

**GARDEN ESTATES AND SOCIAL HARMONY: A STUDY INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
RESIDENTIAL PLANNING AND URBAN GOVERNANCE IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA**

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ABSTRACT

A major feature of China's urban transformation in recent years has been the appearance of huge numbers of new residential housing estates: the basic planning/design unit of this new urban phenomenon is the *xiaoqu* (小区). At the same time, the basic unit of urban governance has shifted from the workplace (*danwei*) to the residential "community" – *shequ* (社区). In many recently constructed residential districts these two units coincide: that is to say, the spatial unit of the *xiaoqu* corresponds exactly to the administrative/governmental unit of the *shequ*. The main objective of this paper is to explore the relationships between space and governance at the residential level: To what extent are the designs of *xiaoqu* influenced by questions of governance? Or, conversely, in what ways do the spatial forms created by commercial urban designers affect the possibilities for governance within the *shequ*? Based on fieldwork in Wuhan, this paper will argue that urban planners play a crucial role in enabling "good" governance and the production of harmonious communities.

INTRODUCTION

The Steel City Garden Community Residents' Committee in Wuhan is very proud of the fact that during the SARS outbreak of 2003 not a single case of infection was recorded within its boundaries. According to the Committee's chairperson, Madame Wang, this achievement was due largely to the rigorous measures implemented by the Committee.¹ During the crisis a four-part program was adopted to guard against the spread of contagion: first the Committee carried out an intensive public education campaign to ensure that all residents were made aware of government public health guidelines on containing the spread of SARS; second, they organized teams of volunteers to make daily visits on every household under its jurisdiction so that the health of each resident could be regularly monitored; third, they placed any residents returning from places with high infection rates under complete isolation; and fourth, the Committee established checkpoints at every gate leading into its residential compound in order to enforce a rigid policy of exclusion on all but permanent residents and essential service personnel. Moreover all people entering the compounds had their temperatures taken, and any with high readings were sent to the Community Clinic for further monitoring.

The SARS outbreak was, of course, a major crisis demanding extraordinary measures. Nevertheless, the response in places like Steel City Garden Community demonstrates how local institutions were mobilized to meet the emergency. Grassroots-level institutions have been revamped in recent years as the result of concerted government-sponsored programs of "community building" (*shequ jianshe* 社区建设). At the same time, the rapid pace of urban development and redevelopment has seen a transformation in the structure of the residential environment. The objective of this paper is to analyze the relationship between local urban governance and the new forms of residential space that have appeared in recent years. Was the success of the fight against SARS in part due to the planners and architects who design the new residential estates? Or more generally, to what extent are the new forms of community governance enabled and supported by the spatial arrangements of the newly built residential estates. In this paper I will attempt to address such questions with reference to general trends in urban design as well as case studies of two residential estates in Wuhan.

In a broader perspective, I hope, through this paper, to address what I see as a glaring void in the literature on contemporary China. While we hear much about the economic development and globalization of Chinese cities, we know far too little about the micro-politics of community and the local spatial practices that inform the everyday lives of urban residents. As China's role in global economics expands and as its geopolitical influence increases, it is more crucial than ever that we understand how it is governed internally; especially since the sheer scope of change that China has experienced means that much of our previously established knowledge on the nature of urban society no longer holds true. This paper, then, is intended to contribute to a larger project of reappraising the complex relationships between politics, society and the urban environment in contemporary China.

SPACE AND POWER

There is a small but growing body of literature on the relationship between space and power, but as John Allen argues in a recent study (2003), most of this work, whether Marxist or poststructuralist in outlook, views space as a relatively straightforward conduit for the exercise or transmission of power. Where Marxist geographers see space as merely another medium through which capitalist relations of production are reproduced, many poststructuralists suggest that space simply reinforces the individuated forms of power and distanced modes of government that they take as characteristic of contemporary life. What is neglected by these works is that space is critical not simply because governance happens in space, but rather because spatial formations affect the very possibilities of governance.

French theorist and historian Michel Foucault, has been one of the few to insist upon the necessity of incorporating the problem of space into the analysis of power in modern society (Soja 1989: 10-42). In his famous analysis of Bentham's "Panopticon"¹, Foucault (1979: 195-228), demonstrates how the meticulously conceived spatial design of this prison enabled the emergence of a new type of individuating disciplinary power. Moreover, he suggests that this kind of relationship between space and power is emblematic of modern society and can be found in variant forms through a range of everyday institutions: for example, the school, the factory, the hospital the asylum and even the family home. Following Foucault's method, scholars like Soja (1989) and Rabinow (1989) have expanded and developed the space/power analysis to other realms of constructed space. The key insight, which is underscored over and over again in these studies, is that power does not precede space; rather power

¹ This case was recounted directly to me during recent fieldwork in Wuhan. Proper nouns have been changed.

and space are mutually constitutive and the design of the built environment has absolutely critical implications for the ways in which power is able to operate.

