

**BUILDING HETEROGENEOUS COMMUNITIES/SHEQU FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN
GOVERNANCE**

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In urban China, several social and economic changes are challenging urban governance: the privatization of the housing market, the coming apart of the work unit (danwei) and the ever-growing rural-urban migrant population. On the one hand, as official government publications suggest, urban Chinese are broadly shifting from being “danwei people” (danweiren) to being “society people” (shehuren). On the other hand, the massive increase of internal population movements has forced changes on state and economic structures at all levels that have often proven difficult to either predict or direct. How to govern a more heterogeneous and mobile population in urban China, so that a “harmonious society” (hexie shehui – a stated government priority) and economic growth can both be sustained? How to channel economic and demographic growth in the major cities in a manner consistent with the continued environmental and infrastructural services that these cities require?

China’s post-Revolutionary model of governance has experienced some sharp changes over the years, but at the limit, it accepted the possibility of direct government intervention in virtually all aspects of people’s lives, at times including neighborhood and family life. Recent community/shequ building initiatives mark an attempt to move away from this model, and toward a new model of structured community self-governance. This change constitutes a response to the combined local consequences of housing privatization, danwei decline, and increased migration -- the three main changes mentioned at the top of this paper.

Contrary to some representations of these local trends, the move away from potentially comprehensive government intervention does not ultimately represent the weakening of the state, but rather to recent international theoretical insights into the provision of stronger, better, and more effective governance. For example, community/shequ building offers some notable parallels with key contemporary trends in international governance theory: effectively, government is increasingly determined to “steer, not row” (Osborne and Gaebler 1993). As is often said in government announcements, the Chinese literature on community-building increasingly suggests that government proper should concentrate on doing what it is good at, such as regulating macro-economics, and it should let society do what it is good at doing, such as providing social services. In sum, state sectors at all levels must offload their burden (shui baofu) of many social responsibilities, and return them to where they belong: society.

This paper looks specifically at the state’s effort to promote community/shequ building in urban China in order to achieve economic, social, and environmental sustainable development, which are construed in broad terms in the sense of the Brundtland Commission Report. This paper specifically looks at two seemingly different kinds of “community” that have been experiencing rapid growth: gated communities and “migrant enclaves”. It considers the challenges they pose to building sustainable communities. Although the two kinds of community decreasingly intermingle in the everyday lives of their residents, and are rarely discussed in the same literature, the juxtaposition of one with the other enables us to think ahead about their accelerated growth into the future, and the implications of that growth for urban and national governance on a broader scale. This paper starts from the premise that these two kinds of community represent some common social trends: privatization of security, internal community homogenization, internal community simplification, and mutual segregation of communities in a wider society that is increasingly heterogeneous and complex. The data for this paper will test the potential implications of an influential North American approach to urban geography in a study of Chinese shequ development, to be drawn from document analyses and field research.

Of course, the government policy of community building is intended to address the problems of a wide variety of communities, many of which are internally heterogeneous. But as a practical matter on the ground, communities characterized by acute social complexity often experience distinctive organizational challenges for emerging shequ organizations. Internally homogeneous and socially simple urban areas might also be expected to respond more rapidly to shorter-term incentives from both developers and buyers in the housing market. These tendencies are widely acknowledged internationally in street-level organization in many modern, complex societies. Over time, international experience on this point suggests that a practical trend towards internally homogeneous and socially simplified urban areas, and that an asymmetry could easily emerge in favor of such communities in the distribution of shequ development and its potential benefits.

However, there are also reasons to think that the social simplification of individual shequ amidst wider trends towards increased social complexity is a tendency with wider long-term social implications that are broadly negative. First, this tendency implies problems at the level of governance. If the functional purpose of this new system is to resolve or administer social tensions at a local level, as shequ legislation, and many government and academic statements have suggested, the internal simplification of self-governing shequ would run counter to their original reasons for existence. Simplification of individual shequ in a locality that is increasingly socially complex merely ensures that social tensions will

increasingly be expressed between shequ (and their administrative bodies) rather than within them. The resolution of social tensions and dilemmas will thus tend to devolve back up to higher levels of organization and to state political bodies, and continue to burden the agenda of hard-working officials.

Second, this tendency implies long-term problems at the level of the social infrastructure needed for continued economic, social, and political development in urban settings. Taking a cue from well-established themes of Canadian-based urban geographer Jane Jacobs, one could argue that the trends toward gated communities, deliberate single-use municipal zoning, and market-driven self-segregation of different social strata do not augur well for social cohesion, public safety, or dynamic social self-adjustment to social and environmental challenges. Based on observations of postwar tendencies in many North American cities, this influential approach to urban geography argues that the proliferation of suburban subdivisions as well as of socially simplified gated communities create a false sense of internal security and harmony by separating their residents from those who are not “like them”. This problem can be especially acute in China where gated middle- and upper-income communities often exist in close proximity to migrant enclaves or low-end apartments, but the two entities are very much apart socially (Ma and Wu 2005).

