COLLECTIVISM, POLITICAL CONTROL,
AND GATING IN CHINESE CITIES

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Abstract: This paper provides a conceptual framework emphasizing the role of culture and the state in understanding gating in different countries, and applies it to examine the long-existing and widespread neighborhood enclosure and gating in Chinese cities. It is argued that the collectivist culture deeply embedded in Chinese society and tight political control actively pursued by the government contribute to the widespread character of gating in China, whereas dominant Western-based theories such as the discourse of fear and private provision of public services are less applicable, even though they are becoming increasingly important in the new gated private housing. Gating and neighborhood enclosure in China help to define a sense of collectivism and foster social solidarity. Thus gating per se does not necessarily lead to residential segregation, although it begins to reinforce segregation in the reform era. Gating also facilitates political control through neighborhood-level governments whose jurisdiction often corresponds to enclosed neighborhoods but forms change between different political-historical periods. Thus, while the physical form of gating is similar between China and the United States, the underlying sociopolitical constructs and implications are quite different.

INTRODUCTION

While gating is not a completely new phenomenon in the United States, large-scale gated communities for middle-class Americans have only emerged in recent decades (Blakeley and Snyder, 1997; Hayden, 2003; Low, 2003). Gated communities are also becoming a global phenomenon, as they are proliferating on every continent (Webster et al., 2002). With recent housing reform in Chinese cities, many private housing estates similar to gated communities in the United States have emerged. Scholars have used American-based theories such as private provision of services and fear of crime and “others” to explain the gating phenomenon in Chinese cities (e.g., Miao, 2003; Wu, 2005). Yet gated and walled communities have always existed in Chinese cities (Knapp, 2000). Traditional Chinese houses—“courtyard houses” (siheyuan)—were built in an enclosed form, and most housing constructed in the socialist era was in the form of “work-unit compounds” (danwei dayuan), which were usually walled, gated, and guarded. None of the American-based theories can explain gating in these contexts. I argue that the collectivism-oriented culture deeply embedded in Chinese society and the
tight political control actively pursued by the government contribute to the long history and wide distribution of gating in Chinese cities. It is the goal of this paper to examine gating in different historical periods in China and the role of collectivism and political control in its construction. A conceptual framework emphasizing the role of culture and the state is provided to help understand gating in different countries, and it is applied to examine gating in Chinese cities.

DEFINITION OF TERMINOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this article a “gated community” is a walled or fenced housing development with secured and/or guarded entrances, to which public access is restricted. Inside the development there is often a neighborhood watch organization or professional security personnel, and there are often legal agreements (tenancy or leasehold) that tie residents to a common code of conduct (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Blandy et al., 2003). This definition is based mainly on gated residential developments in the United States. Most housing complexes in Chinese cities, including traditional housing built before 1949, public housing constructed during the socialist era, and private housing built in the reform era are walled and gated, in one way or another. However, there are not necessarily any security personnel or legal agreements in these communities. Furthermore, enclosed communities in traditional Chinese cities were often characterized by “occupational homogeneity and personal-wealth heterogeneity” (Belsky, 2000, p. 59). Residential homogeneity within/between enclosed work-unit compounds was more prominent in the socialist era. Thus the socioeconomic connotation attached to gated communities in the United States is not necessarily applicable to gating in the Chinese case. In the context of China, the term “enclosed neighborhoods” is used instead to refer to residential developments with gates and/or surrounding walls/fences, emphasizing its physical form. Their entrances may be guarded formally by security personnel, or informally by the watchful eyes of senior residents in the neighborhood. While some enclosed neighborhoods include luxury amenities such as lakes and fitness centers and a legal contract between residents, others may only have very basic amenities such as a small patch of green land and no legal agreement. In other words, “enclosed neighborhoods” in China is a more general concept than “gated communities” in the United States. The term “gated communities” in Chinese cities refers to high-end private enclosed neighborhoods that appeared in the reform era, and these communities do share greater similarities with those in the United States.

