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Ending Gated Communities: The Rationales for Resistance in China

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Abstract

Although gated communities have spread globally, their prevalence in China is often attributed to China's unique tradition of gated living. In 2015, China announced a policy recommendation intending to end gated communities, which faced societal resistance. To elucidate the nature of this resistance, we interviewed experienced Chinese officials, practitioners, and scholars, who inevitably were gated-community residents. They challenge the policy in two ways: policy-rejectors justify gating as common sense and stress risks of ungating, whereas policy-sympathizers understand the policy shift but doubt its feasibility. Their rationale reveals ingrained cognitive dissonance and entrenched state-society tension. Such sentiments of resisting

ungating collectively create practical and ideological barriers to mitigating housing segregation. China's gated communities showcase how private production of civic goods prioritizes market rules and promotes individual values. China's failure in ungating suggests that the prevalence of privately produced communities can justify exclusion, normalize "gated mindsets," and reinforce socioeconomic and spatial inequalities.

Keywords: ending gated communities, social resistance, provision of public goods, housing development, gated mindsets, China

1. Introduction

Gated residential communities have become a global phenomenon today [2020] (Bagaeen & Uduku, 2010; Glasze et al., 2006; Webster et al., 2002). Gatedness has resulted from housing marketization and increasing inequality following worldwide economic liberalization (Cséfalvay, 2011; Glasze, 2003; Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004; Hogan et al., 2012; Tanulku, 2013). Neoliberal housing markets have been widely criticized for spawning gated communities (GCs) as exclusionary urban enclaves for the wealthy (Bagaeen & Uduku, 2010; Breitung, 2012; Douglass et al., 2012; Glasze et al., 2006; Huang & Li, 2014; Spocter, 2017). China also underwent economic liberalization. This gained momentum after 1988 due to housing marketization, causing inequalities commonly found in neoliberal regimes (Chiu-Shee &

Zheng, 2019; Deng et al., 2011). Gated spaces are now a salient characteristic of Chinese cities.[1] Yet neighbourhood enclosure is hardly new: walled neighbourhoods have always been the basic unit of socio-political organization in Chinese cities (Qian, 2013). For that reason, scholars have treated China's GCs as a unique case, claiming a millennia-long "cultural continuity" in gated living from ancient courtyard housing to *danwei* compounds[2] to contemporary housing (Bray, 2005). These discourses, rationalizing the prevalence of GCs—both globally and within China—frame our investigation into contemporary China's effort to promulgate policies *against* neighbourhood enclosure.

Although gating was once promoted in China and still is acknowledged in its zoning regulations (MOHURD, 2018), a 2016 policy recommendation aimed to end GCs. The policy was released after the

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[1] In contemporary China, urban residential gated communities are officially named *menjinshequ* (gated neighbourhoods) and commonly called *xiaoqu* (small areas). Most formally-developed urban residential gated communities have been built by private developers since the rise of housing marketization since 1988. Some formally-developed urban residential gated communities were built (typically before 2004) by former *danwei* or state-owned enterprises as a component of *danwei* compounds (introduced in section 2.3). Informally-built urban residential areas are often partially gated (introduced in footnote 5). However, urban residential neighbourhoods are not the only type of gated spaces in China. Others include, but are not limited to, schools, factories, corporate campuses, university campuses, historical sites, urban parks, touristic areas, and some rural settlements. This paper focuses on formally-built urban residential gated communities in *contemporary* China.

[2] The *danwei* (or work unit) compound was the most basic collective unit in the Chinese political, social, and spatial order during Maoist China (1949-1976). It was typically an enclosed, multifunctional, and self-sufficient communal entity that assumed economic and welfare responsibilities (Bjorklund, 1986; Lü & Perry, 1997). *Danwei* compounds emerged in the late 1940s, proliferated during China's industrialization, and have been gradually dismantled and privatized since 1988.

Central Urban Work Conference in 2015, convened by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), signalling a "turning point" for developmental trajectories (China Xinhua News, 2015).[3] The policy's stated intents, to "abolish GCs in new developments" and to "open up current GCs" (China Xinhua News, 2016), sparked heated and extensive debates. While Western critics saw GCs as exacerbating social and economic segregation, China's recommendation against gating seemed tacitly intended to enhance infrastructure efficiency. Although ungating was decreed from the top as an urban reform strategy, little progress has been observed by 2020; GCs remain prevalent in Chinese cities. Despite China's strong state power, the policy appears to have been quietly shelved, indicating societal resistance.