As Jacobs argues, socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable cities in North America depend on self-organizing mixed-use neighborhoods, neighborhoods in which multiple, though complementary activities routinely take place and citizens of different income levels come into everyday contact. Jacobs argued as early as the early 1960s that internally homogeneous, single-use neighborhoods in North America are relatively vulnerable to such social ills as crime, social alienation, and economic underperformance. Street infrastructure is typically used by all residents at the same time; such areas are often underused for long periods, when few eyes can catch dangerous or threatening activities; and local entrepreneurial dynamism is impaired by uniformity of experience and skills. Given some of the unique challenges that Chinese cities currently face, it may be worthwhile to note immediately that Jacobs was not arguing here for indiscriminate and grossly incompatible combinations on modern streetscapes – she did not consider it beneficial to encourage a steel plant or a sewage lagoon to locate beside an orphanage. Jacobs’ works have influenced city planners in such major Canadian cities as Toronto and Vancouver, in deliberate efforts to avoid or limit such social ills. It is possible in this sense that the stream of research and practice founded by Jacobs in planning for major North American cities could be brought into a productive dialogue with the literature on realizing “harmonious communities” through shequ development.

THE COMING APART OF DANWEI, AND THE BUILDING OF SHEQU

The deliberate reorientation of the Chinese state in recent decades has involved two main steps. First, the state retreats from the economic sphere (zhengqi fenkai), so that market functions more freely. Second, the state re-assigns the pre-reform social responsibilities of state-owned enterprises to societal and market institutions. This is a process that clearly goes far beyond laying off large numbers of employees, and is initially designed to enhance the competitiveness of SOEs under the market system. Reforming the Mao-era system of danwei epitomizes this effort at boundary-drawing and off-loading the state’s social-welfare burden to social institutions, including shequ.

In many ways, the reform of the danwei system and the substitution of shequ community organizations became necessary because the danwei system first became increasingly dysfunctional amidst economic reform. More urban Chinese fell outside the danwei system for their employment and social-welfare needs than ever before. This has consequences for governance.

To further complicate the matter, the privatization of the housing market, a process that moved hand-in-hand with the coming apart of danwei, has meant that people now live further away from where they work. Just as the postwar North American experience suggested, street infrastructure was strained; vehicular traffic and private motorized vehicles both rose sharply. The privatization of housing coincided with rising housing inequalities (Ma and Wu 2005). Increasingly acute were the social boundaries separating homeowners and renters, the boundaries separating gated communities of luxurious townhouses and apartments, from ordinary apartment buildings; and finally the boundaries separating gated communities and migrant enclaves. Housing inequalities not only reflect but in some important ways reinforce the deepening of social stratification in Chinese society. The emerging social landscape thus created the need for new answers to key questions of local governance, within the wider leadership of the Chinese Communist Party: how to govern, what the nature of governing is, who (in the specific sense of “which agencies and institutions”) can govern, and who is governed.

State policymakers in China believe that it would be undesirable to eliminate entirely the social functions

now being separated from direct state intervention by market reforms and by the collapse of danwei. These policy areas cannot be left to provision by the market or by unsupervised social institutions. Those social functions therefore have to be located somewhere else in the wider social structure. Either the self-regulated market or the unsupervised civil-societal institution is seen to risk the outbreak of “social turmoil”. State officials also do not believe that the state should take over social welfare functions itself, because that would run counter to reformist efforts to shrink the state to more efficient and productive governance activities.

Thus with respect to unemployment, for example, the government seeks to develop community/shequ offices, officially as social institutions rather than as governmental ones. The old neighborhood committees (juweihui) are considered to have been created to assist danwei-style governance, and are therefore not considered suitable to governing the most local levels of society today.

There are therefore two transitions at work in the emergence of shequ as priorities in local governance. In the first place, we see in the transition from danwei to shequ a significant functional shift in the social systems and subordinate institutions charged with social welfare provision. From welfare provision by institutions that were also intimately tied to productive work, we see the relentless separation of economic functions of the workplace from virtually all others, and in the process, the transfer of welfare functions to community/shequ institutions. In the second place, we see in the transition from neighborhood committees to shequ a significant shift in the mode of governance at the local level. This also involves a functional transition from state to community institutions, albeit still under party supervision. But what is more striking about this transition is the emergence of the actions of ordinary Chinese, not merely as policy instruments at the implementation stage, as they were before, but increasingly also as participants in a new mode of governance. This is a mode of governance still being steered or “guided” by the party under state regulation, but one depending on citizen participation in carefully demarcated areas of social life.