With the recent surge of gating in the West, there is a growing body of literature on gated communities. Blandy et al. (2003) has provided a thorough and systematic review of the literature grouped by different themes related to gated communities. There are many different perspectives, but in general they can be grouped under the economic and sociopsychological approaches. The economic approach focuses on privatization, the provision of public goods, and a concern for property values. The growth of gated communities is considered a response to the overall trend of privatization and the withdrawal of the welfare state in Western societies (McKenzie, 1994; Low, 1997; Webster, 2001). Public services such as security, street cleaning, and garbage collection are now delivered by private agencies instead of the local government. Through specialized “covenants, contracts, and deed restrictions” (CC&Rs), residents become “club members” who pay fees for these services shared only by members of the community (Webster et al., 2002).
Neighborhood governance in gated communities is also replaced by the private government in the form of homeowners’ associations. In addition, gating is considered to add value to properties such that it is a motivating force for both developers and homeowners (e.g., McKenzie, 1998; Bible and Hsieh, 2001).

Gating is also a result of social and psychological forces, often explained by the discourse of fear. Even though there has been a decline in all types of violent crime in the U.S. since 1990 (Brennan and Zelinka, 1997), fear of crime has been heightened by increased media coverage of urban crimes. Gated communities with surrounding walls and guarded entrances seem to provide people a safe and defensible environment, although there is a debate over whether they are actually “safer” than open neighborhoods (e.g., Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Flusty, 1997; Wilson-Doenges, 2000; Low, 2003). With the growing diversity of American cities, residents are increasingly afraid of unknown “others,” mainly minorities, and desire “purified communities” with people like themselves (Low, 2003). With the lack of effectiveness of conventional social control mechanisms and institutions (e.g., the police) and racism in increasingly diverse cities, gating is a result of social polarization and segregation (Caldeira, 2000; Leisch, 2005). In addition, gating is pursued purely for its symbolic values of prestige and exclusivity, as it projects an image of the upper class and protects a lifestyle inaccessible to others (Romig, 2005).

While gated communities are becoming more popular, they are denounced by some scholars and commentators as reinforcing residential segregation, promoting the loss of public space, and creating “cities of walls” and an “urban fortress” (e.g., Davis, 1990; Mitchell, 1995; Caldeira, 2000).

The existing literature relies mainly on studies of gated communities in the United States and United Kingdom. But similar arguments have been used to interpret gated communities in developing countries such as Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, and South Africa (e.g., Caldeira, 2000; Leisch, 2005; Roitman, 2005; Lemanski, 2006). Despite the long history and the prevalence of gating in China, there has been limited research, and most existing studies focus on private gated communities built during the last two decades and use Western discourses to interpret them. For example, while acknowledging that gating is not new in China, Wu (2005) uses two major explanations in Western gated community studies—the club realm of consumption and the discourse of fear—to examine gating in China, and argues that the former is more important with the shift toward market-oriented service provision and the latter is less applicable. Using the concept of the “club” system, Giroir (2004b) argued that residents in these gated communities live a “club”-like lifestyle that encompasses very different social spaces from the rest of the urban society. The increasing social inequality and security concerns during transition to a market system also contribute to the proliferation of gating (Miao, 2003). Yet, scholars also have pointed out the uniqueness of the Chinese context. With economic globalization, there are many foreign expatriates in Beijing who cannot access housing within the socialist housing system; thus private housing was built in gated communities to meet their housing needs (Wu and Webber, 2004). Despite the Western influence in architecture and lifestyle in upscale gated communities, Giroir (2005a, 2005b) has demonstrated how Chinese cultural and landscape elements are important in these estates to create “golden ghettos” for the elite. Tracing the history of gating, Giroir (2004a) argued that gating is an important part of Chinese civilization.
While Western-based typologies can partially explain the emergence of newly built gated communities in Chinese cities, they cannot fully explain the wide distribution of gating there and its continuity in history. Thus, an alternative approach is needed to better understand gating and its social implications in Chinese cities. I propose a cultural and political perspective, and argue that we need to study the role of the local culture and the state in order to better understand the dynamics of gating and its implications in its specific sociopolitical context. In the next section, I will develop a conceptual framework emphasizing the role of culture and the state in explaining gating. Then I will apply it to examine housing development and gating in various historical periods in Chinese cities, and argue that the collectivist culture and political control contribute to the common occurrence of gating. I conclude by suggesting an alternative approach to gating and the need for more comparative studies on gating.