This study ground-truths the impact of the ungating policy and explores the rationale for resistance. To understand whether there was societal resistance to ungating and if so, why, we conducted extensive, structured interviews between 2017 and 2020 with Chinese officials, scholars, and design and planning practitioners who are knowledgeable about housing development across China. Inevitably, our informants were all residents of GCs since almost all formal housing neighbourhoods in contemporary China are gated. The informants were asked how they perceived GCs, why they thought China's central government recommended ending GCs, and, to their knowledge, whether changes towards ungating had occurred or could occur. The interviews were transcribed and coded, facilitating critical discourse analysis of informants' opinions. Their rationale reveals ingrained cognitive dissonance in individuals that have hindered the state's reform attempts. Such sentiments of resisting ungating—justified by competing cultural, political, economic, psychological, technical, legal, and

[3] Held in December 2015, the Conference emphasized development reform through strengthening urban design, management, and governance. It also promoted smart growth and sustainable development as measures against "urban illnesses," which included overpopulation, traffic congestion, housing shortages, pollution, environmental degradation, and resource scarcity.

institutional reasons—collectively reinforce entrenched state-society tension and create practical and ideological barriers to mitigating housing segregation in China. Chinese society's resistance to ungating suggests covert yet rising civic power. It showcases how private production of civic goods, including a *laissez-faire* approach to housing production and management, popularizes a bourgeois mentality in individuals and a culture of exclusion and prestige in the society. This normalized "gated mindset" can justify exclusion and reinforce socioeconomic and spatial inequalities. At a collective level, "gated mindsets" can impede housing and infrastructure reforms that advance inclusiveness and equity.

2. Literature Review: The Prevalence of Gated Communities

This section first introduces the global spread, economic rationale, and social impact of GCs to demonstrate a key dilemma in capitalist housing production. It then explains the China-specific institutions of gating, highlighting a unique cultural continuity.

2.1 The Global Spread of Gated Communities and Its Rationale

The term "gated community" most commonly refers to a spatially defined residential community on privatized roads with shared amenities, surrounded by gated fences, walls, or other natural barriers to restrict public access (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004). The presence of spatial components that ensure exclusive accessibility is essential in defining GCs, where legal agreements tie residents to a code of conduct (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005). Studies on GCs emerged in the 1980s when territorial privatization of housing development proliferated in both developed and developing countries. This developmental phenomenon—a "global trend of privatized urbanization" (Álvarez-Rivadulla, 2007)—has spawned GCs across urban and has even extended to rural areas—capitalizing on land availability in the countryside (Duren, 2006; Spocter, 2013; Zhao, 2017). GCs have become pieces of

highly specialized territory, authority, and rights that reproduce spatial and socioeconomic relations and restructure power dynamics on scales beyond cities (Sassen, 2010). At the same time, other scholars emphasize that GCs demonstrate the "spatial, organizational, and institutional order" underlying modern cities (Webster et al., 2002, p. 315). Although the global spread of GCs has led to commonalities such as spatial features, management strategies, demographic composition, and social life (Bagaeen & Uduku, 2010; Webster et al., 2002), examination of the trend towards increased gating reveals locally specific histories and political-economic transitions (Spocter, 2012).

Since the 1960s, neoliberal states retreating from housing production have supported the expansion of private communities. This shift increases gating, fragments urban development, and subdivides the city into residential "clubs" (S. Low, 2006). Economic theories explain GCs as territorial club goods (a subset of collective goods). They are excludable[4] and are often under private governance (Foldvary, 1994, pp. 25–27). Based on economic theories, dynamics of housing provision can be examined from perspectives of demand and supply—the fundamental behaviour of consumers (homebuyers) and producers (mainly private developers and governments) (Galster, 1997; Olsen, 1987).

Homeowners' rationale for gating is manifold. Walls and gates control access and define the geographic area of communal services, protecting residents' shared assets, lifestyle, privacy, and sense of security (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; S. Low, 2003; S. M. Low, 2001). Such exclusivity increases property values and locational desirability, facilitating economic gain by both homeowners and developers while

[4] In economics, a good or service becomes excludable when it is possible to prevent non-payers from accessing it (Brito & Oakland, 1980).

symbolizing prestige and enhancing residents' psychological satisfaction (Ajibola et al., 2011; Atkinson & Blandy, 2005; Bible & Hsieh, 2001; McKenzie, 1996; Pompe, 2008). Other demand-side rationale for gating includes fear of crime, security from environmental risks, resistance to democratic mixing, escapism, NIMBYism, as well as desires for control, a sense of belonging, and enjoyment of communal amenities (Caldeira, 2001; Foldvary, 1994; S. Low, 2003; Manzi & Smith-Bowers, 2005).

