# The challenge of opening up gated communities in Shanghai


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## Abstract

The Chinese government has recently issued a directive that calls for an end to gated communities. The aim is to halt the construction of new gated communities, and gradually open existing gated communities to the public. This paper examines the challenges of implementing the new directive in Shanghai, where more than 80% of residential communities are gated. The study reveals five types of challenges: (1) *site redesign*; (2) *urban governance*; (3) *social frictions*; (4) *legal status;* and (5) *financial burden*. While redesign is a more straightforward, albeit onerous, task, smoothing governance, social, legal, and financial tensions is a greater challenge.



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# Introduction

Gated communities are generally defined as residential areas surrounded by walls, fences, or green hedges to discourage or prevent outsiders from entering. Typically, they appeal to the middle- and upper-income strata because they provide a safer, cleaner, and more controlled living environment which is closed to outsiders. Local public services are organized efficiently within the borders, and residents are tied to a common code of conduct through legal agreements similar to condominium contracts. Gated communities also cater to a desire to display status. The concept originated in the United States in the 1970s, and now has turned into a truly global socio-spatial phenomenon (Aron 2002; Frantz 2000; Atkinson and Flint 2004; Blakely and Snyder 1997; Coy 2006; Goix and Webster 2008; Renaud and Elena 2015; Low and Smith 2006; Webster 2001).

In China, gated communities have become ubiquitous since the Reform and Opening policy (*gaige kaifang*), involving gating of preexisting areas, as well as newly constructed areas (Miao and Yuan 2015). In Shanghai, more than 80% of residential communities are gated, turning the city into an "urban fortress" (Miao 2003). In some cases, entire existing neighborhoods inclusive of public streets and storefronts, have been fenced in (Poon 2016). This pattern has reinforced social segregation and division and also produced excessive traffic and congestion, as car drivers need to navigate around the borders of a myriad gated communities rather than take a direct route to their destination (Pow 2007).

In 2016, the State Council of the People's Republic of China, China's cabinet, and the Community Party's Central Committee issued a directive that called for an end to gated communities. The aim is to halt the construction of new gated communities, and gradually open existing ones to the public (*Beijing News*, "Directive on Strengthening Urban Planning and Construction Management," 21 Feb. 2016; Li 2016).

This paper examines the challenges of implementing the new directive in Shanghai. Given that millions of people already live in gated communities, how will the new directive be translated to the local level? There is already evidence of fierce public opposition to the opening process, in Shanghai and other Chinese cities, and middle classes have been alarmed by the prospect (see Poon 2016; Kai 2016; Hewitt 2016; Beech 2016). This emerging public policy issue has the potential of turning into a major political predicament for China. (A leaked editorial directive emerged online which suggested that domestic media had been asked to avoid criticizing the new directive; *Week in China* 18 March 2016).

The discussion in this paper might be of interest to housing and planning researchers focused on other countries - although, to date no other country has proposed such a radical policy of opening existing gated communities. The theoretical underpinning of this study is neoliberalism and its effect on urban space and society. This is succinctly discussed in the first part of the paper, with a particular focus on the version of neoliberalism that has taken shape in China's communist context. The theoretical portion also provides an overview of the precedents to gated communities in China, and the present incarnation of the gated community concept - its history, causes, and effects.[1] In the second part of the paper, the case study setting

(Shanghai) and the study method (expert interviews) are presented. The remainder of the paper discusses the findings.

## Theoretical framework

### *Neoliberalism, individualism, and the 'gated community' phenomenon*

At an ideological level, neoliberalism is centred on the notion of efficient markets - as opposed to welfare states - as the best mechanisms for regulating socio-economic relations (Bourdieu, cited in Schmalz and Ebenau 2012). The neoliberalisation of planning worldwide is well-established (Olesen 2014). Neoliberalism has made a clear imprint on cities, which has not been viewed as positive (Harvey 2007). Under the neoliberal paradigm, cities have been regarded as (1) engines of economic *growth*, (2) centres of social *innovation*, and (3) actors in promoting and consolidating international *competitiveness* (Jessop 2002). Consequently, urban problems have become more deeply entrenched throughout the world - pockets of "urban renaissance" notwithstanding. Cities everywhere possess high levels of inequality, contain large areas of physical dereliction, and are witness to crime and social disorder. The "entrepreneurial turn" of cities has led to socio-spatial polarization and segregation, decline of public space, and housing bubbles (Jones and Ward 2002). An increasingly small urban elite produces, manages, and consumes most urban space and resources whereas those portions of the population that do now own capital feel excluded (Harvey 2008; Mitchell 2003).