CULTURE, THE STATE, AND GATING

Residential landscapes, including gating and neighborhood enclosure, reflect prevailing cultural values and political systems. Thus, even though the physical form of gating may look similar across regions, we need to scrutinize the local society in order to understand its underlying dynamics and implications. I argue that a multi-scalar perspective is needed to better understand the complexity of gating, and I propose a framework emphasizing the role of culture and the state to better understand gating in different countries (Fig. 1). First, local culture is deeply embedded in housing development and neighborhood construction. While gating is becoming a global phenomenon, it is in fact a response to very different cultural norms. Based on the extent of cooperation and competition and the relationship between individuals and ingroups, societies can be divided into those with an individualist culture that values personal goals and independence on the one extreme, and those with a collectivist culture that emphasizes group (e.g., family and work group) goals, collective duties, and in-group cooperation on the other (Triandis et al., 1988). Individualist cultures such as the U.S. and Western European countries are characterized by both independence and distance (emotional detachment) from in-groups (Murdock and Provost, 1973). Thus there is a lack of contact and knowledge of “others,” which has resulted in heightened fear of crime and “others,” especially in societies with increasing inequality and diversity. In these societies gated communities offer an alternative to open-street neighborhoods to provide desired privacy, exclusivity, and security. Gating is used as a tool to protect privacy and private property, to create a space inaccessible to others, and for people to escape from undesirable factors. Thus residential segregation is both a cause for and an inevitable consequence of gating.

In contrast, people are integrated into a few but very strong, cohesive groups (e.g., family, clan, occupation association) from birth onward in collectivist cultures such as China and other Asian and Latin American countries (Murdock and Provost, 1973). Members in these groups tend to live together, and gating helps to foster local communities and strengthen group solidarity. Thus living behind gates in these cultures is historically practiced not for privacy and exclusivity, but for a collective community with intensive social interaction and in-group cooperation, although the former is becoming increasingly important. Because of close social ties in collectivist cultures, fear of “others” is not a primary reason for gating, and residential segregation has not necessarily
been reinforced through gating, although the fear of crime is becoming more important with increasing social inequality and higher crime rates.

Second, the state can shape residential landscapes through its role, or lack of same, in neighborhood governance and services provision. In countries like the United States and Indonesia, gated housing development grew in response to the withdrawal of the state in public service provision and the inefficiency of government institutions (e.g., police) in social control (McKenzie, 1994; Webster et al., 2002). On the other extreme in countries such as socialist China, the state dominates the provision of public services, although some private provision is emerging. The state also plays an intrusive role in people’s private lives, including neighborhood governance through various local government service agencies. While the state exerts less pronounced control than in-groups such as extended family and clan, it usually has a stronger control over individuals than in Western countries (Murdock and Provost, 1973). Thus gating is used as a tool to facilitate the delivery of the limited public services and to help exert political control down to the grassroots. The recent privatization trend in China in fact makes gating even more attractive to the government for continued control in an increasingly liberal society. In Western and Northern European countries such as Britain, there is a significant share of both public and private provision of services, and the role of the state falls in between the two extremes. Gating, while growing, is less widespread than in the United States (Atkinson and Flint, 2004). Thus gating is also a result of the roles exercised by the state in both economic and political realms.

This framework demonstrates that while the built form of gating may look quite similar between countries, it evolves from distinct cultural traditions and political environments, and thus has very different social implications. To better understand gating, we have to examine the role of the culture and the state in society. This approach is not intended to replace or downplay the existing discourses in explaining gating. Instead, it aims to provide a broader framework to explain gating in different contexts; at the same time, it has the capacity to incorporate some existing theories. For example, the private provision (or the club realm) of public services in the United States and United Kingdom.

Fig. 1. A framework to accommodate gating in different types of countries.
has been used to explain the popularity of gating (e.g., Webster, 2001, 2002). This can be explained by the role of the state—more specifically, its partial withdrawal in the realm of services provision and the *laissez-faire* role of the state in private life. On the other hand, the widely adopted explanation of gating in the West—the discourse of fear—is a result of the individualist culture and consequent lack of contact and knowledge of others. In the following section, I apply this framework to understand gating in Chinese cities.

**COLLECTIVISM, POLITICAL CONTROL, AND NEIGHBORHOOD ENCLOSURE IN URBAN CHINA**

The collectivist culture deeply embedded in Chinese society and the tight political control actively pursued by the Chinese government offer a specific explanation for gating in Chinese cities. While walls and gates serve multiple purposes, such as defense, protection from harsh weather, and markers for private property, in a collectivist society such as China, they are used symbolically to define “collectives,” which have always been valued as more important than individualism under the Confucian tradition. Despite various profound socioeconomic transformations in Chinese history, collectivism has remained central to Chinese culture, and walls and gates have also maintained their symbolic value to define collectives and foster solidarity among other functions.