HISTORY OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT OF SHEQU BUILDING

The history of Chinese policy in support of building community institutions at a local level may be sketched out roughly in a few paragraphs. The government passed the Law on Urban Residents Committee Organization in 1989, the first legal framework for the development of community-building policy. As part of this framework, the law summarized the new government policy direction under the official slogan of three “self” functions: self-management, self-education, and self-service. In 1992, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) held its first “shequ-building theory seminar” in Tianjing, on the basis of the framework law. Shequ building experts attended the seminar, and conducted theoretical evaluations and preliminary analyses of early experimentation. A second seminar followed later that year. In 1993, community/shequ experts in Hangzhou, Tianjing and Shanghai launched some community organizations in their respective cities to implement the theory.

As with the implementation of most central government policies in China, shequ building was initially carried out in a few experimental sites. Big urban centers such as Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan were chosen to run the experiments. The experience of each site then became a model. Shequ building picked up speed and became national policy in 1998. This coincides with a serious push to reform the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), which meant cutting off large numbers of people from employment and therefore from the social benefits provided by their workplace. To promote “grassroots democracy” (jiceng minzhu), the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) set up a division for grassroots authority and community/shequ building (jiceng zhengquan yu shequjianshe si). Since December 2004, the MCA has started a series of public hearings (tingzhenghui)¹ to gather opinions from residents, community/shequ leaders, and scholars (the latter including legal scholars, sociologists, and social workers) on how to amend the existing Law on Urban Residents Committee Organization. The key amendment seems to be the one strengthening community “self-governance”, so that community organizations would not act as arms of the government (zhengfu de tui).²

In March 2004, Party Secretary General Hu Jintao issued instructions to strengthen shequ research in this area, specifically in order to build harmonious communities (hexie shequ). After those instructions, the MCA organized its first nation-wide survey on shequ. The purpose of the survey was to “get a feel” (moqing) for the following aspects of developing shequ organizations across the country: social organizations (shehu zuzhi), forms of organization (zuzhi xingshi), relationships among interests (liyi guanxi), and social stability (shehui wending). According to the government, the study was aimed at ensuring the successful future development of more shequ in order to realize harmonious communities.³

COMMUNITY/SHEQU BUILDING: INSTITUTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

Policy implementation in China can be roughly tracked on the basis of key government priorities, typically expressed in official formulations. The central government insisted that community/shequ must govern based on the model of “self-management, self-education, self-service and self-surveillance.” (Article 2 of Law on Urban Residents Committee Organization, 1989)

First of all, community/shequ self-governance involves a significant investment in institution building. Institutionally, community/shequ must be allowed a degree of its own autonomy from direct local government intervention in running its own affairs. The well-known hierarchical government structure of Chinese cities is worth reviewing briefly on this point: from the largest to the smallest units of analysis, one must distinguish municipal (shi) and district (qu) levels of government, followed by the street committees (jiedao weiyuanhui) as the lowest-scale agencies of government (zhengfu paichu jigou).

Under the old system, the neighborhood committee (juweihui) was, in theory, a mass organization under the leadership of the (government) street committee. A key purpose of the neighborhood committee was to serve in the local formation of the virtues of citizenship. In practice, however, the neighborhood committee acted as an arm of the government, just as the street committee did. In turn, the street committees stood in an official relationship of “leadership” with respect to the neighborhood committee. This is the context for the current formula of community/shequ self-governance, with community/shequ organizations serving as the functional replacements for the neighborhood committees. But in relation to a community/shequ organization, local government (i.e., the street committee) now plays only the role of guidance (zhidao) rather than that of leader (lingdao). Building community/shequ self-governance is intended to abolish the older hierarchical relationship with the street committee, and to set-up a relatively self-governed and self-contained entity for the purposes of specific local tasks. Within community/shequ, experiments in elected offices can occur.

By drawing a clearer boundary between community/shequ and the municipal, district and street levels of local government, community/shequ advocates hope that community/shequ organizations can enjoy autonomy within defined limits. Those limits of legitimate action are the territory of the individual community/shequ, and certain matters affecting their immediate living environment (security, hygiene) and quality of life (local service delivery). Self-governance is to empower residents to work actively towards solving their own problems in these domains, and in the process to relieve government of responsibility for them.

Besides institutional change, changes to citizen identities, attitudes, and behaviors are also deemed necessary to build community/shequ self-governance. Urban residents are called upon to shift from identifying themselves with their danwei to identifying themselves with their community/shequ. The identity change also involves attitudinal and behavioral changes. A “shequ person” are said to replace dependence (yilai) and submission to authority, with both independence and active participation in community/shequ affairs. A “community/shequ person” is not only independent but also responsible for others in the community/shequ.