Scholars of China have also begun to turn their attention to questions of space and power in recent years: Francesca Bray (1997) explores gendered space and the role of women's work within the family household during the late imperial period, Yang Dongping (1994) touches on issues of urban planning and politics in his comparative cultural study of Beijing and Shanghai, Michael Dutton (1992) dissects the spatial implications of the Chinese prison as well as some of the everyday spaces of contemporary "streetlife" (1998), Li Zhang (2001) charts the rise and fall of "migrant" space in Beijing's Zhejiang Village" and Lisa Rofel (1999) studies how factory space relates to regimes of labor discipline. All are recent examples of scholarship that demonstrate the importance of spatial considerations to broadening our understanding of social, cultural and political practice in China. However, there are still many gaps in our understanding of the space/power relationship in contemporary China, most notably including the field of urban residential design. In this area my own earlier research on the creation of socialist workunit (*danwei*) space (Bray 2005) during the Maoist period can provide a useful point of departure for analysis of more recent developments.

GOVERNING SOCIALIST CITY SPACE

The relationship between space and power manifested in a unique form in China's socialist cities as they developed under the planned economy of the Maoist period. During these years the socialist workplace, *danwei*, or workunit, was the basic unit of the centrally planned economy, but it also became the site through which the state provided welfare, housing, education, healthcare and other social benefits. As a result the *danwei* quickly became the basic unit of social and economic life for a great majority of urban residents. At the same time, the workunit played a key role in the political mobilization of the urban population: each workplace had a Communist Party Branch as well as trade union, Women's Federation and Communist Youth League, all of which took on responsibility for ideological work amongst various segments of the resident population (Bray 2005). In this way the *danwei* encompassed the social, economic and political life of its resident members.

Most significantly, the *danwei* system also had important implications for the spatial structure of the socialist city. From the beginning of the First Five Year Plan in 1953, Chinese planning authorities adopted a "project" style investment and construction strategy in order to target limited funds as effectively as possible. The majority of large-scale *danwei* (factories, power plants, universities and colleges etc.) were established through direct central investment with little involvement of the city or regional authorities where the *danwei* was located. Investment for each *danwei* project included funds specifically designated for the provision of the basic daily needs of the *danwei* workforce—housing, meals, healthcare, education and so on. City-level government often had no control over the development of large-scale *danwei* within their urban jurisdiction, and as a result, the socialist city became dominated by a cellular spatial structure where each cell (*danwei*) had very few horizontal links with any other part of the city. This gave rise to one of the most significant peculiarities of Chinese socialism: cities that were collections of independent workplace-based communities, rather than integrated urban environments.

The most obvious marker of this cellular urban structure was the high enclosing wall that invariably surrounded the *danwei*. The wall marked out the realm of the *danwei*, defining the distinct spatial territory within which particular regimes of government and social interaction held sway. The *danwei* wall signified, unambiguously, the independence of the *danwei* from the surrounding city, while at the same time it *produced* the space within which a unique form of collectivized social life and socialist government operated. *Danwei* members would spend most of their time within this discreet space, their daily lives shaped not only by the routines and rhythms of the *danwei*, but also by the spatial forms within which they circulated.

Central planning bestowed a high degree of uniformity on the ways in which each *danwei* was organized and operated. Similarly, the design of *danwei* space was largely standardized as a result of the centralization of architectural and urban design: primary responsibility in this task fell to the General Design Office (GDO) of the Ministry of Construction (Bray 2005: 131-133). The blueprints that began to emerge from the GDO in 1953, seemed to embody two key design objectives: first, to symbolize, and reproduce in miniature, the order of the socialist state; and secondly, to promote a socialist collectivized lifestyle amongst its resident members. The basic design principle was to align of key architectural elements along a central axis, while lesser subsidiary elements were arranged in groups on either side of the main axis. Large-scale *danwei* often had one or two additional axes situated parallel to the central axis. The purpose of this axial arrangement is clearly symbolic and derives in part from the principles of

classical Chinese architecture. Traditional city plans and the designs for temple or palace complexes were always based upon an axial progression of major architectural and spatial elements.² Yet the symbolism informing the axiality of the socialist *danwei* is quite different to that of traditional arrangements. Whereas traditional axes were formed by a progression from elements of lesser importance to those of greater importance, symbolizing the strict hierarchical order of Confucian society, the *danwei* on the contrary, reversed the order placing the principle architectural feature in full view at the forefront of the axis, immediately opposite the entrance to the compound. In this way a spatial order was established immediately around this central, architecturally dominant focal point.