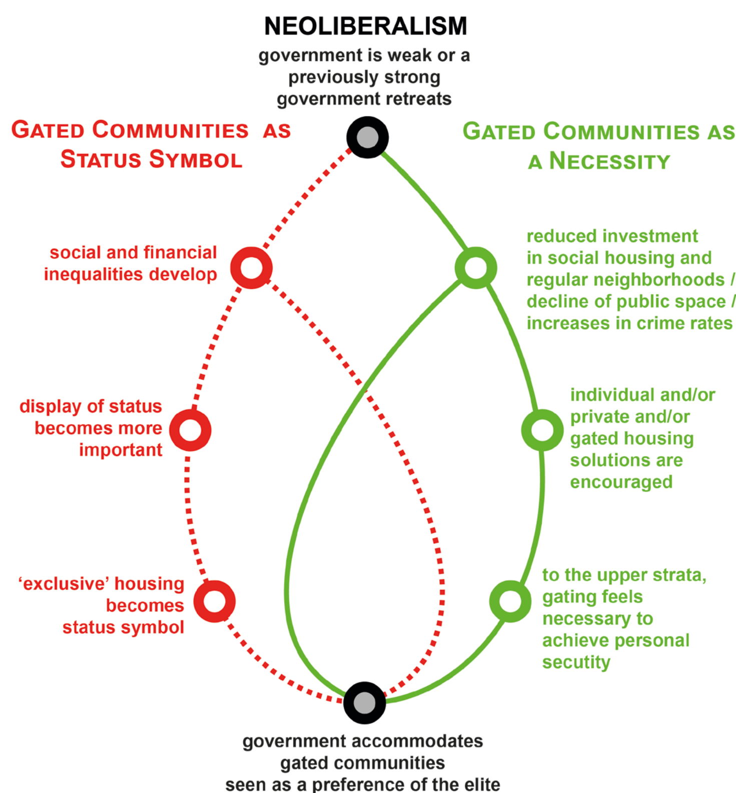


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Consequently, two interlocking vicious circles have developed in housing (Figure 1). The left side of the teardrop diagram illustrates the symbolic role of gated communities as a status signifier in unequal, stratified, neoliberal societies (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Low and Smith 2006; Webster 2001). It reflects ‘the long established desire of affluent groups in many societies to separate themselves from the rest of society’ by being exclusive, or appearing to be, exclusive (Carmona 2010, p. 131). The right side of the diagram illustrates the utilitarian need for gated communities in unequal societies where there is high crime (or perception of crime) (The Economist 2018) and low public investment in social housing, regular neighbourhoods, and public spaces (Carmona 2010). Both these loops stem from the same core issue: the withdrawal of the state as active agent in shaping urban space, housing systems, and income distribution curves.

## *Neoliberalism in China’s socialist context*

Chinese neoliberalism has not come close to resembling neoliberalism’s “heartlands” as the state continues to exert considerable power here. However, neoliberalism has certainly been present in China since the introduction of economic reforms by Deng Xiaoping in the 1970s (Schmalz and Ebenau 2012). The coexistence of neoliberalism with state socialism may seem like a contradiction or a peculiarity. However, a number of analysts have argued that, at least in the Chinese context, neoliberalism’s anti-state character is utterly dependent on its links to the state (Wang and Karl 2004). The state’s presence in the economy may strengthen and legitimize the market logic rather than reducing it (Wu 2008). Some scholars have further argued that the relationship between the modern state and capitalism is a close one even in Western liberal democracies; the two systems need one another in order to survive (see Callinicos 2007).

China’s neoliberal economy has exacerbated social inequalities. So has the ‘shift from state-led industrialization to a more urban-based accumulation’ (Wu 2008, p. 1094). Economic growth has been accompanied by rapid urbanization, where cities use their space (real estate) to absorb surplus capital (Wu 2008). ‘Formerly worthless city land’ has been transformed into construction ‘plots worth millions’ (Lee and Zhu 2006). Inequality (both rural-urban and intra-urban), combined with the retrenchment of the public sector from service provision, has given rise to a heightened degree of social unrest or unease in recent years (Schmalz and Ebenau 2012).

In the course of growing much wealthier, denser, and taller, already polluted Chinese cities have motorized, segregated, polarized, and sprawled in a substantial way. Following the tenets of neoliberalism, urban planning and housing are increasingly commercialized. In 1998, the government introduced the housing monetarization policy, which replaced the Maoist in-kind welfare housing system (*danwei*, see below). In addition, the banking system was reformed to enable individuals to borrow mortgage loans. These policies were based on the assumption that the market could solve housing problems (Lee and Zhu 2006).

By 2000, the rate of home ownership among urban residents had already increased to 80%. China is now ‘a nation of homeowners’ but house prices have inflated to an unaffordable level

for low income families (Wu 2008). A large portion of China's new middle and upper class owes its wealth to rising housing prices in megacities (*Xinhua*, 24 February 2016). In coastal industrial megacities such as Shanghai, in particular, house prices have risen much faster than wages (Lee and Zhu 2006).