The supply-side rationale for gating highlights a free-rider problem, which occurs when beneficiaries of public goods and services do not pay for them or underpay (Elster, 1985). Free riding is a form of market failure that encumbers collective governance, leaving public goods underproduced, overused, or degraded (Kerr & Bruun, 1983). When market constituencies fail to reach an agreement due to strong incentives to be a free-rider, government can force all individuals to cooperate to provide public goods. However, Foldvary (1994) cautions that government-imposed provision of public goods can fail to allocate resources according to the desire of the majority of the public and, hence, is not truly cooperative. Intended to overcome both market and government failures, consensual community arrangements emerged in market processes as a supply-side innovation in real estate, urban design, and urban governance, especially during periods of housing market boom in North America, South America, Asia, and Africa (Le Goix & Webster, 2008; Webster & Goix, 2005). Such arrangements often entail private, voluntary means to finance public goods and realize collective choices, forming spatially defied residential clubs that better meet residents' needs, supplement public services, and enhance management efficiency. Exclusive membership ensures that whoever benefits from the collective protection and maintenance consents to pay proportionately out of their estate. Government often encourages market-led development and private governance of residential club communities to promote design innovation, incentivize environmental enhancement, enable efficient land use and communal

management, strengthen proprietary rights, and foster collective identity and affinity (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005; Ben-Joseph, 2004; Blandy & Lister, 2005).

2.2 The Impact of Gated Communities

The impact of GCs on society, space, and politics has been a bone of contention. Although GCs, as territorial club goods, are an effective model for financing and supplying public goods when government fails to do so (Foldvary, 1994), their exclusive features have furthered a process of segregating societies into micro-territories (Le Goix & Webster, 2008). GCs have been regarded as a prime manifestation of urban fragmentation and social disparity. Some suggest that GCs embody global capitalism and all its ills (Brenner et al., 2009; Marcuse, 1997); others highlight how local favouritism or acquiescence from residents, design and planning experts, developers, and government authorities contribute to gating (Chapman, 2006; Gsior-Niemiec, 2009; C.-P. Pow, 2007; Tomba, 2005; Yip, 2012). Global and local mechanisms have simultaneously facilitated the seemingly inexorable spread of GCs, validating them as “geographies of exclusion” (Grant & Rosen, 2009).

Gating demarcates social-spatial divisions and can exacerbate economic, social, and spatial inequalities. Studies conducted in diverse locales show that GCs not only inconvenience everyday life by segregating public facilities and increasing daily travels, but diminish social diversity, reinforce social segregation, and cause crime-related displacement and concentration (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005; Dinzey-Flores, 2013; Gsior-Niemiec, 2009; Hogan et al., 2012; C.-P. Pow, 2007; Rosen & Razin, 2008). GCs are also condemned as the physical embodiment of a contemporary wealth-driven consumption and lifestyle, to the detriment of marginalized populations. Nayar (2015, pp. 134–136) argues that the “splendid isolation” of GCs can only be created through the dispossession, exploitation, and exclusion of the poor, reinforcing long-term poverty just outside the walls. Such critical perspectives view GCs as the

antithesis of valued qualities in contemporary cities, including fairness, pluralism, diversity, inclusiveness, equality, openness, connection, and social welfare.

Not all scholarly assessments of GCs are critical. Some argue that GCs can ensure privacy and safety while enhancing a sense of community, solidarity, and security. For example, Tomba (2010, 2005) argues that gated spaces are exclusionary but also inclusionary: while walls and barriers prevent outsiders from accessing privately shared territories and services, the insiders manage to experience a stronger sense of belonging and foster common interests. Others stress the importance of the scale and location of GCs. Bagaeen and Uduku (2010) suggest that GCs could contribute to urban sustainability if the neighbourhood reduces or eliminates segregation through a compact, walkable, reasonably dense, and energy-efficient design. Sabatini and Salcedo (2007) find that developing upper-class GCs next to low-income neighbourhoods benefits poorer residents by bringing jobs, service improvement, and civic pride. Therefore, it is important to ask who counts as beneficiaries from a gated collective and who gets excluded. It is also important to determine instances when acts of exclusion may sometimes ameliorate specific problems of public concern (Foldvary, 1994, p. 23).

The mixed assessments of GCs' impacts indicate the urgency to consider specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Attributing gating to historical path dependency, Kleinman (1996, p. 181) suggests that "countries become locked into particular patterns of housing development at an early stage, for reasons that may be historical, deliberately chosen, or the product of accident; once locked in, this pattern then constrains future development." Hence, blaming the rise of GCs on globalization and neoliberalism underestimates the facilitating role of locally grounded practices and cultures. Critiques of GCs, mostly originating in the West, have thus been accompanied by discourse that emphasizes local contexts (Bray, 2005; Hogan et al., 2012; Huang, 2006; Huang & Low, 2008; C. P. Pow, 2009; C.-P. Pow,

2007; Wu, 2005; Xu & Yang, 2008). In today's transnational networks of information, local producers of space reappropriate foreign ideas in ways that may also reflect historical traditions and cultural values. In turn, these local practices integrate specific geopolitical considerations of institutions with foreign influences. The production of GCs in China must be understood in this light, exemplifying a dialogue between global and local, between emerging and traditional knowledge and values.