Reversing the traditional axial principle in designing the socialist *danwei* reflects the influence of the monumental and triumphal architectural style of the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union.³ It was a style that aimed to provide a clear physical embodiment to the power of socialism and the socialist state. To this end, the location of significant buildings was chosen carefully so as to enhance the symbolic effect to the greatest degree. Under Stalin, the city itself became a text upon which the power of the state was writ large (Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze. 1992). In China, Stalinist-style monumentalism was utilized at certain key points within most cities, the best known example being Tiananmen Square at the heart of Beijing. However, it was within the mini-cities of socialist China—the *danwei* compounds—that architectural monumentalism achieved its most significant every-day effect.

The architectural focal building of the *danwei*, often simply called the *zhulou*, or “principal building”, usually housed the main administrative offices for the *danwei*, including offices for the Party branch committee and other senior *danwei* officials. Its positioning therefore, symbolized the centrality of the Party and its leadership role in the everyday life of *danwei*. The effect of axial arrangements in traditional China was to situate power deep behind layers of walls, hidden, impenetrable and far removed from the ordinary subject. By contrast, the architectural language of the *danwei* spoke to a more open, populist and at times, egalitarian face of state power. In short, while the spatial symbolism of the *danwei* represented the centrality of Party and state to the life of the *danwei*, it also embodied the ideals of Mao’s famous “mass line”; namely, that leaders must live and work amongst the masses.

According to standard designs, the other important buildings of the *danwei* compound were arranged along the central axis behind the *zhulou*. Where the function of the *zhulou* was usually related directly to the Party and central government, other buildings were generally associated with the business of the particular *danwei*. These buildings housed the major workshops or plants for a factory, the offices for an administrative department or the lecture theatres and classrooms for an educational institution. As with the *zhulou*, the central positioning of these buildings imparted an important symbolic meaning: it denoted the centrality of labor in the life of the *danwei* and the socialist nation. The *raison d’être* of the *danwei* was the organization of labor, therefore within the *danwei* compound daily life revolved around the demands of production—whether it be production of material goods, knowledge or information. It is not strange to find then, that the *danwei* was organized spatially to reflect the privileged position that socialism accorded productive labor.

The symbolism of the *danwei* compound thus embodied two interrelated ideas: first, it underscored the primacy of the socialist state and socialist Party; and secondly, it reinforced the significance of labor to socialist practice. The former represented the leadership, guidance and unity of purpose that was required in order to realize the aims of socialism; while the latter represented the practical means through which a socialist society was to be achieved. Labor was important both as a material and spiritual prerequisite to socialism. That is to say, socialism was predicated upon *both* an improvement in the material conditions of life, which could only be brought about through productive labor, *and* the production of proletarian consciousness that emerged out of participation in collective labor. *Danwei* design clearly sought to produce a space in which both the productive and the spiritual effects of labor could be nurtured.

It would be a mistake, however, to focus only upon the symbolic, since compounds were also designed to achieve practical effects both in the promotion of productive relationships and the transformation in modes of social interaction. Like their Soviet forebears, Chinese architects and urban designers believed that spatial forms could play an instrumental role in the production of proletarian consciousness and lifestyles. Their designs reflected this commitment to collective life within the *danwei* at a number of different scales. At the most basic level of collectivity, every three to five families shared toilets and kitchens within each basic housing unit (*danyuan*). At the next level, each two to three buildings shared facilities like laundries, bicycle sheds and open space for recreation. Finally at the *danwei* level, all residents shared facilities like canteens, medical clinics, bath houses, meeting halls, sports grounds, kindergartens, primary schools etc. Collectivism was embedded at every level within the micro-level practices of daily life in the *danwei*. The minute planning that went into the production of collective

oriented spaces shows that collectivism was not merely an abstract political ideal promoted by CCP authorities. Rather it was a principle that informed a whole range of daily practices within the *danwei*. Likewise, it is abundantly apparent that the principle of collectivity was not only reflected in the symbolic form of the *danwei* compound, it was also invested to a very practical degree within the everyday spaces around which *danwei* life revolved.

Under Maoism, there was a very clear link between power and space – the spatial form of the *danwei* bolstered a socialist mode of urban governance centered on the workplace. The *danwei* was intended to be a machine for the production of loyal, proletarian workers, but like all utopian schemes it was doomed to failure. After the death of Mao and the repudiation of his more radical policies, China set off on a path of economic reform under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. While the reforms have been responsible for a dramatic transformation of China's economy, they have also resulted in spectacular change to the urban environment. These spatial changes have likewise underpinned the emergence of new methods for the governance of the urban population.