But Chinese cities are commodified in other aspects, not only housing. Commodification has become 'ruthless' and 'pervasive' in Chinese society (Wu 2008). In a neoliberal context, urban residents have redefined their self-representation and self-narratives to incorporate consumption, competition, and individualism (Roefl 2007). 'Neoliberalism has come to transcend, not simply the physical structure, but also the social relationship between people' (Lee and Zhu 2006, p. 44). Human beings are assigned an exchange value in the neoliberal marketplace, through a new notion of *suzhi* or "human quality." This is employed to explain social inequality and legitimize or naturalize social hierarchies. For example, urbanites have higher *suzhi* than rural migrants and therefore deserve better access to goods and services; poor workers have lower *suzhi* than successful entrepreneurs, etc. (see Kipnis 2007).

The emergence of the *suzhi* notion is another manifestation of an individualistic moral code that has taken hold of Chinese culture in the post reform era. Although many still believe that China is a collectivist country, recent research demonstrates that the Chinese are increasingly prioritizing individualist factors, such as income and health, when assessing their own happiness and life satisfaction. Consequently, the public broadly accepts increases in market-oriented policies and socioeconomic inequality, and has come to disengage from community affairs that are beyond the personal or family circle (Steele and Lynch 2013). Research in other post-communist countries has reached similar conclusions (Pojani and Buka 2015).

In combination, these socio-economic transformations and spatial growth patterns have produced well-being for some urban residents but also a number of serious problems, which have undermined the quality of life for all (Logan 2008).

## *Gated communities in Chinese cities*

The introduction of the gated community concept has become a new trend across China. This type of neighborhood, also called "sealed residential quarter" (*xiaoqu*), refers to a basic residential development unit housing 2000-3000 households. Residential densities are high: approximately 200 to even 900 people per hectare. Surroundings of gated communities range from hedges to fences to high walls. Typically the area provides all the necessary amenities and open space internally. Unlike the West, gated communities are not necessarily low-rise or suburban (Miao 2003; Kan et al. 2017).

In a sense, *xiaoqu* represent a return to the traditional, enclosed *li fang* neighborhoods of Imperial China. At that time, walls served a variety of practical purposes, including defense and weather protection. At the same time, they constituted symbolic markers of the "inside vs. outside" – i.e., "family vs. strangers." In line with Confucian philosophy, these divisions were important in defining the collective, which prevailed over the individual. Life within *li fang* presumed mutual help, contribution to the community, and social harmony (Kostof 1992; Wu and Cui 2005).

During Mao's rule, the work-unit compounds (*danwei*) created around industrial production centers were another type of gated community, which grouped factory coworkers (as opposed to extended family members, as in *li fang*). Housing was distributed based on need criteria – rather than the cost of land (Lee and Zhu 2006). The compounds were surrounded by high walls and were formally guarded to keep out anyone who lived or worked elsewhere. In addition to living and working space, *danwei* provided all the auxiliary services such as clinics, schools, grocery stores, canteens, and public bathhouses (Ma and Hanten 1981; Bian et al. 1997). But the construction quality was poor and rent levels were too low to generate funds for basic maintenance. However, the physical quality varied substantially between different work units (Lee and Zhu 2006). Wang (2013) has graphically documented *danwei* space in detail.

In line with communist ideology, all the *danwei* land and buildings were publicly owned. These communities constituted a social rather than a commercial good. As a result of intensive daily interactions during work and leisure, the sense of community and identity was strong (He 1998; Huang and Low 2008). Moreover, workers lived in close physical proximity to local party officials thus ensuring a close, clan-like relationship between citizens and the state (Wu 2008). At the same time, the housing allocation system 'led to widespread corruption where some cadres gained more than a fair share of their housing through *guanxi* (personal relationship)' (Lee and Zhu 2006, p. 41). Because jobs and housing were tied together, labor mobility was rather limited (Lee and Zhu 2006). Starting in the 1990s, the function and character of work-unit compounds gradually disintegrated (He 1998; Bian et al. 1997; Goix and Webster 2008).

In contrast to *li fang* and *danwei*, contemporary gated communities have often been viewed as a blatant manifestation of the tenets of privatization, individualism, freedom, and stratification which have come to reign in contemporary, neoliberal Chinese cities. With the government withdrawing funds for public housing provision and encouraging commercial housing provision, private property developers have created gated communities (Zhou 2016b). Typically, the cost of infrastructure provision 'is shouldered by the developers in exchange for development rights and flexible development standards' (Yip 2012, p. 222.) 'In a form of socialized neoliberalism, local authorities [use gating to] ensure a degree of social control (Grant and Rosen 2009, p. 577). In this manner, a system of social exclusion has been naturalized (Pow 2007). Plots are usually extra-large because this saves local governments time and money on the procedures of land sales (Zhou 2016a).

Gates and walls have come to be preferred by residents because they enhance the sense of security and minimize disturbance by door-to-door peddlers (see Kan et al. 2017). With their halo of modernity, *xiaoqu* may also be seen as a reaction to the poor and cramped (albeit friendly and interactive) living conditions in the open courtyard neighborhoods of Maoist China. In fact they are often advertised as "oases" in the hectic and hyper intense Chinese urban milieu (Hewitt 2016). "Home" is not merely a domicile to be used as in the old days but it is construed as the central site of consumption and identity – not to mention its new exchange value, which is raised via gating (Lee and Zhu 2006). In Shanghai, for example, some gated communities have manifestly exclusive names, such as Rich Gate or Top of City (Hewitt 2016).