The realization of these goals, which are themselves nuanced enough when stated in the abstract, are also increasingly framed as a break with past practice. As Dou (2003) complains, among others, many communities continue to use the mass mobilization techniques of pre-reform days to mobilize people to volunteer, to donate, and to participate in community/shequ elections. This is a problem, because Dou argues that mass mobilization politics cannot work as effectively in the market economy as it did under Mao. Dou offers two principal reasons for this new weakness: 1) a large proportion of the population now do not work or live within the government sphere; 2) the Maoist style of participation inherently disavowed self-interest in favour of an altruistic pursuit of the public interest, and 3) mass mobilization inherently takes the form of a temporary campaign. The temporary nature of mass mobilization campaigns means that they are inherently unsustainable, and also require the backing of strong government coercive power.

Dou's points about the limits of altruistic mass-mobilization techniques appear to have been well-absorbed in higher-level reflections on the community/shequ approach. Increasingly, a new rationale is being presented for participatory community institutions. In today's calls for citizen participation, both the public good and self-realization are stressed. Hence the slogan, “Others help me; I help others.” (renren weiwo, wowe renren). In some ways, this trend is quite similar to the limited altruism informing the volunteerism practiced in some contemporary liberal democracies.

Citizens are otherwise perceived to lack “citizenship consciousness and participation consciousness” (gongmin yishi he canyu yishi), and participation is presented as an indicator of personal ‘quality’ (suzhi), a quality now thoroughly embedded in official and everyday discourse.⁴ Participation can be in community decisions that affect citizen’s lives and work, but also in supervision of policy implementation. Democratic participation is also considered an integral part of the full development of the individual (ren de quanmian fazhan), and is held to be manifested in citizens’ consciousness (gongmin yishi) through volunteerism.

COMMUNITY SELF-GOVERNANCE

From an examination of their novel internal structure, it appears that shequ organizations have acquired two functions that are quite distinct from two analogous Mao-era institutions, the danwei (on the one hand) and 2) the neighborhood committees (on the other hand). That dual innovation may be summarized by what public administration theory has called “governance”.

Since the 1990s, governance theories and practices have been imported to China through the translation of books, through academic exchanges, and through various international development agency programs such as those of the World Bank.⁵ This is arguably an intellectual dimension of the wider tendency towards “joining the global track”. For example, following the Rio International Conference on the Environment, China’s Agenda 21 report states that sustainable development must rely on the “maximum consent” (rentong), support and participation on the part of the public and social groups. Chinese scholars find the international concept of governance particularly appealing because it speaks to the Chinese need to reform the previously omnipresent state and to create civil society. Some of these scholars consider the expansion of latter to be conducive in itself to the emergence of democracy in the long run. Through the example of community building, we can see how governance guides the Chinese government’s attempts to reconstitute relations amongst the state, the market and the society.

The concept of governance in western discourse grows out of practical concerns about the smooth and efficient internal operation of a wide range of institutions: one can accordingly talk about governance in government; governance in schools, and governance in corporations. Governance literature influences the question of governing in the specific context of neo-liberalism, since it generally places more emphasis than its predecessors for ordering forces that exist beyond the state. Government becomes only one actor in the complex web of governing state and non-state actors. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, the international fascination with governance is related to the claim that in an increasingly globalized world, the state cannot afford expensive social policies. Government must forgo trying to help those it cannot help or who are not competent, and let others (especially the third sector) do the job (Rose 1999). Instead, to remain globally competitive, government must become lean and small.

Both privatization and public-private partnerships are promoted in the literature on good governance. But if it appears to present a new rationale for the containment of the state, the governance literature also entails the containment of society. Society is no longer to act as a contestant for power over norms and morality in relation to the state, but rather is brought in line with the state and market, specifically through the emphasis on state-societal partnerships. As James Rosenau (1992, 5) points out, “governance is always effective in performing the functions necessary to systemic persistence, else it is not conceived to exist since instead of referring to ineffective governance, one speaks of anarchy and chaos.”

While these transformation clearly occurred in quite different local contexts, the political philosophies run parallel: in both cases, government should not “row” but only “steer” (Osborne and Gaebler 1993), and citizens must be “empowered” to solve their own problems. Within this context, one might also observe that certain variations of communitarianism (after Amitai Etzioni) and social capital theory (Robert Putnam) have also been appropriated.

What is emerging in the thinking and practice of governance in China has strong parallels with this global mode of governance, for instance in the so-called Third Way politics of the 1990s and 2000s. Here one might encapsulate the parallel by invoking the official Chinese slogan, “small government, big society” (xiaozhengfu, dashehui). In liberal democracies, the trend is also away from welfare as the rights of citizenship, towards striking a balance between such rights and responsibilities and obligations. In China, the trend is away from urban residents’ reliance on danwei welfare provision (the workplaces predominantly housed in state-owned corporations), whilst the state sheds its welfare responsibilities to society.