THE NEW CHINESE CITY

In the post-Mao period a range of policies have been adopted to transform the planned economy into a market economy and to establish a so-called “modern enterprise system” in place of the old state-run sector. One of the implications of this transition has been the separation of workplace and living space as the *danwei* has been stripped of most of its former welfare functions. At the same time, rapid economic development over recent years has resulted in a dramatic transformation of both the physical and the social structure of the Chinese city. Large swathes of the low-rise housing, industrial and commercial architecture of preceding decades have been replaced by new high-rise apartment blocks, multi-level shopping malls and modern office towers. Increasing rates of urbanization have seen the cities grow ever larger as new housing estates and industrial development zones creep further out into the countryside. Economic restructuring has also led to the decline of state-sector employment, while the rise of the private sector, combined with relaxation of internal constraints on population movement, has resulted in the emergence of new socio-economic groups amongst the urban population: entrepreneurs, private sector employees and migrant laborers from the countryside pursue their daily lives virtually independent of the old state system. A key feature of China's urban transformation in recent years has been the appearance of huge numbers of new residential housing estates, designed by professional planners and architects they are known as “small districts”, or *xiaoqu*. These estates, private and highly differentiated by entry price, are primarily home to the newly emerging wealthy and middle classes, but some are also designed to house people of more modest income who have been relocated due to urban renewal elsewhere in the city.

Perhaps the standout feature of recent housing construction has been the relatively large scale of individual development projects. Moves toward the commercialization of real estate in urban China have certainly not led to a proliferation of small-scale owner-builders.⁴ No doubt the scarcity of land and population pressure has influenced planning authorities to promote the kind of high-rise and high-density development that can only be undertaken by large-scale construction firms. At the same time, the decline of central funding for state sector *danwei* and the financial windfall derived from land sales, have both contributed to a resurgence in the power and wealth of the city government (Wang and Murie 1996). Where the operation of the centrally planned economy permitted little scope for urban planning, reform era policies have revived the possibilities for the coordination of urban development at city and district levels. All these factors have led to the rise of a planning regime that favors large-scale coordinated projects.

The basic spatial unit of the new planning regime is the so-called “small district” (*xiaoqu*), and bears some resemblance to the *danwei* residential compounds of the past.⁵ It is a planned neighborhood where housing is integrated with communal facilities like kindergartens, clinics, restaurants, convenience shops, sports facilities and communications infrastructure all under the control of a professional property management company. The concept of the *xiaoqu* was developed in the late 1980s, through trials sponsored by the Ministry of Construction in the cities of Wuxi, Jinan and Tianjin. According to Zou Denong's analysis (2001: 459-465), the *xiaoqu* designers particularly focused on the communal spaces of the compound, striving to promote attributes like social cohesion (*ningjuli*), neighborliness (*linli guanxi*) and feelings of security and belonging. When the trials were deemed successful, the *xiaoqu* compound became the model for residential development throughout China.

While the *xiaoqu* clearly bears some resemblance to the *danwei* of the past, it also differs in important respects. Some *xiaoqu* are attached to large-scale enterprises or institutions (like universities) but by far the majority are not connected to any sort of workplace (Wu 2002: 163). Not only does this mean that the

link between work and daily life has been severed, it also ensures that residents within any given *xiaoqu* will come from a range of backgrounds and workplaces. As homeowners rather than *danwei* staff members, the residents of the *xiaoqu* are likely to have a more proprietorial attitude to their surroundings and may even join the local “homeowners association” (*yezhu weiyuanhui*) in order to protect their property interests (Read 2003).

Although a form of communal space, the *xiaoqu* is a privatized realm that residents have bought their way into. Unlike the *danwei*, to which people were assigned, residence in a *xiaoqu* is determined largely by choice and the ability to pay. As the disparity within urban incomes has continually widened, housing supply has diversified to meet the needs of different social strata. Whereas the socialist cities had generated a fairly ad hoc and largely undifferentiated distribution of social groups throughout urban space, the new city is a place in which social differentiation is becoming increasingly linked to one's location within a stratified spatial order (Wu 2002: 161-6). Money buys a bigger apartment in a better-serviced compound, but it also buys peace of mind and a greater sense of security (Fraser 2000: 27). Most *xiaoqu* have some kind of barrier— a wall or fence—enclosing them, and many have security guards who monitor and control entry to the compound. The more affluent the *xiaoqu*, the better the security— higher walls, more guards and more sophisticated electronic surveillance and entry systems.⁶ No doubt it is more than fortuitous that the rise and proliferation of the gated *xiaoqu* has mirrored the decline and contraction of the state sector and the “flood” of rural migrants into the cities. Both these latter trends have important implications for city space that further highlight the degree to which the urban environment is being refigured to reflect new relations of power.⁷

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

These physical, social and demographic changes have presented China's authorities with major challenges in their efforts to govern the urban population. The methods of the past, centered on the state-sector workplace (*danwei*), are simply no longer able to encompass an increasingly mobile and diverse population within the rapidly changing urban environment. In response to this challenge, from the latter half of the 1990s, the Chinese Government began to develop the strategy known as “community building”, aimed at re-organizing the urban population through “community” units based on their place of residence. This policy initiative is underpinned by a new conception of society, derived in part from the social-democratic traditions of Europe and, more particularly, from the influential New Labor strategy known as “the Third Way”, articulated most fully in recent works of Anthony Giddens. Under this model “community” stands between the state and the individual as a mechanism for mediating the relationship between the population and government as well as for initiating and operating self-help services in areas the state is unwilling or unable to shoulder (Giddens 1998: 78-89). In China, the official concept of “community” has been deployed in a similar vein, but within a far more specific and narrower framework of operation and combined with elements of socialist-style mobilization tactics inherited from the past.