While very popular with the middle and upper classes, contemporary gated communities have

been criticized for causing a series of urban problems, such a space fragmentation, social distance, community disintegration, and a false sense of insecurity, not to mention traffic congestion (see Miao 2003; Pow 2007; Wang and Murie 1999; Zhang 1998; Sit 1995; Huang 2006). Architecturally, gated communities often turn a blank, stifling wall or fence to the street for 500 meters or even one kilometer. With fewer streets, each street needs to be wide and becomes busy with traffic (Hewitt 2016). The design styles employed within the walls are eclectic, ranging from Mediterranean balconies to Imperial roofs, thus reinforcing the sense of fragmentation in Chinse urban society (Liu 2016).

Xi Jinping government's directive to open up gated communities has been interpreted as an expression of a shift in China's development strategy, from one that prioritizes economic growth to a more balanced one that considers social and planning issues. This shift is consistent with the government's promulgation of a "new normal" (Zhou 2016b). But the directive has also been interpreted as a populist stance to combat elitism and return to more traditional values (Hewitt 2016). After all, the concept of gating is ideologically inappropriate in Communist cities, including Shanghai. As noted, more than 80% of residential communities are gated here. A word on the city's history follows below, prior to discussing modern development.

## Case study of Shanghai

Located in the lower Yangtze Delta, Shanghai developed as a major trading port in the mid-1800s. Open to foreign dignitaries and merchants, by the 1930s it was a large and prosperous city of three million inhabitants, with substantial financial and industrial power. It boasted innovations such as electric lights and trams. At the time it was known as "the Paris of the Orient." In 1949 Shanghai came under Communist control. The early Communist government wished to erase the city's Western legacy, and its association with vices such as opium smoking, gambling, and prostitution. While Shanghai became an industrial center during the Maoist era, overall it declined in status and importance (Wu, 1999; Yusuf and Wu 1997). It rebounded in 1990 when astounding amounts of foreign investment arrived in China. The Chinese government undertook a concerted effort to push Shanghai up the world city ranks - partly in order to outperform Hong Kong, which remained independent from China until 1997 (Walcott and Pannell 2006; Xu 2003). The first post-reform (*gaige kaifang*) masterplan was prepared in 1992-94 by world-renown architects Richard Rogers and Ove Arup (RSH 2017). On an international level, Shanghai is competing with wealthy Asian cities such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Seoul. It is evolving beyond manufacturing toward advanced service industries, such as software design, finance and fashion. Its development agenda contains the same rhetoric as other ambitious cities (including Western ones) who are engaged in culture-led renewal processes (Sudjic 2016).

Deyan Sudjic's (2016) dramatic description of contemporary Shanghai is apropos:

> "Shanghai has the most assertive of skylines, which must be understood as an attempt to bulldoze itself into the list of essential world cities. At night it ripples with neon and light-emitting diodes like Blade Runner brought to life. Smog permitting, during the day it presents a distinctive silhouette of towers that

is instantly recognizable as the symbolic incarnation of the new Shanghai. Towers are symbols but they are also a vital step in achieving substance. 'Pay attention' is the message of all those towers. Build them and the bankers will come. […] Shanghai was determined that every visitor knew the scale of what was going on, and harangued them in language that recalled the days of the Red Guards. Carved in both Chinese and English into a low granite wall were the words: 'Persist in the development of Pudong without wavering until it is done.' […] Shanghai is a city that has been through a spasm of change so violent that it tests the limits of human resilience."

Clearly, Shanghai has regained its former glory. But it has also come to embody the key tenets of neoliberalism - growth, innovation, knowledge economy, and competitiveness. Rapid urban development has led to rising incomes and better amenities but, at the same time, high population growth and density has placed extreme pressure on the city's limited land resources (Wang and Wang 2015; He 2012). Currently, Shanghai has more than 18 million inhabitants and a total area of almost 6,500$km^2$ (Li et al. 2014). Living space per person has reached 15 square meters – doubling from 1990 levels. However, population densities in some parts of the inner city, such as the Old West Gate, are as high as 1,800 to the acre - much like Mumbai's Dharavi slum (Sudjic 2016). While the subway has a daily capacity of more than 10 million, by 2010 the city comprised 3.5 million cars (now caps are in place for the sale of new cars) (Sudjic 2016). A series of plans have aimed to deconcentrate growth into new satellite towns in the Guangdong Province in order to relieve some pressure from the urban core. The satellites have been designed in a fusion of German, Italian, Scandinavian, and Chinese urban styles (Sudjic 2016). For the most part, they serve as bedroom communities for white collar workers employed in inner city businesses (although some new production centers have located in the periphery).

Figure 2. Shanghai Cannes gated community in the Xin Zhuang suburban satellite town.
Photos by Stefan Krasowski/Flickr [CC license].