Yet, collectivism is a double-edge sword in China. For the public, it allows people to identify themselves with a larger group other than their immediate nuclear families, whose protection, help, and recognition are essential to them. For the government, a society organized with collectives in enclosed territories, instead of individuals, is easier to control and govern. With collective leaders serving as the “nerve tips” of the government to monitor and control individuals, enclosed neighborhoods resemble Bentham’s concept of “panopticon” where the controller—the state—remains invisible and at a distance from individuals yet controls their lives in detail (Bentham, 1995; Read, 2000). Thus, the Chinese government has always actively promoted neighborhood enclosure, from the construction of *fang* in imperial China (Knapp, 2000; Zhang, 2002) to the construction of work-unit compounds in the socialist era, and to the more recent sanction of “sealed residential quarters” (*fengbishi zhuzhai xiaoqu*) in new housing development. Above the hierarchy of these enclosed territories, administrative agencies such as the “three seniors” under the *baojia* system, Residents’ Committees (*jumin weiyuanhui*) in the socialist era, and recently Community Committees (*shequ weiyuanhui*; CCs) and Community Service Centers (*shequ fuwu zhongxing*; CSCs) function as the basic unit of the government to control (and serve) residents in these enclosed neighborhoods.

Collectivism and political control can arise from different social constructions in varying sociopolitical contexts. I will examine housing development and gating in Chinese cities in three different historical periods: the pre-socialist, the socialist, and the reform era. This division may seem simplistic, given the long history of urban development in China, yet the physical form of cities and the philosophy of urban planning and construction have remained unchanged for the most part of Chinese history (Skinner, 1977; Knapp, 2000; Zhang, 2002). Even during the socialist era when the government was determined to break away from feudalism, many traditional elements of urban planning and neighborhood management remained.
Traditional Chinese Cities (Pre-1949)

Enclosed neighborhoods have characterized the residential landscape in traditional Chinese cities since the Shang (1700–1027 B.C.) and Zhou dynasties (1027–771 B.C.). The jiefang system prevailed in urban planning and courtyard houses dominated the housing form (Zhang, 2002). Using large avenues and narrow lanes, the jiefang system divided the residential area into smaller wards, called fang. Each fang was surrounded with walls and guarded gates (Knapp, 2000; Zhang, 2002). In some cities, gates were closed during the night and a curfew insured social stability (Zhang, 2002). People living in the same or nearby fang often had similar occupations, forming enclosed neighborhoods with occupational homogeneity but personal-wealth heterogeneity, such as occurred with the merchant and gentry nuclei in late imperial Beijing (Skinner, 1977; Belsky, 2000). While the physical form of the jiefang system discouraged interactions between “insiders” and “outsiders,” it helped to foster a strong sense of internal community and establish an identity often based on occupation through the popular guild system.

Within each fang, courtyard houses further divided the space into enclosed units often based on family/clan ties. The courtyard house was a traditional, rectangular housing complex with multiple bungalows surrounding a courtyard in the center, further enclosed by walls, and usually, a single gate (Knapp, 1999; Figure 2). The walls and gates not only delineated private properties, but also defined a collective of extended families living
High expectations existed for members inside the compound to help each other and fulfill family/clan obligations. There are still many well-preserved courtyard house complexes in Chinese cities, such as the magnificent Qiao Family Manor in Pingyao (Knapp, 2000). The Forbidden City in Beijing was basically a large courtyard house complex for the emperor and his families, and the surrounding walls and gates not only demonstrated the emperor’s authority and legitimacy to rule, but also defined a collective different from and superior to the rest.

In coastal cities under foreign occupation since the mid-19th century, housing development reflected a European design; yet the feature of gating and enclosure remained essential. In Shanghai, for example, rapid industrialization during the 1840s–1940s led to the massive construction of terraced houses known as alleyway houses (linong fang), which accounted for 72% of the city’s housing stock by the end of 1940s (Lu, 1999). These multi-story houses were built in rows, and a few rows were marked off by surrounding walls and often a stone-framed entrance to form an enclosed residential compound (Lu, 1999). In addition, each alleyway house compound had a distinctive name, which contained the term “li” or, most commonly, “fang”—words that referred to the basic neighborhood under the jiefang system (Lu, 1999).