2.3 China's Unique Tradition of Living In and Governing Through Gated Spaces

Scholars regard contemporary Chinese GCs as a unique phenomenon incorporating both Western influences and indigenous socio-cultural traditions (Breitung, 2012; Douglass et al., 2012; Huang & Low, 2008; Yip, 2012). On one hand, the globalization of liberal capitalism and materialistic modernity (Giddens, 1991) has reached China, shaping the production of its contemporary GCs (Tomba, 2010). Developers have adopted Western architectural elements and foreign names to symbolize first-world-like lifestyles and attract affluent consumers (Giroir, 2006; Webster et al., 2002). On the other hand, GCs are at least partially if not essentially facilitated by China's historical traditions of living in gated spaces (Bray, 2005; Huang & Low, 2008; Knapp, 2000).

China's urban landscapes have included enclosed neighbourhoods since ancient times, suggesting a long-lived cultural acceptance of gated spaces (Bray, 2005; Knapp, 2000). For example, from the Warring States Period (500 – 221 B.C.) to the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.), cities in ancient and imperial China were organized through the repetition of the basic unit of "walled compounds," called *li* (Bray, 2005). *Li* was the smallest unit of residential communities, the lowest level of government, and the basic unit for tax collection. In the reconstruction of Beijing (1406-1420) under the Ming Dynasty, this spatial logic generated the layout of the Forbidden City and its surroundings, serving as a representative reference for subsequent generations' urban settlements and power structures. Other forms of

enclosure persisted during China's socialist era (1949-1988), when Chinese cities were inhabited by a small percentage of the overall population who belonged to the privileged class of state workers (Tomba, 2010). *Danwei* compounds were created mainly during 1960s and 1970s as the "work units" of the socialist "city of production" (*shengchan chengshi*) (Brugger, 1981; Schurmann, 1971). These cellular structures—commonly referred to as *danwei dayuan* (meaning "the big courtyard of the work unit")—were physically enclosed and administered by *danwei* with the goals of reducing consumption and securing lifelong (and often multigenerational) employment (Tomba, 2010). Walls surrounding *danwei* compounds were not intended as a means of exclusion based on socioeconomic differences (Huang & Low, 2008; Wu, 2005). *Danwei* provided its members with comprehensive functions—including food, employment, education, healthcare, childcare, security, entertainment, and communal interaction—to ensure cradle-to-grave urban living. *Danwei* thus served as a fundamental socio-political unit of urban governance for socialist China. The *danwei* system reinforced the socialist aim of egalitarian distribution of resources, housing, and social welfare. It also obliged patriotism, since the assignment of livelihood support was contingent on not only workers' duties and family composition but also their political performance.

Contemporary GCs have proliferated as the real estate sector has become a pillar industry of the Chinese economy. Since China's economic liberalization began in 1978, Chinese cities have greatly expanded. A series of housing reforms that occurred between 1988 and 2004 gradually dissolved China's socialist housing system and established a market-driven one, leading to privatization of housing stock and widespread homeownership (Deng et al., 2011). A 1994 tax-sharing reform placed additional financial burdens on municipalities, obliging them to largely rely on land-based financing to generate revenues (Shu-ki & Yuk-shing, 1994). Typically in post-1994 China, private companies lease land from

municipal governments and construct formal urban housing. Land leasing fees contribute to the majority of municipal revenues. This public-private growth coalition has led to a heated real estate market, skyrocketing housing prices, and a sharp increase in the homeownership rate. The latter reached 90 percent nationally in 2013 and has held steady (Tradingeconomics, 2020). The most obvious spatial outcome of this coalition, apart from the rapid erasure of villages and older neighbourhoods, is the proliferation of what is increasingly the predominant form of market housing neighbourhoods—China's *contemporary* GCs, or *xiaoqu*. A typical *xiaoqu* is composed of an enclosed superblock, maintained by a property management company (Huang, 2006; Tomba, 2010). Almost all contemporary GCs are on enclosed, inward-looking superblocks, forming patchworked, predominantly residential, and monocultural "enclaves" with specific socioeconomic groups or activities (Breitung, 2012; Douglass et al., 2012; Kochan, 2015; Qian, 2013; Wissink et al., 2012).

2.4 Social Control and Classification Through Gating in Contemporary China

During China's rapid urbanization, bureaucracies and residents shared a fear of disorder and social instability. A rapidly changing urban environment has made the marketing of exclusive lifestyles appealing to all classes of society. Beginning in the early 2000s, local policies publicly endorsed neighbourhood enclosure to foster security (Tomba, 2010). GCs have flourished in tandem with alarming rises in economic, social, and spatial disparities, posing challenges to public services and social cohesion (Pan et al., 2014; Roy & Ong, 2011; Timberlake et al., 2014; Wissink et al., 2012).