This policy intervention turns upon a very specific and narrow definition of the concept of “community” which strongly emphasizes territorial and organizational elements. While it is founded upon the “Residents’ Committee” system inherited from the Maoist period, “community building” has seen an enlargement in the scale of the basic “community” unit, the professionalization of its staff and a significant expansion in its activities to include responsibility for aspects of welfare, education, sanitation, public health, family planning, public order and so on (Duoji 2001). The new organizations are far more substantial than the Residents’ Committees of the past and appear to have a much larger influence over the territory they control. In this respect the campaign to “build communities” has transformed the governance of urban space: since its inception cities have been reorganized into a matrix of contiguous “communities”, each run by a committee of cadres according to a standardized repertoire of bureaucratic procedures.

The responsibilities now delegated to the *community* are numerous, but can be divided into five broad areas of activity (Li 2004). First, it is expected to provide a range of services to the resident population. This work focuses on the various groups within the *community* who need special care: the elderly, the sick, the disabled, those with financial difficulties, the unemployed and the laid-off workers. *Community* cadres are responsible for administering the state's guarantee to provide a basic living allowance to those who have no other means of support. Secondly, the *community* is charged with responsibility for managing aspects of urban healthcare and sanitation. Many *communities* have their own clinics, others arrange consultations with doctors, and most organize periodic information sessions on various aspects of personal and public health. In times of crisis, such as the SARS outbreak of 2003, the community is mobilized to implement emergency prevention methods as directed by national authorities. They are also required to administer state family planning policies, which include very close monitoring of contraception amongst all women of childbearing age, as well as the registration and reporting of all

births within their territory. Additionally, *community* cadres manage every-day sanitation work, garbage removal and general maintenance of the *community* environment—although staff of the property management company in most instances carries out the actual work.

Thirdly, the *community* is expected to organize a wide range of educational and cultural programs. Educational work mostly centers on the dissemination of CCP government policy and is referred to variously as “socialist education” or “education to foster civilized citizens of quality” (*wenming shimin suzhi jiaoyu*). Cultural events are arranged on national holidays and other significant occasions. Fourthly, the *community* plays an important role in the local coordination of security work. In this area the cadres work closely with local police and the security guards of neighboring work units and residential compounds. This work includes arranging security patrols of the entire *community* territory, disseminating information on household security, monitoring the behavior of residents who have been in trouble previously, ensuring all residents are registered with the police, solving disputes amongst residents and mobilizing volunteers to establish “neighborhood watch” networks. Finally, the *community* is required to coordinate and liaise between various other organizations. Most importantly, it takes direction from the local Street Office of the District Government and from the local Party organization. If the *community* contains enough Party members it is required to establish its own CCP branch with the head of the *community* committee simultaneously acting as Party branch secretary. The *community* also liaises closely with any work units and other businesses located within its territory, with the local property management company, with the homeowners’ committee (*yezhu weiyuanhui*), with local People’s Congress delegates and with any other official organization that wishes to make contact with the local population.

The preceding outline demonstrates that the duties of the *community* cover a wide range of responsibilities, and since each *community* is staffed with only three to six full-time cadres (depending on population), managing this heavy workload is an onerous undertaking. To address the logistical challenges, cadres are encouraged to mobilize volunteers from within the local residential population to assist in the day-to-day work of *community* governance. This strategy accords closely to the guiding principles that underpin “*community* building” and which derive in part from the Maoist traditions of mass participation and self-help. Like the RC, the *community* is officially defined as a “mass organization”, so one of the main duties for the cadres is to mobilize “the masses” to participate. At the heart of the volunteer system is a corps of “activists” (often Party members) organized into a hierarchical system based on the spatial arrangement of the *community* population: if the *community* has more than one residential compound then each has a designated “compound leader”; each separate apartment block inside the compound, in turn, has a volunteer “building leader”; while within each building several “section” or “floor” leaders will be assigned. Together these volunteer activists provide a comprehensive network for ensuring that all aspects of *community* life are kept under close scrutiny and that all the vital daily maintenance and security work is seen to. It is the volunteer network that links the *community* population to the formal organizational structure and binds its territory into one seamless social unit.