Under these circumstances, the rise of gating is unsurprising. By some estimates, the Guangdong Province encompassed 54,000 new gated communities by the early 2000s (Miao 2003). One of the largest gated communities, Shanghai Cannes, with 60,000 residents, is depicted in Figure 2. Inner city gated communities tend to be small - though very elegant and exclusive.

The most comprehensive and up to date study on contemporary gated communities in Shanghai was conducted by Ngai Ming Yip in 2012. He found that most *xiaoqu* 'do not necessarily impose strict access control'. They rely on the guards to question strangers (but not very consistently); some are even unwalled. While most residents perceive their neighborhood to be

safe, living in a gated community adds a layer of safety to people's perceptions. While China is safe from crime and violence by international standards, a heightened concern for physical security on the part of residents of gated communities 'may have been created by the presence of migrant workers', 'who have been portrayed by the media and the government as criminally high-risk groups' (Yip 2012, p. 227). Within Shanghai gated communities, 'at least a modicum of interaction' occurs among neighbors, and on average the sense of community is fairly high – although perhaps not at high as in the *li fang* and *danwei* of the former times (Yip 2012). Generally, newly built private housing (as opposed to privatized public housing) elicits both a higher sense of security and sense of community. Community solidarity has been fostered by low-cost management services (partly owing to inadequate state regulation), which lead to disputes and collective action on part of homeowners. Also, the pursuit of unbridled, Western-style neoliberalism, privatism, and escapism may be counterbalanced by a community building initiative (*shequ jianshe*). This 'aims to restructure community governance and strengthen the provision of social services at the neighborhood level' (Yip 2012, p. 231). Other commentators have also noted that the rise of gated communities in Shanghai should not be interpreted as the bulldozing of public space by the private but rather as the carving out of new domestic spaces that potentially increase personal and household autonomy away from hegemonic state control (Pow 2007; Huang 2006).

The rhetoric of the new Shanghai masterplan (2017-2035) is mixed. City leaders seek to reconcile global competitiveness with local livability, as the following passage suggests: "[W]e we aim to plan a Shanghai where residents of all ages may enjoy their lives and lead a healthy lifestyle… It is also our hope that Shanghai is not only for China or the world, but for its citizens! With the love and affection of its citizens, Shanghai will grow more vibrant, and become a fountain of creativity. Let us try our utmost to build Shanghai into a place full of positive energy and vitality that will fulfill its mission to lead the national economic development and partake in the international competition…" (SUPLRAB 2018).

## Method, data, and analysis

This study is based on a review of the available literature and six interviews with key experts in Shanghai. Given the focused nature of the study, this sample was deemed sufficient to reach thematic saturation and garner insights into the issues under investigation (Baker and Edwards 2012). The interviewees were urban planners and designers employed in both the private and the public sector and were identified through snowball (or chain-referral) sampling. (The initial participant was selected from within the researchers' professional network. Upon completion of the first interview, that person was asked to nominate other participants who met the eligibility criteria and could potentially contribute to the study.)

The interviews were semi-structured and took place in June-August 2017. Each lasted one half hour to an hour. The interviews were conducted face to face in Mandarin, voice recorded, transcribed, translated into English, and then analyzed. The analysis followed an iterative manual coding process based on grounded theory, an inductive methodology, which involves

the construction of theory through the analysis of data.[2] The findings are discussed below. The information collected from the participants is summarized in the text. No direct quotes are reported, for two reasons. One is the nature of the analysis, with a focus on the content of the interviews rather than the discursive tropes employed by the interviewees. The other is the language barrier, with subtle linguistic nuances lost during translation.

## Findings: Challenges of opening up gated communities in Shanghai

This research revealed that to open up existing gated communities in Shanghai, five types of challenges must be overcome: (1) *site redesign*; (2) *urban governance*; (3) *social frictions*; (4) *legal status;* and (5) *financial burden*. These are detailed below.

### *Site redesign*

The interviewees note that redesigning a large number of gated communities into open urban neighborhoods based on a street-block system (*jiequ zhi*) (Zhou 2016a) will be an onerous task, which, in their view, the public planning institute rather than individual developers must take on. According to the interviewees (and corroborated by the Shanghai 2017-2035 masterplan, and Kan et al. 2017), the redesign presents three likely challenges:

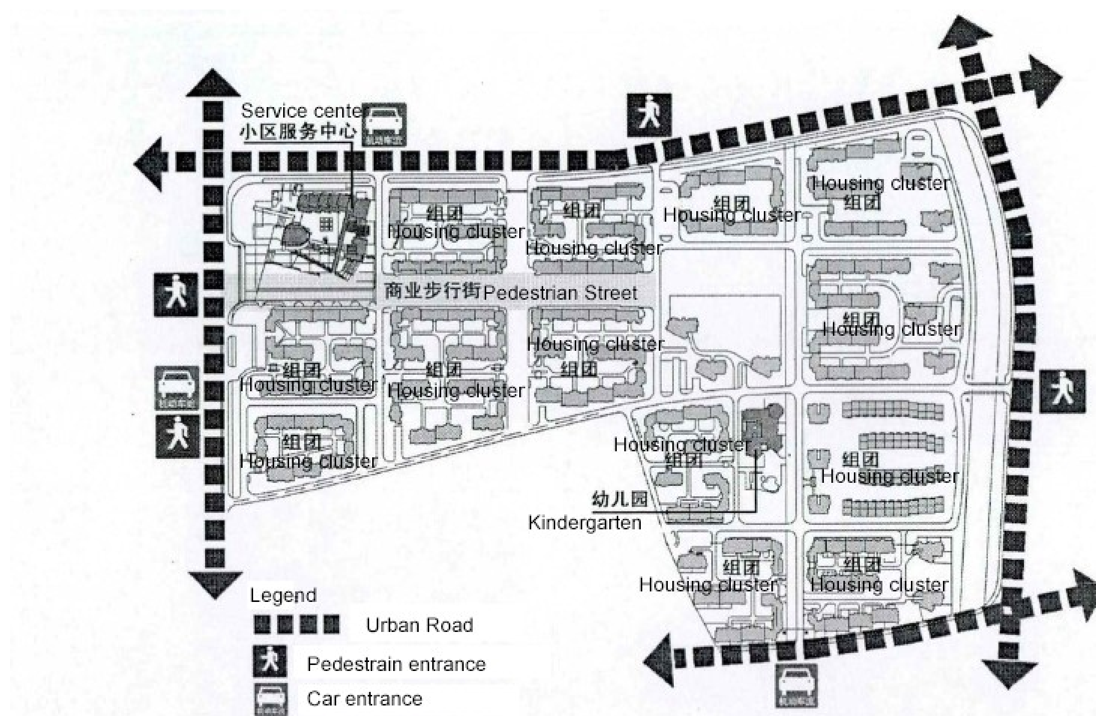


Figure 3. Opening gated communities through elastic and permeable boundaries. Plan courtesy of one of the interviewees.

The first is the creation of "defensible space." When the boundary between the gated community and the city is weakened or removed, the site design must retain a sense of

enclosure, privacy, and security, to which residents of contemporary, privatized Shanghai have become accustomed. To this end, U-shaped or courtyard buildings with elastic and permeable boundaries must be the preferred template (Figure 3). These building blocks must turn into the basic organizing unit of the city – thus constituting a return to the urbanism of socialist Shanghai. Traffic calming devices, such as one way streets, are important as well to impart a sense of safety, and prevent residents from feeling that their living space is being taken over by outsiders. (However, one way streets also have their shortcomings as they can lead to increased vehicular speeds and confuse drivers; Kan et al. 2017) Where a new public right-of-way must be cut through the blocks, the loss of green and parking spaces must be compensated elsewhere (*Global Times*, 2 February 2016; Kan et al. 2017). In context where individualism and privatism has come to reign, these design strategies will ensure more acceptance of the "opening up" process.

Second, the community edges that face main streets - the current 'border vacuums' as labeled by Jane Jacobs (1961) - must be activated by converting the ground level apartments into small offices, creative studios, training centers, tea restaurants, supermarkets, and other small business. These must primarily serve local residents rather than generate regional traffic. This approach would be in line with the traditional Asian linear commercial space concept. Currently, commercial activities are typically located in a central space - replete with water features, flower beds, and sculptures. The challenge will be to convince business owners to relocate along the edges of the gated community, and convert the core into a workspace or non-commercial public space.

This links to the third challenge, which involves combining at least two primary land uses (e.g., work and living) in each community, as advocated by Jane Jacobs as early as 1961. As mentioned, many Shanghai gated communities are now "bedrooms" for employees of business districts located elsewhere, while a strong rationale for opening them up is traffic alleviation. This cannot be realized without mixing land uses and distributing workplaces among currently dormant areas. Some residents may be able to find work closer to their home and thus shorten their commute time – although this is not a guarantee given current levels of job specialization. If gated communities include work functions, such as offices, in the future public transport provision will be key to avoid car traffic generated by commuters from other parts of the city, as this will likely meet with local resistance and resentment. The inclusion of connective bicycle lanes and walking paths may be considered but there is a risk that these may be seen by residents as intrusive, especially if the responsibilities for their maintenance are not specified (Kan et al. 2017).

However, the interviewees concede that this redesign process will likely be very gradual. They propose that, initially, larger gated communities, which effectively obstruct traffic, be subdivided into smaller "semi-gated" units, encircled by green hedges (rather than metal fences or brick walls). This would open the larger access roads to the public, while retaining some privacy for the residents.