In China today, GCs include three types: gradually privatized *danwei* housing, informal GCs built on collectively-owned rural land, and newly-built urban GCs.[5] Together, these diverse GC types

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[5] In *contemporary* China, almost all formally-developed market housing neighbourhoods are gated. Informal GCs can be found in informally-built urban residential areas. The latter mainly include

accommodate residents of various socioeconomic statuses. They vary greatly in their spatial characteristics, quality of services, housing prices, communal lifestyles, and management. Given that most urban residents live in GCs, neighbourhood enclosure has worsened housing inequalities.[6] GCs turn their back on the streets, encouraging collectivized, inward social life and reducing social interactions in more widely shared public spaces (Abramson, 2008). In turn, the design, regulation, and management of GCs has become an essential tool of social control and political classification in China (Qian, 2013).

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shanty areas (*penghuqu*), urban villages (*chengzhongcun*), and Small Property Rights Housing (*xiaochanquanfang*, SPRH). Shanty areas were mostly self-constructed by migrant workers during China's peak urbanization and have allegedly been erased in major cities today. Urban villages are collectively governed rural communities whose land has been engulfed by urbanization. Village households self-construct low-cost housing, providing extra-legal rental housing to migrant workers (Shi et al., 2018). SPRH is defined as extra-legal housing that is developed on collectively owned rural land and then sold to homebuyers who are migrants or non-indigenous villagers (Lai et al., 2017). Communities of shanty areas, urban villages, and SPRH are often at least partially enclosed. In our paper, we refer to these enclosed areas of informally-built urban housing as China's informal GCs.

[6] Some market watchers estimate that from 1998 to 2016, China built 9.8 billion square meters of market housing, which roughly equals 100 million units housing about 400 million people (Shangjieyongdao, 2018). They also estimate that China's SPRH stock is three times the extent of its market housing stock. Accordingly, China could have gained about 300 million units of SPRH, which could house another 1.2 billion people. Based on these estimations, the watchers argue that China could have a total housing stock sufficient for 1.6 billion people. (The reporters base their estimation on the assumption that each unit is 100 square meters and houses 4 people. These numbers derive from statistical surveys of the national average.) They believe that China does not lack housing nationally but suffers severely from the uneven distribution of housing and concomitant social problems from skyrocketing housing prices.

Huang (2006) scrutinizes the influences of culture and the state on residential landscapes and stresses that the prevalence of GCs in China has been facilitated by an entrenched collectivist culture and the Chinese state's pursuit of tight political control. Today, the jurisdictions of lowest-level (street-level) government often correspond to territories of GCs. Therefore, Huang argues that gating *per se* does not necessarily cause residential segregation; instead, it supports political control and fosters social solidarity. Nevertheless, Huang (2006) suggests that the rationale behind the emergence of GCs in Western societies is increasingly applicable to the proliferation of China's contemporary GCs; hence, the latter have begun reinforcing segregation in China. China's contemporary GCs resemble "club realms of consumption" whose members share properties that are neither entirely private nor public (Giroir, 2006; Webster, 2001; Webster et al., 2006). These privately-developed gated "clubs" concentrate consumers and limit access to members-only so as to stimulate consumption and provide services more efficiently. To urban residents today, contemporary GCs provide, and protect, exclusionary amenities and services. Owning a home in a new GC has become an important indicator of improved quality of life. The location of and the environment within a GC determine the market value of housing and, hence, reflect homeowners' social status, personal wealth, and social identity.

Although writing about the United States, Blakely and Snyder (1997) observed that setting boundaries is always a political act, an exercise in classification that delineates space to facilitate the activities and purposes of political, economic, and social life. Gating is thus particularly suited to China's authoritarian political system, since order and social stability is of paramount importance to the Chinese state (Tomba, 2010). Through zoning of urban space, whether institutionalized, officially planned, or formed through bottom-up processes, different social groups in the hierarchical Chinese society are bounded geographically with "unpredictable encounters between them" inhibited (Qian, 2013). Therefore, the

Chinese state regards gating as a means to reduce the risk of societal tensions and turmoil, in contrast to the ways that GCs are widely criticized for deepening social inequality and polarization in Western neoliberal societies. Others point to gating's effectiveness as a socio-political strategy, noting that boundaries foster intra-group contacts and solidarity, and contribute to a sense of belonging and inclusion within the community (Huang & Low, 2008; Lemanski, 2006). Breitung (2012) has studied Chinese urban dwellers' perceptions of gating and concluded that residents living both within and outside GCs view gating as a norm rather than a problem since enclosure ensures privacy and security. Some scholars suggest that gated living's persistence in China's long history has proven its effectiveness, validity, and sustainability (Huang, 2006; Tomba, 2010). Breitung (2012) has predicted that the building of GCs as China's dominant model for housing production would likely recede when urban growth declined.

Overall, the literature argues convincingly that influences from globalization and neoliberalism, existing indigenous traditions of neighbourhood enclosure, and a desire for political control through spatial demarcation and social classification have combined to create the proliferation of GCs in China. Yet scholars have expressed mixed opinions about the impact of gating in China. Most critiques of Chinese GCs echo the global discourse about how gating exacerbates social disparity and inequality.