But empowering citizens to solve their own problems could potentially challenge bureaucratic power, as home-owners associations and leaders in migrant enclaves have demonstrated. If citizens can solve their own problems over their lives and even employment, then what is the role of the state? The tension between the government's call for citizen self-governance within their communities, and pressures to retain local levels of bureaucratic authority appears to constitute a central dilemma for the trend towards community-level self-governance. Many writers (Xu 2002; Dou 2003; Lei 2001) have pointed to the possibility that levels of government immediately above shequ can continue to treat shequ as their "leg" to run affairs (banshi de tui).

COMMUNITY AS A SPACE OF GOVERNANCE

These parallels with global governance literature should not blind readers to some key distinctions that separate the global literature from the Chinese experience. In liberal democracies, the discovery of community is in response to the "crisis" of the welfare state. In China, the community is discovered and developed by the government. But in the community/shequ model of governance, government plays only a supportive role in social-service financing. In matters of social control, a community and its residents are called on to govern their own affairs.

"Community/shequ building" in China is understood to imply that a conscious effort has to be made to cultivate community/shequ consciousness so that individuals can return to a state of solidarity despite the individualizing pressures created by marketization. In the Chinese literature, this is far more a practical concern than any philosophical preference for collective consciousness. Government considers community/shequ building to be a complex "social system project" (shehui xitong gongcheng). Rather than participation being a supplement to the electoral democratic character of the state, as it often is in the literature on liberal democracies, "participatory democracy" in China is more frequently associated with supplementation of market or entrepreneurial activity. Shequ building involves not only institutional change but changes in people's behavior and identity, and this is intended precisely to restore social cohesion in a specifically market economy.⁶

In China, those who worked in the danwei system relied on government to provide social benefits; in return, their loyalty to the government was expected. With the smashing of the "iron rice bowl" under economic reform, people are asked to be responsible for their own affairs, even as they take up obligations to their fellow citizens in society/shequ.

This move from taking care of oneself to taking care of oneself AND others within one's community is commonly presented as developmental – in other words, as a sign of material social progress. In a report entitled *Steering Residents to Participate in Democratic Self-governance through Community Deliberative Mechanism* (Yi Shequyishiyuan wei Zaiti, Yingdao Jumin Canyon Shequ Minzhu Zizhi), the Gulou District Government (Nanjing) and Party Committee pointed out that as a consequence of shequ development, residents have increasingly moved from caring only about those matters in which their own interests were at stake to caring about wider community building, moral/ethical development (daode jianshe),⁷ and democratic participation.⁸ Community/shequ building, in this context, involves what Rose calls an "etho-politics", in that it "concerns itself with the self techniques necessary for responsible self-government and the relations between one's obligation to oneself and one's obligations to others." (Rose 1999, 188)

Another key distinction from western debates arises from where the Chinese debate situates "society" in space. Notably, the Chinese government states that local community (shequ) in particular is society in its concrete manifestation (juti tixian). Accordingly, 'building society' is leading the Chinese state to emphasize highly localized institutions, and particularly to build community/shequ. The latter are to handle social service delivery and to exercise social control. This control is now to be exercised over a much more heterogeneous urban population and a much more complex social landscape than the preceding danwei units contained.

Community in liberal democracies is not necessarily territorial: for instance, one can speak readily of the "Chinese-Canadian community", the "business community", and so on. At most, attempts have been made to "fix" communities geographically (Larner and Butler 2005, 84). In China, by contrast, community/shequ is territorial by definition. Despite of these differences, community in both the West and China share some common assumptions: community is the site for meaningful political actions, and it constitutes a moral/ethical space in which people not only take care of themselves (as in economic spaces), but also are responsible to fellow community citizens. The positive normative connotations of community are easy to understand both in China and in many liberal democracies. As Rose (1999, 172) points out, this community is not simply a geographical space, a social space, a sociological space or a

space of services, although it may attach itself to any or all such spatializations. It is a moral field binding people into durable relations. It is a space of emotional relationships through which individual identities are constructed through their bonds to micro-cultures of values and meanings.

But in contemporary China, this potentially presents a specific dilemma, given the weight placed upon a specifically territorial understanding of community. The project of shequ building has in part been intended to set aside the economic and social costs of market reforms as “social problems” (rather than as “state problems”) and to have these tensions administered specifically by local, non-state, non-economic institutions. This territorial conception arises logically because community building arises in the wake of the crisis of the danwei system. But within the inherently territorial understanding of community, there is also tension in Chinese theory and practice over what constitutes a “community”. For example, home-owners’ associations would typically consider their work to be part of the building of shequ self-governance, even though they may not need shequ committees.