## *Urban governance*

The interviewees note that, in conjunction with opening up gated communities, the urban governance system will have to change toward more autonomy for individual communities. In combination with the design strategies outlined above, autonomous decision-making may make the opening process more acceptable to locals. Under the neoliberal paradigm, 'the right to the city' may have been denied to the poor. But in addition to the elites and private interests, the government wields considerable power in Chinese cities. At present, neighborhood committees are only responsible for more modest tasks such as daily maintenance, gardening, and minor conflict resolution within the gated communities. They are not involved in decisions regarding more substantial tasks such as managing population density or addressing parking shortages at neighborhood level - or even the determination of green space ratios or enforcement of noise controls. Because neighborhood-level tasks require coordination among multiple communities, the Shanghai municipal government will need to be involved in guiding neighborhood committees to exercising their powers and complying with their duties without overlaps. The interviewees opine that this transfer of power is feasible but, like site design alterations, can only occur very gradually.

Opening up gated communities would require negotiations and agreement amongst myriad condominium owners, and between the latter and local planning bureaus (Kan et al. 2017). For example, opening up Sanlinyuan, a Shanghai gated community studied by Kan and colleagues, would require consensus across more than 2000 households, as well as engagement with 'Sanlin Residents Committee (*jumin weiyuahui*), the Sanlin Community (*shequ*), and the Pudong New Area Planning and Land Authority' (Kan et al. 2017, p. 770).

The interviewees point out another issue related to urban governance: balancing development, service provision, and spatial quality between the inner city and suburban areas. This imbalance has resulted from Shanghai's focus in the last three decades in promoting and consolidating its international competitiveness – through flagship megaprojects such as Pudong, a glitzy CBD – rather than local livability. If gated communities are opened to the public, so will the services and amenities therein. There is a risk that inner city services will end up flooded with customers from the metropolitan region, whereas the urban fringe will be depleted of services and amenities. The current Shanghai masterplan (2017-2035) highlights this imbalance and promises to tackle it. However, the main planning tool employed for this purpose is still the functionalist service radius. The latter is impossible to implement in an unequal context in which the quality of services varies substantially across the region and many services are "privatized" within the borders of gated communities.

Finally, issues related to job provision might constitute a barrier. Currently, management companies hire a large amount of staff: security officers, cleaners, gardeners, electricians, plumbers, etc. Often their employees are poor migrants or elderly people to whom these jobs offer a chance of survival in a big, competitive, and expensive city like Shanghai. They have been the losers in the globalization and neoliberalism game. If gated communities disappear, this can result in substantial unemployment – unless the public sector steps in to employ some or all of the redundant workers.

To appease the uproar of public discontent, the Supreme People's Court and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development has stated that, in implementing the directive the government will take all involved stakeholders into consideration, the public will be consulted, and preparatory work will be carried out (Zhou 2016a; Zhou 2016b; Hu 2016). This statement was crucial as Chinese society has become more used to debate since the arrival of the Internet age; alienating the elites who have a rich experience in defending their rights and interests is a risky political strategy (Hewitt 2016; Zhou 2016a).

## *Social frictions*

At present, Shanghai gated communities are largely sorted by socio-demographic variables. Some are more traditional and low-rise, and house older, native Shanghainese; these are rapidly disappearing. Others include newly built apartments targeting first-time buyers – typically young couples and singles. Those gated communities which house wealthier urban families are more consolidated and complete with public space and facilities. By contrast, gated communities in the urban fringe are more basic and house more impoverished suburbanites and farmers from the hinterland.

The directive to open up gated communities has triggered fierce opposition from the public, in particular the so-called "gilded class." Angered, its members charge that gated communities in which party members live should open up first to serve as examples for the masses (Zhou 2016a; Gan 2016). Residents often cite security, noise, and pollution concerns to explain their opposition. However, the reasons might be more subtle and center on Chinese social psychology (Zhou 2016b; Hamama 2017; Liu 2016). The interviewees note that, in a society that has been accustomed to gating, individualism, and segregation over the course of several decades, mixing and integrating diverse subpopulations is likely to be a fraught process. For affluent residents of gated communities, their exclusive microcosms fenced off from the rest of urban space and society offer heightened freedom. They serve as a self-protecting mechanism in a context characterized by severe inequalities, poor social security, and deep social distrust (Zhou 2016b; Liu 2016). However, while life within gates is desirable, it is divorced from the larger city environment, ultimately resulting in exclusion (Pow 2007). Moreover, even affluent city dwellers are only empowered as far as the gates extend (Staub and Yu 2014).

At the same time, a non-confrontational, "harmonious" mentality prevails according to which "I shall not oppose anything as long as it does not affect my personal profit." Crucially, gated communities have shrunk the notion of civic engagement and have allowed residents to retreat from civic responsibility (Staub and Yu 2014). The new directive to open them up may be a means to consolidate the party's leadership role inside gated communities (Zhou 2016a).

The interviewees opine that a communal culture must be rebuilt, in which people feel a sense of camaraderie to neighbors from different backgrounds and afford the same level of respect to public space which is shared with "strangers." Moreover, a civic mindset must be shaped, in which people are active participants in the planning and design of their communal neighborhoods and cities. Consistent with these views, the Chinese government too, appears to

be moving toward a social-corporatist direction (Schmalz and Ebenau 2012).