2.5 China's First Attempt to End Gated Communities

Since 2014, China's central administration has begun rethinking development. President Xi Jinping announced that China must adapt to a "New Normal" featuring slower but better growth (Bloomberg News, 2014; Green & Stern, 2015; Saggu & Anukoonwattaka, 2015). In support of this proclamation, in 2015, China's central government convened its first Central Urban Work Conference in 37 years, laying out guidelines for enhancing city development (Ma, 2015). These guidelines were

published by China's CPC Central Committee and State Council in 2016 as "Several Recommendations for Strengthening Urban Planning, Construction, and Management" (Xinhua News, 2016). The sixteenth recommendation, as a measure to "improve public services," seeks to "optimize the structures of neighbourhood road networks." It continues:

> To develop neighbourhoods for living that are open, convenient, at suitable scales, and with comprehensive amenities and that foster neighbourhood harmony. Newly built housing will promote block systems (*jiequzhi*) and, in principle, no longer construct enclosed residential communities. Existing residential communities and *danwei* compounds will be opened gradually to allow public use of internal roads, solve problems of road networks, and improve land use efficiency. To establish "narrow roads and dense road networks" as principles for laying out urban roads, and establish road networks with reasonable hierarchies. To eliminate various cul-de-sacs, form connected road networks, and increase connectivity. By 2020, the average road density in built urban areas shall be increased to 8km per square kilometer, with roads taking 15 percent of the total area. To utilize one-way roads to improve traffic management. To strengthen the construction of bike and pedestrian paths and promote green transportation. To optimize parking management, encourage civic participation, incentivize market investment, and gradually address parking problems.[7]

The recommendation clearly indicates a shift in administrative attitude toward gating: once favoured, it is now to be altered through "opening," "elimination," and "connecting." The recommendation stressed the negative impact of gating on traffic and parking management. Yet the proposed eradication of GCs left the public in shock, triggering disagreements from residents and spurring heated debates among planning, design, and legal experts (e.g., Kjshzx, 2016; Ren, 2016; Xiaoxi, 2016; Xinhuanet, 2016; Zhongfangyanxie, 2016). While public discontent with this policy has quieted, scholars and designers in both the West and China have begun exploring potential ways to ungate. Kan, Forsyth, and Rowe (2017) speculate about opportunities and challenges for neighbourhood design,

[7] The translation is intended to reflect the original text. The sixteenth recommendation does not specify who should be responsible for implementation and enforcement or whether it applies to all cities in China.

governance, and legal practice after the new policy and suggest design strategies for modifying China's residential superblocks. Wang and Pojani (2019) present potential solutions for opening up Shanghai's existing GCs, underscoring five challenges that may, or may not, be gradually resolved: 1) onerous work to implement site redesign; 2) additional responsibilities for neighbourhood commissions; 3) fierce social frictions; 4) residents' infringed property rights; and 5) an increased financial burden for municipalities due to the return of shared spaces to public ownership. Exploring the potential permeability of the city in the event of coercive ungating, Sun, Webster, and Chiaradia (2018) conducted a GIS-based simulation to identify ways to maximise walkability with minimum expropriation of property rights.

Despite explorations of ungating, the ungating policy has had little impact since 2016. As of 2020, the prevalence of GCs appears little changed in China. One survey of planners throughout China found that these planners all live in GCs themselves and support gating despite attempts at reducing its negative effects (Liao et al., 2019). This sample of Chinese planners' opinions indicates that ungating is not likely to be popular in the professional planning community, but this unpopularity is insufficient to explain the ungating policy's ineffectiveness. Below, we explain our methodology for investigating the rationale for resisting ungating.

3. Methodology

In order to ground-truth the resistance to ungating and parse its rationale, our study used elite interviews (Natow, 2020) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010). We carried out 55 structured, in-depth interviews with experienced practitioners in China from 2017 to 2020. The interviewees were knowledgeable about, and/or had work experiences in, housing development across China. They provided thorough understandings of the supply-side rationale for resistance and shared opinions as

residents, since all interviewees lived in GCs. The interviewees were selected through snowball sampling. Our interviews continued until we had reached a saturation of information.

The interviewed elites included project managers, principal designers, and rank-and-file employees who worked for major Chinese developers, managerial-level and rank-and-file architects and planners employed by governmental institutes, as well as professors who also practiced in China, and legal experts who worked with GCs (Table 1).[8] While elite interviews can provide valuable information for understanding public policy, politics, and power relationships, we used three forms of triangulation, a method that is particularly important in order to obtain a fuller picture of the phenomenon, especially a politically sensitive one (Davies, 2016; Natow, 2020; Denzin, 2009). First, to gain access to elites: we studied the elites' backgrounds and histories of their work in preparation for the interviews.[9] Second, to triangulate data, we gathered information from different locations, from different perspectives (e.g., developers, residents, designers, scholars, legal experts), and from employees within a particular industry who possessed varying amounts of power, and from different time periods. Lastly, through

[8] It is worth noting that all interviewees themselves were inevitably GC-residents since they all lived in formal urban housing in China. Most had visited, or lived in, Western cities. Most informants had a mixed background, with experiences working for both the public and private sectors. For example, most interviewed employees of real estate companies had previously worked for state-owned design and planning institutes, or the real estate companies were state-owned developers. Most scholars were also actively collaborating with planners and developers while practicing planning and design.