This particular observation leads one to a more general concern: there is little reason to believe that residents of a community/shequ, at least as currently constituted, actually share many interests upon which durable, emotional relationships might develop, given some other current trends in Chinese urban development. In the paragraphs that follow, I will develop this concern, beginning with a short detour through some influential western concepts surrounding solidarity and community.

Durkheim’s well-known concept of mechanical solidarity implied an undifferentiated homogeneity of interests, albeit as a means of designating a pre-modern rather than a modern collectivity. By contrast, he argued, organic solidarity arises out of social differentiation and interdependence based on complementary and often hierarchical function, class, and status. Tönnies approached much the same distinction somewhat differently through his concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, stressing the automatic commonality of interest that are common today only within families and spontaneously developed neighborhoods, versus the synthetic commonality of interest that can (in his view) only arise out of deliberative exchanges about the common good, and at a higher level of social organization.

But at the local level, the modern *Gesellschaft* in many different national contexts has tended to generate people that rarely interact with one another locally, and share few if any social bonds. It is quite common for modern neighborhoods, both in the most recently developed quarters of urban China and in liberal democracies, to be peopled by individuals who not only exhibit quite different social backgrounds, but who concretely have very little to do with one another. The experience of *Gesellschaft* certainly approximates more nearly the meaning of community/shequ in many settings, if not most.

The creation of shequ institutions occurs amidst a transition in the Chinese urban landscape towards a thorough geographic zoning – both official and self-organizing – of distinct social functions and social strata. In China, government officials have a unique leadership role in finding common interests among community residents to ensure their participation, a feature of the Chinese experience that partly differentiates it from Tönnies’ *Gesellschaft*. This task of the government, and its exploration through the more experimental complementary role of scholarship, proves challenging.

Some shequ are based on the existing social geography of cities, and consist of existing neighborhoods; some by contrast are newly-developed gated communities (*xiaoqu*), that are conventionally further divided into high-end, luxurious communities (*gaodang haohua*) and ordinary (*yiban/putong*) gated communities. Some are based on neighborhoods which are legacies of danwei-assigned apartments; some are almost shantytowns. Each type of community/shequ has a typical history, and this affects the degree of prior communal bonding and the residents’ willingness to participate in community/shequ activities.

Take the otherwise divergent gated communities and poor migrant enclaves for example. Although residents in each community belong to different social classes and different hukou systems, both have become more noticeable in the course of marketization. Neither seems to need shequ committees to govern their own affairs (Tomba 2005; Zhang 2001). Gated communities have arisen out of the decline of danwei housing complexes and the privatization of China’s housing market. By contrast, migrant enclaves have only emerged because migrants can now move around, thanks to marketization and the relaxation of the hukou system. But on the other hand, hukou distinctions, even in their reformed condition, continue to exist. Thus migrants do not enjoy the full privileges of urban residency, and are on their own to find affordable housing. Such housing is usually available only at the edges of cities. Most migrants within enclaves (such as “Zhejiang Village”, “Henan Village”) have prior social relationship based on birthplace or even blood ties.

Gated communities take on many features of the previous danwei compounds. They tend to be characterized by residents of similar social and economic backgrounds with local hukou status. But unlike residents who were previously assigned to live and often work in the danwei compounds, residents in gated communities bought their way into the “community”, although some bought their apartments at government subsidized prices. Membership in the former was associated with one’s occupation, while membership in the latter is tied to one’s material wealth. Residents in gated communities often do not have prior social relationships with one another; the sense of security they feel comes first, from the sense that they belong to the same social class, and second, from security guard services, often offered on a 24-hour basis.⁹

When considering the implications of such homogeneous local communities, one must recall the widening gap in social strata that is now widely acknowledged as a source of concern. Within some other kinds of shequ, the new model of shequ self-governance has faced challenges that appear to be directly linked to the new diversity of social strata that more generally characterize Chinese cities today. Home-owners associations, property management companies, and community/shequ committees co-exist within these “communities”, but the relationship among the three is not always smooth. My own preliminary investigations uncovered some indications that both officials and casual observers of shequ development often consider socially complex shequ more difficult to organize than internally homogeneous ones. It might appear that social simplification within shequ (whether through top-down western-style zoning or bottom-up self-segregation) favors shequ organizational development. During my field research in the summer of 2004, I discovered that communities that were considered model communities amongst my informants – both frontline community workers and ordinary residents reflecting on community organization – are those composed of 1) more or less homogeneous residents, 2) who are beneficiaries of economic reform. Such communities would include residents of apartment blocks formerly assigned by government, and residents of gated communities. They are considered model communities because the built environment is pleasant; residents are generally considered of high individual quality (suzhi); and most do not have employment problems or the associated social problems. In other words, they are relatively happy with their lives, and therefore cooperate readily and require community assistance less frequently.

