

Making the right move

Editor's note: Traditionally, Chinese people are reluctant to move house once settled. However, an increasing number are now upping sticks for a variety of reasons, mainly to ensure access to the best educational and medical facilities.

Below, four people briefly explain why they decided to buck the trend.

A wedding gift

By TANG YUE

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In China, most newlyweds live in their own apartment, rather than renting. Since only a few couples can afford the down payment themselves, parents tend to offer financial help. Wang Xinhua and his wife Liu Ailing, both 57, are two of those helpful parents.

In 2010, their son, Wang Zheng, then 27, told them he planned to marry the girl he had been dating for two years. But his fiancée refused to share the apartment his parents have been living in for more than 30 years.

However, the senior couple from the municipality of Tianjin in northern China, had not been in full-time employment for more than a decade. Their savings were almost zero and they were unable to provide the down payment for their son's new home.

"I understand that the younger generation won't live with the parents when they get married," said Liu. "Wealthy families can buy a house for their children. We don't have much money, but we can't let our son remain single just because he has no house."

So the couple decided to share the apartment of Wang Xinhua's 80-year-old mother. However, the apartment had only one bedroom and the living room was tiny, so they turned the kitchen into a small bedroom and relocated the kitchen to the balcony.

Because their family apartment was old and not

considered good enough for the newlyweds, they sold it for 600,000 yuan (\$94,000) last year. Wang Zheng then made a down payment of 400,000 yuan on a new property and obtained a further 400,000 through a loan. The 200,000 yuan left over was spent on decorating the new home, on appliances and the wedding ceremony, which was held during the National Day Holiday in October.

"I was very grateful to my mother-in-law. When my husband went to propose the idea to her, she didn't hesitate, but simply said that Wang Zheng is her only grandson and she would like to do everything for him," Liu said.

"Among working people like us, it's common to borrow money from all over to buy an apartment for their son's marriage. I even know some who've rented a shabby house for themselves and given their apartment to the children. Compared with them, I'm lucky enough."

Liu works as a waitress, while her husband is a gatekeeper at a local steel factory. Their combined earnings are about 3,000 yuan a month.

They still try to save for their son. "They may have a baby soon, and raising a child is very expensive. They have to pay back the loan, so we have to help out," said Liu.

From the suburbs to downtown

By HU YONGQI

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Lu Chuan, of Qixi district in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, had never considered moving from the area he had come to know and love. After all, he had all he desired and his place of work was just a 10-minute walk from his front door.

However, an accident jolted the 58-year-old music professor out of his comfort zone and prompted the search for a new home, one closer to a decent hospital. Lu has recently moved to the city's downtown area.

Lu's daughter, Lu Lin who is 28 and works in the media in Beijing, announced that she would be returning home for the National Day holiday, accompanied by her boyfriend, whom she planned to marry.

The night before the visit, Lu and his wife cleaned their home. Usually the couple rise at around 8:30 am, but on the day of the visit, they became early birds and rose at 6:00 am. They spent the day in meticulous preparation for the long-awaited dinner, buying food and drink from the best supermarket in the area and looking forward to meeting the young man who would soon be their son-in-law. When the preparations were finished, the couple sat back in expectation of a happy family feast.

However, things didn't go according to plan. According to the traditions in his hometown in Shandong

province, Lu tried open a bottle of wine to toast the arrival of the young couple, but the neck of the bottle broke and Lu's left palm was badly lacerated by shards of glass. Bleeding profusely, he was rushed to the local community hospital.

"I couldn't feel my hand and I was afraid that some shards might be left in the wound. The doctors explained that the didn't have the equipment to remove all of the shards. All they could do was wrap the wound and staunch the heavy bleeding," said Lu.

The family took him to Maigaoqiao Hospital, but the doctors there were unable to better the performance at the community hospital and the shards remained. Lu was then transferred to the Nanjing Medical University No 1 Hospital in downtown Nanjing. The journey took approximately 50 minutes as it was difficult to get a taxi in the rush hour, but when he eventually arrived at the facility, the medics cleaned the wound and removed the glass that was so close to a nerve that it could have resulted in paralysis. Although Lu's hand is now fully recovered, it bears a 4-cm scar.

"As my parents grow older, I care more about their health. So I strongly recommended that they found a new home close to the hospital," said Lu Lin.

"It was so hard to reach a good hospital when we lived in the old apartment. For people like us, who are getting on in years, injury or sickness might occur at any moment, so we want to be close to top-class medical facilities. That's why we chose to move to this location," said Lu.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

Doing it for the children

By HENA

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Sun Guihua, of Changchun, capital of Jilin province, once swore that there were two areas where she would never consent to live, no matter how good the houses were: next to a railway station or a hospital.