[9] We have selected interviewees who have different types of expertise, have worked for different types of housing developers, and have experiences in different Chinese regions. The diversity of the interviewees' backgrounds and experiences helps to broaden the perspectives reflected in our findings.

within-method triangulation,[10] we employed multiple types of data collection procedure, including interviews, observations, literature review, and online document analysis. This combination allowed us to reveal comprehensive reasons for resistance to ungating. We then followed up with the interviewees each year since the initial interview to check whether their practices had shifted. We coded interviewees' responses (Table 2) and conducted discourse analysis in order to critically assess various rationales that undergirded interviewees' opinions, including their implicit assumptions and biases.

4. Parsing the Rationale for Resisting the Ungating Policy

The informants were first asked about their opinions on the central government's ungating policy and its impact on local practice to their knowledge. Most informants expressed that they had initially been surprised by the ungating proclamation in 2016. Most doubted that the central government's resolution would be realized at scale any time soon. Summarizing this situation, one informant who had practiced both as a planner and a developer stated, "the idea to ungate emerged out of the blue, and it is too complicated and almost impossible to actualize this idea." Today [2020], although the policy remains displayed on the central government's official website, most informants believed that it had been tacitly shelved, indicating the policy's effective failure. Below, we present informants' sentiments regarding the failure in two categories. One kind of argument rejected the ungating policy openly, justifying gating as a common-sense approach and stressed the risks of ungating, while another view sympathized with the central government's intent but expressed doubts about its

[10] Within-method triangulation refers to the employment of multiple qualitative methods for data collection (Thurmond, 2001).

feasibility.[11] The following subsections explain these two perspectives further.

4.1 The Rationale for Rejecting the Ungating Policy Outright

The ungating recommendation included two parts—to build no more GCs, and to gradually open up existing ones. Informants who rejected the policy described both aims as "unpragmatic," "implausible" ideas that were "doomed to failure."[12] The intent to open up existing GCs was more contested. Some designers and developers believed that "opening up blocks of workplaces such as industrial parks and corporate campuses could be plausible." But they challenged the idea of opening up residential neighbourhoods. A developer-employed planner argued: "GCs are private goods and personal territories that deliver privacy and a sense of ownership; therefore, it is incomprehensible why residential areas should be open." This view was shared by several other developers and designers, who questioned why ungating residential areas was even "needed" or "beneficial." One developer (and architect by training) openly mocked ungating: "The recommendation to eliminate GCs in China is laughable." Another design and planning professional stated plainly, "Ungating defies logic and public opinion." This view was echoed by some prestigious scholars: "Ending GCs was a strange idea proposed at some scholarly official's whim," one speculated. Designers and planners also suggested that "neither developers nor policymakers in China had the experience or capacity to successfully develop

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[11] The categorization applies to the interviewees' sentiments but does not sort people into separate categories. The two categories of explanations were sometimes provided by the same interviewee. Some interviewees both rejected the ungating policy when considering its feasibility and sympathized with the central government's intent when considering the impact of prevalent gating.

[12] Most policy-rejectors had a mixed background, having experiences working as and/or with designers, planners, developers, and scholars.

neighbourhoods with open blocks." Together, policy-rejectors criticized the ungating policy as an "unreasonable" attempt to reverse China's "common-sense" practice of gated living.

4.1.1 The Cultural Normality of Gated Communities in China

All interviewees underscored the widespread acceptance of GCs in China. Many stated that "Chinese people love gates" and that "everyone in China prefers enclosure." Developers all defended gating: their consensus was concisely captured by one who stated, "Gating housing developments is indisputably necessary for our business, since prospective homebuyers reject open neighbourhoods." Most developers mentioned open neighbourhoods critically, as insisted by one: "Open neighbourhoods are Western and, hence, certainly unsuitable for Chinese conditions." Even well-travelled designers and scholars also expressed scepticism. One scholar cautioned, "Open neighbourhoods are too foreign to Chinese residents, the majority of whom cannot accept ungated living." Many interviewees (including developers, designers, planners, and scholars) underscored China's "uniqueness," especially considering that "gated living is a Chinese tradition for thousands of years." These tradition-lovers argued that gating was "very normal in China" and that it was "most suitable for Chinese culture." One stressed, "History had proven that gating was a sensible and sustainable approach to urban management in China." Another echoed, "Gating has little negative impact in China." Several predicted that "gated living will naturally persist in China."