An administrative system, called the xiangli system, or later the baojia system, emerged over the physically enclosed neighborhoods as early as in Qin Dynasty (221–207 B.C.) and persisted throughout Chinese feudal history (Hsiao, 1967). The goal of the xiangli system was to divide the society into small units under a hierarchical system for population registration, tax collection, policy implementation, and generally political control. Instead of using the individual as the basic unit as often is the case in the West, the xiangli system used the household as the basic unit for organization, consistent with the collectivist culture. For example, in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), 10 households were organized into a wu with a leader called wu zhang, and 10 wu formed a li headed by a li zhang, and 10 li formed a xiang headed by a xiang zhang. These three leaders usually were respectable seniors from the community elected either informally by the community or assigned by the local government. In the Republic of China era (1911–1949), the government used the baojia system to collect taxes, draft and train military personnel, and to campaign against the emerging Chinese Communist Party (CCP); the system is still functioning in Taiwan today. Thus, the baojia system served more as part of the state machinery than a neighborhood organization.

In summary, traditional Chinese cities were characterized by enclosed neighborhoods because of the jiefang system in urban planning and the traditional courtyard house complex and alleyway house compounds served as the main forms of housing development. While the spatial division and enclosure seem to fragment the society, they in fact were intended to form occupation and family/clan-based collectives and foster extremely close ties among members. Furthermore, the baojia system organized households into groups, creating larger “collectives” to facilitate political control. Thus, in traditional Chinese cities, the neighborhood enclosure resulted from guild and family/clan-based collectivism and creating grassroots political control. Despite this spatial division, there was economic heterogeneity within enclosed neighborhoods, and socioeconomic disparity between enclosed neighborhoods was not obvious. Residential segregation was neither a cause nor a natural result of gating and enclosure.
Socialist Urban China (1949–1987)

Since 1949 when the CCP assumed power, there has been a profound urban transformation; yet, gating and enclosure, albeit in a different form, have remained an essential factor in residential development. There are two aspects of this transformation related to neighborhood enclosure: the massive construction of public housing in the form of work-unit compounds, and the creation of Residents’ Committees as the basic unit of urban government. Faced with severe housing shortages, new public housing complexes were developed mostly in suburbs next to large employment centers such as factories and government agencies to shelter state employees from a single work-unit, including leaders/officials, professionals, and staff/workers (Ma, 1981; Sit, 1995). These work-unit compounds were usually enclosed territories with surrounding walls, and they provided not only housing but also public services such as clinics, schools, grocery stores, and canteens exclusively for their own members (Bian et al., 1997; Lu et al., 1997; Bray, 2005; Fig. 3). They were also guarded, some formally with security personnel in uniform standing next to gates monitoring every visitor, and others informally guarded with vigilant senior residents volunteering at the entrances. In addition to enclosing free land allocated by the state to work units, the surrounding walls of work-unit compounds created a unique space for the socialist collective lifestyle. People living in these compounds were not only colleagues experiencing intensive interactions at the workplace but
also neighbors with close contacts at home as they all lived in the same complex, shared
the same canteen, bathhouse, clinic, and grocery store. There are many crucial resem-
blances in terms of structure and functions between the traditional extended Confucian
family and these work units, one of which is the duty to care for group members (Bray,
2005). Work units are “large families” or “public families” that operated to guarantee the
livelihood and welfare of their members. Thus, households living in these enclosed
neighborhoods shared the same strong attachment to their work unit, and a unique micro-
culture often emerged, especially in large compounds for government ministries and
departments in Beijing, the so-called “big compound culture” (dayuan wenhua). Thus
work-unit compounds created enclosed residential and social spaces based on occupation
and industry.

Work-unit compounds were also the basic unit for political control. Work units were
organized in a hierarchical system by industry (such as mechanical factory–city bureau of
the mechanical industry–provincial department of the mechanical industry–ministry of
mechanical industry), also known as the vertical system (tiaotiao; Wu, 2002). Policies
were often passed down and information passed up within the hierarchy. Furthermore,
each work unit had a party branch, overseeing the work unit’s daily operation and shaping
almost every aspect of its employees private lives (e.g., employment, marriage, divorce,
children’s education, employment). By integrating economic institutions with political
institutions, the system of work units was one of the basic mechanisms on the “road to
serfdom” (Hayek, 1944).