Volunteer participation is also crucial to achieving a degree of “self-governance” within the *community*. The concept of “self-governance” (*zizhi*) is a strong theme in the official literature on *community* building, however the term should not be understood as implying anything like “absolute autonomy”, but rather a more limited form of “self-governance” in which the *community* is expected to manage its own affairs within the operational parameters established by government authorities. In explaining this concept more fully the manuals sub-divide the concept into three categories known as the “three selves”: self-management, self-education, and self-service (Chen 2004: 26-8). Self-management concerns the way in which the *community* is organized internally and implies that it is expected to mobilize itself (with the cadres taking a lead role) to create its own management structures—committees, sub-committees and so on—that are capable of carrying out the various tasks, for example, security, sanitation, and cultural events, assigned to it. The concepts of self-education and self-service demand that the *community* rely substantially on its own resources—human as well as material—in pursuing the intellectual, spiritual and economic improvement of its population.

The *community* is charged not only with responsibility for looking after residents with special economic needs, but also with lifting moral and educational standards, particularly amongst those sections of the population that are seen as problematic, such as migrant laborers, petty criminals, delinquents, and the unemployed. In taking on this kind of role, the *community* has been increasingly mobilized as a player in the broader national campaigns to raise the overall “quality” (*suzhi*) of the population. Insofar as local problems begin to be solved by local cadres and residents working together as a *community*, the need for intervention from higher levels of government is forestalled and practical efficiencies are achieved.

That the “community” has emerged to replace the workunit (*danwei*) as the basic organizational cell of

urban society over recent years at the same time as dramatic transformation of the physical form of the urban environment is by no means fortuitous. Rather, it underscores the close link between modes of governance and forms of urban space. In particular I believe that emerging strategies of *community* governance have been significantly bolstered by the spatial design of contemporary residential estates. In many ways the *xiaoqu* creates forms of social space that seem to be highly amenable to the implementation of *community* governance: they are meticulously planned in order to facilitate security, surveillance, community services and activities, and to promote a sense of belonging amongst residents. In short, the spatial arrangements appear to bolster the opportunities for “building community”.

CASE STUDIES: 2 RESIDENTIAL ESTATES IN WUHAN

The appearance of many upscale housing developments and the increasing socio-economic differentiation of residential areas within China's cities over the last decade have encouraged some commentators (eg. Tomba 2005) to equate this trend to the phenomenon of the “gated community” that has proliferated in the United States and elsewhere. However, while comparative analysis can provide useful insights it should always be treated with a critical and skeptical eye. Much of what has been written on the issue of “gated communities” in North and South America (for example Luymes 2002, Caldeira 1999) poses the problem in terms of a class analysis which situates the wealthy elite on the inside and the poor and marginalized on the outside. While the class analysis has some relevance to circumstances in China, the inside/outside dichotomy has limited applicability since the majority of China's urban population, regardless of class or status, live inside some form of walled compound. In China the “gate” or the “wall” does not of itself provide the key to understanding social division; rather it is the space inside – the way it is configured, policed, secured, and serviced – which reveals the nature of the power relationships at work. In the following section I will attempt to unpack the implications of these power relationships through a detailed comparative analysis of two residential estates (*xiaoqu*) in Wuhan, central China.⁷

Wuhan is a large inland city, less developed than coastal cities like Shanghai, but also undergoing rapid urban transformation. Although reforms to its local governance structures began later than in coastal cities, Wuhan's urban authorities have enthusiastically adapted the concepts of “*community* building” to their larger programs for the modernization of the metropolis (Wuhanshi 2005). The two estates I studied have both been constructed in the last five years and are held up as local models of residential lifestyle as well as exemplars of the “*community* building”. The Hundred Pagoda Garden estate (HPG), located in the Jiang'an District of Hankou, is built and managed by a private real estate developer and its apartments are sold on the open market to a largely middle-class section of the population. HPG has gained considerable national attention through visits from senior government leaders and promotes itself in marketing as a “new brand (*pinpai*) in residential management”. Its carefully cultivated corporate model is underpinned by the close integration of property management with *community* governance. Steel City Garden estate (SCG), located in the Qingshan District of Wuchang, adjacent to the Wuhan steel works, was built by the property development subsidiary of Wuhan Steel and provides homes primarily to workers and staff of that enterprise. Organizationally, there is a much clearer distinction at SCG between property management and *community* governance.

Both garden estates belong to larger urban development projects: HPG is a *xiaoqu* of about 12 000 thousand residents (3 400 households) within a development currently housing 60 000 and due to expand to a satellite city of 300 000 residents; SCG, with 6 400 residents (1863 households) is one of 8 *xiaoqu* housing over 50 000 within the larger Steel City development. Despite affiliation with much larger urban projects, both estates are archetypal *xiaoqu*: that is, they are enclosed residential compounds and each is also designated as a *community* for the purposes of local governance. Both estates, then, are spatial units as well as basic units of urban governance. For this reason they make excellent sites through which to further explore the relationship between residential design and urban governance.