Within this point of view, communities considered less “good” – that is, less auspicious for the development of shequ organizations and thus less liable to show the etho-political development just described above -- are composed of residents of heterogeneous background (za), such as a mix of local and migrant residents. These heterogeneous (za) communities are usually marked by unemployment and other social problems. Because the unemployed are so unhappy with their unemployed situation, and angry that they have not benefited much from the economic reform, they tend to have more interactions with shequ leaders for job training or social services. On the other hand, they might also work out their frustrations on shequ workers.¹⁰

Of course, social homogeneity that complements shequ development must be of a certain kind. Internally homogeneous migrant enclaves are also often associated with chaos and crime. As Li Zhang points out in her ethnographic study of Beijing’s Zhejiang village, “Rumours of gunfights, gang violence, and conflicts with the police in migrant communities circulate widely among Beijing residents.” (Zhang 2001, 139).

Where home-owners associations (yezhu xiehui), property management companies, and community organizations co-exist, the home-owners associations may also use the term, community/shequ, to describe their particular gated community, and they pride themselves in practicing democratic self-governance in, for example, fighting against real estate developers for not fulfilling their commitments in the original development plan. On the one hand, this challenges the effort of government agencies to define communities. On the other hand, this sense of community/shequ is built on self-selection and self-aggregation. It effectively involves two moves in calling the shequ identity into being. Real estate developers advertise their high-end luxurious gated communities specifically to attract successful and thus wealthy people (chenggong renshi). On the other hand, living in gated communities has become a social status symbol. For example, Sunde Country Garden (biguiyuan) advertised its gated community as “five-star homes”, designed specifically for successful people...(it) is China’s largest and the most luxurious community. It has not only modern civilization of the cities, but also the quietness of the countryside. It is close to the cities, but is “a modern Shangrila”...[City Garden] implements blockade management...It has an over 800 private security guards, who patrol the community 24 hours a day. It is to guarantee the homeowners personal and property security not violated by outsiders.¹¹

This particular commercial captures the purpose of these gated communities: people want to live there

to demonstrate their social status, to live apart from the rest, who are considered the less successful, and to deal with their fear for the security of their persons and property. There is a clear sense that outsiders are inherently threats to residents' security. But residents of gated communities often testify to well-developed community: many gated communities hold socials, organize outings, and so on, precisely to strengthen a sense of community belonging. But one question is how much sense of community is actually shared, and more particularly whether this kind of community actually aggravates social tensions. Such a community physically embodies – and perhaps even entrenches the wider existence of deepening social polarization. Furthermore, home-owners associations consider fights with real estate developers as an exercise in democratic rights. But such a relationship is ultimately based on contract: it is a market and legal relationship, not a “social contract”, to borrow a western term.

However, the suggestion from my initial explorations seems to be that internal social simplification (for instance, through western-style zoning or gradual self-segregation) facilitates shequ development. In fact, the gated community is often celebrated as model community to be followed by those who are not gated. The logic seems to be that good communities lead to “harmonious society”, and that model communities represent the future of good urban governance. As Pan writes based on his ethnographic work in Shanghai (Ma and Wu 2005, 135), The disappearance of state factories and plants in the city's depressed industrial areas coincided with the neighborhood gentrification of “lower quarters” such as Bay Bridge. By the 1990s, the state factories in the neighborhood were either shut down or on the brink of declaring bankruptcy. A gated community in Bay Bridge is often located in the midst of several “workers' new villages (gongren xincun) made up of dozens of six-storey walk-ups in the typical form of government housing projects built during the 1970s. For the current generation of technocrats of the District Government and subdistrict street offices, the gated community, whose residents are total strangers in the neighborhood, represent the ideal form of a “model community”—a perfect showcase for cultural citizenship.

This general pattern is reflected in my own experience visiting a gated community in Jiangsu Province. This gated community was built as a North-American style suburban neighborhood, with single detached homes and front yards. My host described it positively as one of the few remaining refuges from the noise of the city. But it had been built in the midst of an existing fruit-growing village of rural hukou holders with social status quite different from the current residents of the gated community. Beyond occasional forays to buy produce in the local fruit market, there was little evidence of routine social interaction between the two sides.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Let us consider for a moment the implications of the foregoing relationships, if their existence were demonstrated more broadly as the result of further research. If the functional purpose of this new system is to have social tensions resolved or administered at a local level outside the direct purview of the government itself, the internal simplification of individual shequ would seem to run counter to the original reasons for having them as autonomous entities – the generation of broader social harmony and simplification of the state's peculiar tasks. Internal simplification of individual shequ ensures that social tensions will increasingly be expressed between individual shequ (and their administrative bodies), rather than within them. The resolution of social tensions will still tend to devolve back up to higher levels of organization and to state political bodies. The gated community, considered by some to be a “model community”, could under such circumstances only remind residents ultimately in both the gated community and “workers' new villages” of the increasing gap between the rich and the poor.¹ For the same reasons, my own parents' shequ is commonly characterized in common discourse as relatively weak because it is za: a prosperous gated community is located within a larger shequ jurisdiction that includes an emerging red-light district and temporary housing for the city's many migrants.