In addition to the work-unit system, new neighborhood governments—Residents’
Committees—were created to replace the baojia system as the grassroots of the govern-
ment for political control. Instead of voluntary self-governance organizations, Residents’
Committees served as the building blocks of the territorial administrative hierarchy
(kuaikuai). A Residents’ Committee’s jurisdiction might include one to several work-unit
compounds, or a dozen courtyard house complexes. The staffs of the Residents’ Commit-
tees were paid government employees. Residents’ Committees served, monitored, and
controlled residents at the same time (Read, 2000). On the one hand, Residents’ Commit-
tees organized social and civic activities for residents, delivered welfare benefits, helped
the needy households, and solved disputes within the neighborhood. On the other, Resi-
dents’ Committees carried out a number of administrative tasks such as family planning
implementation and household registration. They also served as the local informants of
the police and the government, which helped to maintain neighborhood security and
assisted political control. Thus, while work-unit compounds defined collectives through
physical walls and common work-unit affiliations, Residents’ Committees served and
controlled their constituents, not very differently from the previous baojia system.

In summary, with a significant resemblance to courtyard houses for Confucian fami-
lies, work-unit compounds added a new layer of gating to Chinese cities, creating
enclosed residential and social spaces based on occupation and industry. As a result
of socialist urban planning and the housing development program, collectivism was
transformed by socialist ideology, and work-unit attachment became the basis for people
living collectively behind walls. Since state employees with different socioeconomic
status all lived in uniform public housing units in work-unit compounds, gating created
homogeneous neighborhoods with little social and housing inequality. In addition, by
combining economic, social, and political functions, the system of work-unit compounds
facilitated political control through a vertical system, while Residents’ Committees served as the basic unit of the territorial administrative system and monitored and controlled residents under their jurisdiction. Thus, despite the “new” forms of housing development and “new” types of neighborhood governance, collectivism and political control continued to contribute to the widespread use of gating in the socialist era.


As part of the market transition process, China launched housing reform in cities in 1988, which brought profound changes to the production and consumption of housing. While public housing is being privatized through subsidized sales, massive private housing construction unfolded, especially in the suburbs, for the emerging middle class and the new rich. Consequently, housing inequality and residential segregation has increased, in contrast to the socialist residential pattern that was characterized by uniform public housing and homogeneous neighborhoods (Hu and Kaplan, 2001; Huang, 2005). Ranging from affordable housing units for low-medium income households to villa complexes for the elite, private housing estates are equipped with not only traditional walls, gates, and guards, but also sophisticated security and monitoring systems such as intercoms, surveillance cameras, infrared alarm systems, and card-activated entrances (Figs. 4 and 5). Public services in these communities, such as street cleaning, gardening, and security that
were previously provided by the government or work units, are now provided by private developers or professional Property Management Companies (PMCs) for a monthly fee. Furthermore, most of these communities have formed Homeowners’ Associations (HOAs; yezhu weiyuanhui) to represent residents’ interests. In other words, many of these new private communities share similarities in both physical and legal aspects with gated communities in the United States, and factors such as private service provision and security concerns are no doubt just as important to them as they are in Western gated communities (e.g., Miao, 2003; Wu, 2005). These enclosed neighborhoods are certainly different from courtyard house complexes and work-unit compounds, yet they also represent continuity with the past. I argue that collectivist culture and political control continue to be essential to the social construction of gating in the reform era.

Despite the emergence of a more individualistic subculture as a result of market transition, collectivist living behind walls is still promoted or pursued by different agents. First, the government continues to use gating and enclosure in urban planning to promote collectivist living in a new era characterized by the demise of the work-unit system, high unemployment and crime rates, and the emergence of an increasingly liberal society. Private housing is developed in the form of xiaogu, literally “small districts” or “residential quarters,” and “sealed residential quarters” are sanctioned by national planning codes, becoming the basic unit in the planning and development of residential construction.

Fig. 5. Code-protected entrance to a building in an enclosed neighborhood for mostly university faculty and staff in Beijing. Photo by author.
Although being privately produced and with no connection to the workplace, "residential quarters" bear a resemblance to work-unit compounds: they are designed with communal facilities such as kindergartens, clinics, restaurants, convenience stores, and sports facilities, forming self-sufficient communities (Bray, 2005). Planners for "residential quarters" focus particularly on the communal spaces of the compound, aiming to promote attributes such as social cohesion, neighborliness, and a sense of belonging (Zou, 2001). In addition, a new campaign of "community building" (shequ jianshe) was launched in 2000 to foster a stronger sense of community among residents, and Community Committees and Community Service Centers are set up for one or several enclosed residential quarters to deliver social, welfare, health, and administrative services (Ministry of Civil Affair, 2000). According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA, 2000, p. 3), a "community" is "a social collective (shehui gongtongti) formed by people who reside within a defined and bounded district." It is clear that the government wants to promote territorial collectives, even as the strong foundation for collectives in previous eras disappears. Thus the "community," instead of work units, is now promoted as urban residents’ new collective home.

