, schools, residents' services and internet services make Mr. Yan feel more convenient than ever. The environment is also relatively friendly, so Mr. Yan enjoys social activities such as chatting and walking with friends outdoors. He believes that the neighborhood in Xiaogang is very cordial and everyone helps each other. At the same time, Mr. Yan believes that he has realized his “self-worth” in Xiaogang.

In addition, there is a long-standing practice of rural land-use right transfers in Xiaogang, where farmers who have contracted land-use rights transfer them to other farmers or organizations. This not only provides a channel for external capital to enter the village, but also creates more employment opportunities for local villagers, which eventually forms a virtuous circle.

## 4. Conclusion Reflection and Suggestions

Combined with Maslow's hierarchical needs theory, it is found that the vast majority of local residents in Fengyang County are living their ideal lives and accomplishing self-actualization. This higher subjective quality of life is closely related to the following economic factors: (i) suitable prices; (ii) diversified entertainment options; (iii) harmonious neighborhood relations; (iv) safety; (v) job security; (vi) quality education; and (vii) well-developed infrastructure facilities.

The way to improve the subjective quality of life of Fengyang County's residents mainly lies in respecting the people's subjective ideas and suggestions and putting them into practice to achieve their expected goals. On the other hand, the deployment of rural revitalization strategy is also one of the factors that help residents improve their life quality. The implementation of the land transfer policy gives villagers the opportunity to leave the village and settle in cities. At the same time, as the contracting companies continue to expand, more resources will enter the village, thus continuing to promote infrastructure construction and the development of tertiary industries. As a result, villagers in Fengyang have easy access to surrounding resources while having a stable basic income, ensuring a relatively high subjective quality of life for most local residents. Today, China's economy has basically completed the transition from supply shortage to under-consumption, and the rural economy has entered a period of "feedbacks". Therefore, the government has also made efforts to effectively improve the farmers' life quality in many ways, such as:

- (i) Increasing farmers' income, with a focus on agricultural subsidies;
- (ii) Improving the basic quality of farmers, with a focus on developing cultural and educational services;
- (iii) Establishing a rural security system, with a focus on improving medical services;
- (iv) Optimizing the rural living environment;
- (v) Enriching the spiritual life of farmers.

## 5. Conclusions

The core of the concept of residents' quality of life is to focus on people's actual living conditions, to understand where their life satisfaction and needs lie, and to evaluate the effectiveness of urban planning and policies, as well as community development based on this, so as to improve residents' subjective quality of life in a targeted manner and ultimately achieve a happier, healthier, safer, and more efficient life.

The Statistical Bulletin of National Economic and Social Development of Fengyang County in 2021 shows that the per capita disposable income of urban and rural permanent residents in the county in 2021 was 21,750 yuan, while 15,352 yuan per capita disposable income of rural permanent residents in the same year. Also, according to the Work Report of Fengyang County People's Government in 2022, the regional GDP of Fengyang in 2021 was the 12th highest in the province, and the per capita GDP was 73,000 yuan. With the support of data, the objective quality of life here is average.

At the same time, the subjective quality of life of local residents is relatively high. For example, a resident of Fengyang once said in an interview, "The roads in the neighborhood are wider, the lights are brighter, cars and electric cars are not parked indiscriminately, it is not flooding in the rain, and there is a place for fitness." These are the subjective feelings that residents have expressed about the improvement of the surrounding environment. However, it is also clear on major Internet platforms that there are a significant number of residents who are not satisfied with the overall environment as well as their personal quality of life in Fengyang. One account on the forum Zhihu(知乎) made the statement that "the standard of living in Fengyang County is very low, and the quality of people is not very high, and people are not advised to come here for development." The results of the previous research proved that there are some differences in the subjective quality of life evaluations of local residents.

After the field survey, it was found that the subjective quality of life of villagers in Xiaogang Village were higher than the results of the previous research. The vast majority of villagers are satisfied with their current life situation and believe that they have realized themselves. Compared with Fengyang County, Xiaogang Village can give such a high outcome to the villagers thanks to the implementation of the land transfer policy, which has realized the transformation of Xiaogang from an agricultural village to an ecological tourism village. The revitalized development of Xiaogang has undoubtedly brought a better life for the villagers as well. However, the replicability of such a model or transformation path has not been verified and is currently less likely at the theoretical level. Xiaogang has an innate advantage of popularity due to its unique historical background, so other villages that rashly imitate this model will probably not achieve similar success as it. Besides, after the village transformed into an eco-tourism village, prices naturally rose, making the cost of living for residents increased. The unit price of strawberry in Fengyang County is 15 yuan per kilogram, while the one in Xiaogang Village is 35, so if one specific village does not have similar resource advantages as Xiaogang, it is likely that it will not be able to attract enough traffic to buy local products, leading to the failure of the same model of operation.

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