"Those places are too noisy, and I hate being surrounded by crowds of strangers," said the 38-year-old, who works in local expressway administration. However, she changed her tune when her 13-year-old son was accepted by a top-ranked middle school.

To ensure that the boy, Ding Hongyu, had easy access to the school, Sun and her husband bought an apartment less than 1,000 meters from the school and rented out their 120-square-meter home next to Jingyuetan Park, one of Asia's largest manmade forests.

The school is affiliated to Jilin University and is next door to Jilin University No 1 Hospital, the best in the province. Sun often complains that the ground floors of her building are rented out to stores related to the hospital. What she hates most are the two funerary stores selling clothing, goods and wreaths for those who have passed away.

"Those stores are open 24 hours a day. Whenever I come back at night and see the store lights burning, I'm always apprehensive that someone will follow me up the stairs," said Sun.

However, the good points outweigh the bad. When her son is already back at home after the school day, she knows that the other students are still waiting for the

school bus to start its engine, and when those students who live at a distance leave home at 5:30 am to travel to school, her son is still fast asleep. At times like these, Sun admits that the sacrifice has been worthwhile.

Sun and her husband paid 425,000 yuan for their current 67-sq-m apartment. "6,300 yuan per square meter for such an old house!" exclaimed Sun. "I really doubted my decision at first, but my neighbors recently sold their house, which has a similar number of square meters, for 450,000 yuan. It cheers me up to know that," she said.

"Despite the crowds and the poor environment, it's an ideal place for a family that contains both children and seniors," she added.

Both parents frequently work overtime, meaning that it's impossible for them to pick up their son when classes finish at 4:50 pm. The advantage of living close by the school is that the boy can walk home in 10 minutes and the parent don't need to worry about rush-hour traffic jams.

"Compared with my colleagues, who run around like crazy after work to pick up their children from school, I am much happier," Sun said.

"I hope my son can continue through the higher levels at the same school, or we will have to let this apartment and rent or buy another close by the new school. I don't like moving, but that is a parent's destiny," she added.

"My son is in the second year of junior middle school now and has five years to go. When he enters university, my husband and I will move back to our house next to the park and enjoy the fresh air and a quiet life, as we did before."

An apartment ensures education

By JIANG XUEQING

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Zhang Yingying, a freelance graphic designer, bought an apartment for her son near Huangchenggen Primary School, one of the best in Beijing, despite the fact that the boy was no more than 2 years old.

According to the regulations, Zhang had to register her son's *hukou* (China's household registration) within the school district at least five years before he reached school age to ensure that he would gain admittance. In Beijing, a child must be 6 years old before school starts in September. However, before registering *hukou*, she had to buy an apartment within the school's catchment area, even though her son was still too young to even attend kindergarten.

Many less-prestigious primary schools set the admissions bar for the *hukou* registration period at 2 or 3 years of age. However, that's not the case at Huangchenggen Primary School, a keynote facility in the Xicheng district of Beijing, where the city's best educational resources are clustered.

The school sits directly opposite Beijing No 4 High School, an elite establishment respected by students and parents alike. Such rich educational resources have made the housing market in the nearby residential area particularly hot.

"I considered the pros and cons of purchasing an apartment within the school area and decided that I had to buy one as quickly as possible," said Zhang.

Her family paid around 1 million yuan for an old

apartment of more than 40 square meters, located in the heart of the city, when the housing price slumped during the global financial crisis in 2009. Built in 1990, the six-floor building has apartments sited on both sides of a long hallway on each floor. Today, the price of her apartment has more than doubled, rising from 23,000 yuan per sq m to almost 50,000 yuan.

Zhang redecorated and furnished the apartment, installing cable TV and Internet access. As soon as it was ready, she rented the apartment to a family whose child attended the nearby Beijing No 39 Middle School. This year, another couple moved in, paying a monthly rent of 4,000 yuan. Their child is enrolled at a branch campus of Huangchenggen Primary School, just two bus stops away.

Zhang's son will turn 6 in 2014. She said school officials usually start paying visits to families within the school district six months before the beginning of each academic year. At present, she is still trying to decide whether to move from her 160-sq-m apartment on the East Third Ring Road into the smaller one next year.

"It's a huge challenge for me," she said. "How can a family of three live in a small, shabby apartment like that?"

However, if her family does not move, they will have to spend at least two hours driving between home and school every day. "My friends suggested we take our clothes to the small apartment, stay there from Monday to Friday, and come back home on weekends. But even if I can make it, it will still be too exhausting for a 6-year-old kid," she said.