Second, instead of clans/guilds and work units, new housing agents such as developers and PMCs now play important roles in defining and forming collectives. As virtually all new housing estates are gated, developers often create unique identities for their estates to attract households who are choosing among many gated communities with similar price ranges. Socioeconomic status, architectural design, and exclusive amenities are often used to promote unique collective identities and lifestyles. For example, the SOHO New Town in Beijing stands out among numerous estates with colorful high-rise apartment buildings, multi-functional spaces, brand-name stores and art shops, fancy restaurants, teahouses and cafes, and a fully equipped club. The developer projects an American urban lifestyle for the emerging young professionals in Beijing by creating neighborhoods similar to the SoHo area in Manhattan (New York City; http://www.sohochina.com). In contrast, the developer of Purple Jade Villas, an upscale gated community with multimillion-dollar villas in central Beijing, created a luxury but heavenly peaceful oasis amidst the chaotic urban environment. In addition to modern amenities such as swimming pools, a fitness center, spa, and an ice rink, there are two artificial lakes decorated with lotuses and weeping willows, a hiking trail along an artificial mountain with several waterfalls, a central grand lawn, and numerous exotic animals such as peacocks, swans, and pheasants wandering around. The Purple Jade Villa offers the richest a nature retreat and an idealized Chinese country life without leaving the heart of Beijing.

Third, while privacy and anonymity are pursued by the emerging middle class and the new rich, they also have a strong desire to form collectives to protect their lifestyle and interests. Most homeowners in Chinese cities are first-time homeowners whose strong proprietary attitude often leads to collective actions to protect their property-related interests. As housing markets are still in their early stages, housing disputes and conflicts, mostly between homeowners and developers and PMCs, have significantly increased in recent years. For example, homeowners of the Fulun Homes, a gated community for medium-income households in Beijing, sued their developer and the Beijing Planning Committee because a facility building in the compound that was originally planned for a day care center was turned into a spa center without homeowners’ agreement
Residents were very angry about the change not only because they could no longer enjoy the day care center but also there would be many clients and “undesirable” outsiders coming into the compound for the spa service. Even though the HOA had not been established then in this neighborhood, 149 homeowners organized themselves together and filed the lawsuit, and they won. In addition to traditional meetings and phone calls, new communication tools such as the internal Bulletin Board System (BBS) and email listserv served important roles in informing residents and organizing their actions. This case demonstrates that homeowners in enclosed neighborhoods can form a strong collective to protect their property interests and lifestyle, even though they do not share a common organizational basis such as clan lineage or work-unit affiliation, they did not know each other before moving in, and sometimes there were no official grassroots organizations such as HOAs to represent them. The collective nature of housing interests has provided an active catalyst in the formation of collective identities, which come with the right to protest (within the walled complexes) and responsibilities of self-government (Tomba, 2005). Of course, HOAs have been established in most private communities, and most homeowners join HOAs to protect their property interests (Read, 2003). Thus the basis for collective identity is common socioeconomic status, lifestyle, and property-related interests, instead of family/clan lineage and work-unit affiliation.

At the same time, gating continues to be embraced by the government for political control. With increasing inequality, mobility, and higher crime rates during the market transition, the government considers maintaining social stability as its topmost political concern, and gating becomes a simple tool to control crimes and achieve social stability and political control (Miao, 2003). While “sealed residential quarters” is sanctioned in new housing development, gating is often used in government-sponsored urban renewal to create enclosed communities (Miao, 2003). In addition to residential development, the government also tries to maintain its tight control over the population through monitoring and reorganizing neighborhood governments. Since Residents’ Committees only function well with close personal contacts and detailed local knowledge, they can no longer serve the government in newly built private housing estates featuring card-activated entrances, high-rise apartment buildings, and detached villas. In addition, private housing has been developed so quickly, especially in suburbs, that Residents’ Committees have not yet been set up in many neighborhoods. Thus there is a “vacuum” in urban governance in these new housing areas. Since 1994, HOAs have been encouraged by the government in new housing estates. Yet, after witnessing the ability of HOAs to mobilize their residents for various causes, the government has become less enthusiastic and has placed many restrictions on the establishment and roles of HOAs. According to the State Council (2003), the formation of an HOA has to be “under the direction of the district, county government and housing administrative agencies” (p. 5) and it has to “inform its decisions to relevant Residents’ Committee, and sincerely listen to and take Residents’ Committee’s suggestions” (p. 9). Furthermore, HOAs have to work with the public security agencies and Residents’ Committees to maintain social security in its jurisdiction (State Council, 2003).