## *Legal status*

Legal issues have been pointed to in the press as a major barrier to opening up gated communities in Chinese cities. Legal experts have stated that such a mandate infringes on residents' property rights, which - according to China's property laws - are "inviolable" (Poon 2016). Because the cost of roads and other shared spaces inside gated communities (lobbies, elevators, parks) have been factored into the prices that residents paid for their homes, gated communities are essentially considered as private property under the constitution and the law. They were built and purchased based on this expectation. Therefore, if the government compels the opening of these communities and taking control of a portion of their space, this would be an act of administrative imposition which may require compensation of property owners (Gan 2016; Kai 2016; Gan 2016).

The Constitution of People's Republic of China and the land laws state that land in urban areas is owned by the government. Individuals and institutions are granted land use rights for a limited term (70 year leases). The state may reclaim or expropriate it for public use and make compensation. A process of adjudication and fair compensation would be needed to minimize land and property disputes, which in the past have been cause of major incidents in China. Which institution would provide the compensation is also uncertain. Local governments may be unwilling or unable to cover the cost of the compensation, as their fiscal burden has been increasing while revenues have stagnated (Kan et al. 2017).

These legal arguments are yet to be accepted or opposed by the government. In a tactic to stall the process, some commentators have proposed that the government wait to implement the opening until property owners' 70-year land leases expire (Zhou 2016b).

## *Financial burden*

The interviewees propose that, to resolve the issue of the fragmented private ownership of roads and other shared spaces inside gated communities (aforementioned), the Shanghai government could purchase those and transfer them into public ownership, while also taking charge of daily management and maintenance task. A return to public ownership, as in the pre-reform era, would alleviate the 'property contradiction' and class conflict that is a continuing source of tension in planning in capitalist contexts - such as contemporary China has become (see Fogelsong 1986). However, this would be an extremely expensive and lengthy process. Demolishing the walls or dismantling the fences of gated communities will impose another major financial burden, which the interviewees believe the government should shoulder.

It is unclear where these funds would come from. One cost-recovery idea proposed by the interviewees involves fees and profits from infill development. Parking lots, portions of parks, and other open spaces within gated communities could be sold to residential and commercial developers. This would also make more efficient use of Shanghai's scarce urban land resources and reduce the amount of public (green and open) space that would require public maintenance. However, in an already hyper-dense city, this strategy is likely to result in public uproar.

Moreover, green and beautiful outdoor space is one of the major selling points that the developers of gated communities have highlighted to attract potential buyers. If developers cannot provide this amenity, they might be uncooperative as they would see their profits reduced.

Another idea is to allow members of the public (outside a gated community) to use certain facilities therein, such as parking lots, community clubs, and swimming pools, upon payment of an entry fee. To make this idea more palatable, local residents and neighbors should be given priority of use. Existing guards, who would lose their jobs if gated communities are opened up, should be employed in these facilities. These practices are already in place in some gated communities, and therefore the transition might not be very strenuous.

## Conclusion

The advent of gated communities in China has been primarily motivated by neoliberal and individualistic ideologies that took root post *gaige kaifang* rather than a practical need to defend residential space from crime or traffic. Similarly, the new government directive that calls for an end to gated communities ostensibly stems from practical concerns such as traffic congestion but likely has its roots in the sentiment that gating is incompatible with the tenets of communism. Open cities may be more socially vibrant and economically productive. But the process of opening up a myriad gated communities in Shanghai - and other large cities in China - is more complex than simply removing walls and fences; extensive research and a multi-pronged strategy is required. In fact, this paper's tagline might be 'be careful what you wish for'.

Policy makers will have to carefully consider design, governance, social, legal, and financial issues associated with the opening process. Paramount issues include: creating 'defensible space', applying traffic calming devices, devolving decision-making power to neighborhood committees, balancing funding streams between the center and the peripheries, and reviewing property laws. In conjunction, the underlying political, economic, cultural, and spatial planning factors that have led large portions of the Chinese population to want to live in gated communities since the Reform and Opening policy must be tackled; a new inclusive public consciousness must be fostered. The complexity and depth of these tasks precludes quick action and forced "opening" (Zhou 2016b). There is a long way to go. So far, only Beijing has taken some initiative to test the implementation of the government's directive. Pilot projects containing small blocks will be implemented as part of the planning of Tongzhou, Beijing's administrative sub-center (Kan et al. 2017).

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# Notes

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[1] In the interest of brevity, this overview does not venture beyond the context of Chinese cities. However, gated communities in other parts of the world have been discussed at length by other papers in the last three decades, and readers are invited to consult Aron (2002), Frantz (2000), Atkinson and Flint (2004), Blakely and Snyder (1997), Coy (2006), Low in Low and Smith (2006), Webster (2001), Goix and Webster (2008), and Renaud and Elena (2015) for additional background information.

[2] By contrast, positivist approaches are based on a priori themes, and the collected data is used to show how the theory applies to, or deviates from, the phenomenon under study. But an existing framework was not available in this case because, as noted, no country to date has attempted to open up gated communities.