This point relates to the wider question of how to govern the enormous migrant population in many of China's cities. Because of the hukou system and the cost of renting an apartment in the cities, rural migrants turn to villages near cities for rental flats or rooms, hence creating the so-called “migrant enclaves”. These “migrant enclaves” appear to exist in the self-organizing space away from the state, community or danwei. This poses a challenge for government in terms of governance.

¹ Recent lessons arising from an analogous situation of segregating distinct social strata in the West might clarify the concern I am attempting to raise, in order to explain my call for further investigation along the above lines. A colleague of French origin suggested that zoning in Paris, France, was profoundly reshaped under the mayoralty of Jacques Chirac, the present president of the French Republic. Previous housing arrangements in France had been organized, such that different social strata found themselves on different floors of the same buildings throughout the city. The colleague related this social zoning to the current rise in social unrest in Paris this year.

There seems to be a tendency since the mid-1990s, for the government to move away from coercion/expulsion of migrants from their enclaves. Instead cooperation and partnership are preferred in governing such enclaves, relying on migrant leaders as partners in the process (Zhang 2001; Lei 2001). Coercion/expulsion was ultimately rejected as a failed approach. In their study of migrant enclaves in Beijing, Lei and her co-authors (2001) rightly point out that migrants do not really rely on government for anything. Their only interactions with government tend to be perceived as negative, in the form of either “unannounced searches” at night or the collection of so-called “management fees”. Lei and others further argue that the nature of government policy toward migrants may only alienate migrants further from urban communities (Lei et al. 135). Allowing migrant enclaves to self-organize, with migrant leaders maintaining patronage ties with local government (Zhang 2001), may constitute a positive step toward more sustainable urban governance; however, it still has not solved the problem of treating migrants as the “other” of urban residents. As Smart and Tang point out, migrant enclaves in China should not be equated with slums in many developing countries, because migrants in China are generally not stuck in hopeless situation. They are in the cities to work and make some money. (Ma and Wu 2005). But migrants under this arrangement are still left forming their own “community”, and they do so as second-class citizens (Solinger 1999).

Moreover, when internal migrants come to the cities, they see for themselves how urban residents live, and the broad contrast this offers to how they live themselves. The emphasis that spatial segregation can add to this observation might seem potentially to have adverse impacts on achieving the goal of a “harmonious society”. Some of migrants I interviewed over the years have told me (in various terms) that while urban people and migrants are all “human beings”, migrants do not live in the same way as urban people.

ENDNOTES

1. Public hearings are being conducted experimentally in China as a sign of grassroots democracy. However, question remains whether public opinion is actually incorporated in the final government policy.
2. See the official website of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. <http://www.mca.gov.cn>
3. “Work Program on Conducting Nation-wide Hundred-City Community Building Survey” (Quangguo Baicheng Shequ Qingkuang Diaocha). <http://www.mca.gov.cn/redian/shqgz/shequjs4.html>
4. For excellent analyses of suzhi, see, for example, Anagnost 1997; 2004
5. Lester Salamon, considered one of the pioneers in the notion of the “associational revolution”, lectured at the Tsinghua University NGOs Center in 1999. Anthony Giddens’ Third Way was translated into Chinese. In several recent trips to bookstores in Beijing, I discovered shelves of books written by Chinese political scientists and sociologists, on the topics of governance in China, community building and political reform in the globalized world. See a selection of my bibliography for this.
6. Tang Jingsu, 2004. “Prospects of Community Building.” (*Shequ Gongzuo Zhanwang*). <<http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/content/200422392114/20041129142805.html>> System control theory (*xitong kongzhi lilun*), the Chinese translation of cybernetics, is popular in China because it is the science of control and communication for complex machine systems. See, for example, Greenhalgh and Winkler 2005.
7. In Chinese, *daode* means both morality and ethics.
8. <http://www.mca.gov.cn/redian/shqgz/fayan9.html>.
9. Exception would be the situations in which people from WenZhou who would buy blocks of apartments in gated communities in Hangzhou or Shanghai.
10. While I was conducting my fieldwork in China in 2002, I personally witnessed a very angry unemployed resident yelling at a shequ cadre for not helping him out on job hunting.
11. Advertizing pamphlets were handed to the author while I was on a research trip to the Pearl River Delta in 2002.

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