While HOAs perform some of the functions of Residents’ Committees, such as mediating disputes and conveying concerns, they are not part of the administrative apparatus and they do not perform administrative tasks. Thus, Community Committees (CCs) and Community Service Centers (CSCs) are set up to fill the “vacuum” in urban governance
in these newly built enclosed neighborhoods. While claiming to be self-governance organizations, CCs serve administrative functions similar to Residents’ Committees, and provide diverse (some new) social services to the public in a new environment characterized by the demise of work units, influx of migrants, and higher unemployment and crime rates. Furthermore, a party branch is set up in each community, overseeing community building; and there are multiple branches of government agencies in CSCs (Figure 6). Thus CCs and CSCs, although appealing, are still part of the administrative apparatus to facilitate political control in a changing environment. Yet, it is true that in some of the most upscale gated communities such as the Purple Jade Villa, HOAs are more important than neighborhood governments, and it is somewhat difficult for CCs and CSCs to function there.

In summary, with the demise of the work unit and the dominance of nuclear family, socioeconomic status, lifestyle, and interest in property rights have become the main factors for people to live together behind walls. At the same time, gating and enclosure have been adopted by the government, and new neighborhood governments have been set up to achieve political control in a new environment. In other words, despite dramatic changes in the housing system and neighborhood governance, collectivism and political
control, although now re-defined, continue to contribute to neighborhood enclosure in the reform era. With an increasingly mature housing market in Chinese cities, households with different socioeconomic status are being sorted into different types of enclosed neighborhoods, ranging from walled migrant enclaves and enclosed work-unit compounds to enclosed affordable housing estates and upscale gated villa communities. This is different from the spatial division in traditional and socialist Chinese cities, where enclosed neighborhoods are characterized with occupational homogeneity and income heterogeneity. There is no doubt that social and spatial segregation is in the making in Chinese cities, and gating and neighborhood enclosure reinforce that process. However, the physical form of gates and walls, which has been in existence for centuries, is not the primary cause of social segregation and exclusion; instead, it helps to define collectives and foster a sense of community.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With gated residential development becoming a global phenomenon, I propose a conceptual framework focusing on the role of local culture and the state to understand gating in different countries. Applying this framework to examine neighborhood enclosure in different historical periods in Chinese cities, I argue that the collectivist culture deeply embedded in Chinese society and the tight political control actively pursued by the government contribute to the wide distribution and continuity of gating. The jiefang system with courtyard house complexes in traditional Chinese cities, the work-unit compounds in the socialist era, and newly built “residential quarters” are all enclosed neighborhoods that restrict access. The physical form of enclosure and gating helps to define territorial collectives, promote collectivist living, and foster social cohesion and solidarity, although its foundation changes over time (e.g., family/clan lineage in the pre-socialist era, common work-unit affiliation during the socialist era, and now similar lifestyle and common property-related interests). At the same time, gating and enclosure are used to facilitate political control, through the baojia system in traditional China, the work-unit system and Residents’ Committees in the socialist era, and now the campaign of community building in private housing estates. Thus, gating and enclosure do not necessarily lead to social and spatial segregation, although they begin to reinforce the emerging segregation in Chinese cities.

While American-based theories such as the discourse of fear and privatization in service provision are becoming increasingly important in explaining gating in China, it is clear that cultural and political mechanisms of enclosed neighborhoods in China differ significantly from the social construction of gated communities in the United States. While the physical form of gating may look similar across countries, the Chinese case demonstrates that it can be the result of very different processes, and its sociospatial implications can be very different. Thus more theoretical and empirical studies in different countries and comparative studies are needed to better understand the gating phenomenon. A multi-scalar perspective should be adopted and knowledge of the local cultural and political system is needed to better understand gating and its implications.
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