During fieldwork in Wuhan I spent several days based within each estate collecting research data. In addition to observing the spatial configuration of the estates I collected numerous documents from the *community* committee relating to internal governance and management. I also utilized interviews to collect detailed information from *community* staff and from local activists and volunteers who participate in *community* governance. The professional staff of the *community* committee were interviewed on practical issues of organization: for example, how are volunteers mobilized to participate? How are sub-committees organized? How is day-to-day work managed and how are various tasks distributed? Moreover, each individual staff member (including the community policeman) was interviewed on the more specific problems relating to the practical implementation of work within their particular area of responsibility: for example how is family planning policy undertaken? How are security patrols organized? How are disputes between residents managed? Interviews were also undertaken with the unpaid

volunteers who, as “gate leaders” and “building leaders” (门栋张), form a network of activists spread throughout the space of the community. Volunteers were asked about their role as conduits between the committee and the ordinary residents: how they are briefed on policy and how they interact with and mobilize the residents under their jurisdiction.

The most obvious way in which these residential estates are policed is through monitoring and regulating entrance into the *xiaoqu* compounds. Both estates are enclosed by high steel fences with access restricted to two (HPG) or three (SCG) entrance gates. In the past most workunits and residential compounds were enclosed by solid walls, but in recent years the trend is to utilize sturdy fences instead of walls. I have heard two explanations for this shift: first, that the fence is simply more aesthetically pleasing than a high brick wall; others, however, suggest that change is dictated primarily by security concerns – the iron fence, unlike the wall, is transparent and therefore more amenable to regimes of surveillance from both inside and outside. The entrance gates are staffed 24/7 by security guards employed by the management company. Under normal circumstances people entering are rarely asked to provide ID, but the guards certainly do challenge anyone they perceive to be an outsider, especially if they appear to be a peddler or a rural migrant. When need be, for example during the SARS crisis, it is a simple matter to close the gates and enforce a far stricter regime of identification. Alternatively, if a crime is committed inside the compound, the guarded exit gates make it very difficult for a suspect to leave undetected. While having guards at their gates no doubt enhance residents’ sense of security, it is also a constant reminder to them that they live within a highly surveyed residential space and that their own activities may be subject to regular scrutiny.

Policing of residential space is also enabled through the enhanced visibility that results from the formal and regularized symmetrical arrangement of architectural elements within the compounds. A typical *xiaoqu* has anything from 20-50 separate apartment buildings spread out across the open space of the compound. Usually these buildings will be clustered into groups so that several will open onto a common area of grassed or paved public space. The clusters will normally be linked together by wide boulevards – thoroughfares running between the entrance gates, and providing quick and easy access to all parts of the compound. HPG has four clusters of buildings while SCG is sub-divided into six internal clusters. These spatial arrangements render the open spaces of both *xiaoqu* remarkably transparent to the gaze of anyone who cares to notice. While this design enhances the effectiveness of formal security work, it also transforms each resident into a permanent unofficial security guard. The spatial structure presents an open book to the gaze of every resident as they pass through the compound; and since every thoroughfare invariably carries regular pedestrian traffic, irregularities would no doubt be spotted by any number of residents in a very short space of time. Conversely, each resident is all too aware that their own behavior is equally transparent to fellow residents; in this way spatial design, in homage to the Panopticon, contributes to the inward turn of the resident subject as she learns to govern herself to conform to the accepted norms of public behavior.

Security within the *xiaoqu* is further augmented by the utilization of both human and technological means of surveillance. In the more affluent residential estates CCTV is a common feature. HPG has installed a comprehensive CCTV network with a security guard on constant duty monitoring the screens in a control room located adjacent to the main entrance gate. Virtually all *xiaoqu* have professional security guards periodically patrolling the compound as well as staffing the gates. Many estates, including both HPG and SCG, also have volunteer patrols organized by the *community* committee under the guidance of their designated ‘community’ policeman as well as in liaison with the security staff. As a final measure, both estates have also followed police advice to install heavy steel ‘anti-burglar’ security doors on the entrances into all residential buildings. According to the community policeman at SCG (interview 17/01/06), the primary purpose of all these security measures is prevention. However, given all the other measures already in place, the implementation of patrols by resident volunteers seems to be as much about building community cohesion and fostering a sense of responsibility amongst the resident population as meeting actual needs of security.

Volunteer participation, as a major component of ‘*community* building’, is actively pursued in both estates and is facilitated in some respects by the design of residential buildings. Since the 1950s the favored style of urban housing has been the elongated multi-floor apartment block with a series of separate ground level entrances (Bray 2005:134). Each entrance, known as a *danyuan* (单元), leads to a stairwell that gives access to two or three apartments on each floor. There is no internal access between stairwells, so normally there is only one way in and out for any given apartment. In both HPG and SCG estates this style of housing predominates and the *community*’s volunteer network is built around this feature. In principle, the *community* recruits one volunteer activist from each *danyuan* to act as ‘section leader’ for the *community*. The section leaders meet once each month with the *community* committee for

a briefing, but can liaise with *community* cadres any time if need be. Their role is to act as a link between the *community* and the residents: they oversee sanitation and security work within the *danyuan*; as well as disseminate information, report any disputes, assist with family planning work and help mobilize residents to participate in campaigns and cultural events. Although the *danyuan* model was originally adopted for economic rather than political reasons, it provides a very neat and effective way to segment the residential population into manageable micro units of governance. While this form of residential design is a legacy from an earlier era of austerity design, it has remained a significant feature of contemporary *xiaoqu* and facilitates the governance of every-day life within the estate.

One of the most obvious signs of *Community* building is the plethora of information that it generates. Residents need to be kept informed on a range of issues from the structure and personnel of the committee itself, to the latest government policies, arrangements for festivals and holidays, responsibilities of good citizens and the various services available to residents. Within both the estates under study, information was provided primarily through the use of notice boards placed at strategic points throughout the space of the compound. Some notice boards are sited just inside the main entrance gates, while others are placed along the main thoroughfares and in the central open areas within each building cluster. Urgent notices are also often pasted onto the doors leading into the *danyuan*. Because the design of each *xiaoqu* serves to channel pedestrian flows along a relatively small number of principle roads and paths, it is relatively simple to ensure that information reaches the majority of residents in their daily movement through the space of the estate. Similarly, activities organized by the community, whether educational or cultural, are invariably made extremely visible to the entire residential population simply because they are carried out within the highly visible public spaces that form an integral component of *xiaoqu* space. As Lisa Hoffman's paper demonstrates, some activities are even specifically designed to foster the relationship between the residents and their residential environment – tree plantings, clean-up days and so on, aim to make residents more aware of and responsible for the management of their collective spaces.

CONCLUSION

In the last decade or so China's leaders have placed great emphasis on two aspects of social development: first they have constantly reiterated the economic goal of creating a 'moderately affluent (*xiaokang*) society'; secondly they have repeatedly underscored the necessity of fostering a harmonious (*hexie*) society. In many ways, it has been within the vast number of new residential estates that these two objectives have come together. For most, the move into a garden estate represents a significant step towards a higher standard of living. At the same time, the new residential estates have become key sites for the implementation and development of the latest strategies for *community* governance. With their roles encompassing matters such as security, sanitation, mediation, welfare and education, it is quite clear that the *community* is seen as instrumental in the project to maintain social harmony.

In this paper I have endeavored to demonstrate how closely strategies of governance are linked to the production of urban spaces in China. In particular I have focused on the intersection of the *xiaoqu*, urban residential estate with the *shequ*, urban *community*, in order to show how the two overlay and reinforce each other. It seems quite clear to me that the meticulously designed, regularized, walled and gated spaces of the *xiaoqu* provide a highly favorable physical environment for the realization of the objectives of *community* governance. Architects and designers have played a major role in facilitating the re-formation of a productive relationship between space and power in the reconstructed cities of China.

ENDNOTES

1. The Panopticon was made up of prison cells arranged around a central observation tower such that a single supervisor in the tower was able to see into each cell at any time without in turn being observed by the prisoner.

2. In his study of Chinese architectural and urban planning history Boyd suggests that the basic principles of design "appeared early in the tradition and were applied very widely, whether to the plan of a little homestead, the layout of a temple, a palace or a city ensemble". These basic principles were: "(a) walled enclosure; (b) axiality; (c) north-south orientation; and (d) the courtyard." Boyd, 1962: 49.

3. The origins of this style in the modern era derived primarily from the monumental urbanism developed by Haussmann in Paris under the patronage of Louis Napoleon. One of the central features of Haussmann's plan was the placement of monumental architectural structures at key symbolic points throughout the city. As well as finding favor in Stalin's Soviet Union, this state-sponsored monumental style gained prominence in Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany. See Frampton, 1992: 210-223.

4. Apart from anything else, as Zhou and Logan point out (2002:144), it is very difficult for individuals to obtain bank loans for

housing construction.

5. The term “xiaoqu” is not new, but its usage since the late 1980s is taken to imply a new form of xiaoqu—xinxiaoqu.
6. One luxury development I visited in Beijing had two sets of manned boom-gates, CCTV, electronic-coded access to lobbies and lifts as well as security guards patrolling the compound 24 hours/day.
7. Zhang's study (2001) of the rise and fall of Zhejiangcun in Beijing, provides a very insightful analysis of how one group of migrant workers attempted to appropriate urban space and the way in which local and Beijing authorities responded.
8. Most of the fieldwork for this paper was undertaken during two separate visits to Wuhan in 2004 and 2005.

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