Adding to this advocated cultural normality of gating, some policy-rejectors noted the necessity of enclosing privately-developed neighbourhoods after the dissolution of the *danwei* system. Most interviewees could not recall a specific event or policy intervention that had triggered post-*danwei* gating; rather, they regarded its emergence and popularization as an "unplanned," "spontaneous" "market choice" that had occurred during China's post-reform transformations, when private housing

developments mushroomed with rampant urbanization and increasing rural-to-urban migration. According to memories of experienced planners and developers, gating had gradually become a market preference that was legitimized by the introduction of official guidelines for building walls. Architects recalled that the national standards for neighbourhood design did not provide guidelines for building walls until post-1991 updates. Accordingly, in the 1980s, many residential buildings had remained freestanding in open areas. But during this time, cities saw massive influxes of rural migrants who sought urban jobs, especially in construction and vending, as well as improved economic opportunities. Urban homeowners were from privileged classes such as state workers and wealthy private-sector employees who could afford market housing, whereas migrant workers lived in scattered shanty areas and urban villages. In this time of social change, gating became a bourgeois social preference: “Urban dwellers, who were accustomed to live in *danwei* compounds, increasingly had to confront unfamiliar faces and dialects in a changing city constantly undergoing constructions,” recalled one interviewee who grew up and continued working in a major city, adding that in the 1980s, “trespassing and crimes involving migrants surged.” Perceptions of concomitant increases in migration and crime were generally shared by interviewees, who had witnessed rapid transformations during China’s initial urbanization. Several believed that urban citizens’ long-standing fear of others, especially migrant workers, had originated and intensified during urbanization. A native of a major city asserted, “Original urban populations did not trust poor, rural newcomers.” Another argued: “the increasing numbers of migrants undermined social ties and public safety.” In tandem with rising homeownership rates, urban residents segregated themselves through purchasing homes and associated services in GCs. One developer argued: “Living where one can afford is a sensible way to organize a rapidly changing city with increasing floating populations.” The urban/rural and modernized/undeveloped juxtapositions that appeared in the 1980s therefore made social disparities more apparent than ever. Ultimately, many interviewees attributed the

emergence of post-*danwei* gating to the rise of social disparities and safety concerns against a backdrop of "dirty," "disordered" cities under transformation from rapid urbanization.

Some designers and planners concurred that contemporary gating had not been imposed by bourgeoisie, but instead had been popularized by private developers and legitimized by the government's updated technical guidelines in the 1990s, during the process of *danwei* dissolution. Yet one developers argued: "State-owned enterprises had taken the lead in continuing gating, constructing most of the earliest post-*danwei* walls around workers' dormitories to keep strangers out and to ensure residents' safety."

Collectively, policy-rejectors emphasized that gating was normalized as an "effective," "inevitable" strategy to ensure safety, order, and hygiene for "a better quality of life" in Chinese cities today.

4.1.2 The Impossibility of Ungating

Most policy-rejectors expected ungating to be fraught with peril. They stressed residents' psychological resistance to opening up their own neighbourhoods. First, residents considered walls and security systems to be protectors of their safety, properties, and rights. Speaking from residents' perspective, one designer cautioned, "Open access would allow unruly crowds of low-end people and outside vehicles to mob communal space." Another designer argued: "Residents are concerned that open access would engender noise, crime, and property damage and jeopardize residents' safety, privacy, and a sense of security." Second, some developers highlighted the psychological benefit of owning an enclosed, exclusive environment. "The only undisturbed, intimate environment that an ordinary resident can have in Chinese cities today is the privatized, garden-like spaces in GCs," one

insisted, adding that "these are the places where urban professionals can flee outside disorder, retreat from the anxieties of urban life, and enjoy family time with their parents and children." Developers suggested that such psychological benefit was achieved "by design." Several designers stressed that their goal was to "enhance residents' quality of life" and that their main strategy was to "integrate walkable, park-like spaces into GCs so that the environment is safe for pedestrians and agreeable for recreational activities." Judging from these perspectives, policy-rejectors believed that ungating would allow the intrusion of outsiders and that it would compromise residents' quality of life. As one designer put it, "The environment within the walls engenders relaxation, in contrast to the wide roads, busy traffic, and messy conditions outside the walls." As a developer remarked dramatically, "Walls are the division between peace and chaos." "An established social circle" was another advantage of GCs highlighted by some designers and planners. One argued: "Members of GCs are already familiar with each other and know community rules." A planner and legal expert asserted, " Each GC is a close-knit society where residents are already grappling with complex internal conflicts; therefore, GCs are unwelcoming to outsiders." One scholar and planner supported this line of argument, stressing that "ungating could threaten the stability of current social ties and trigger additional work and higher cost for property management." One planner warned, "Ungating would reverse urban living back to the disordered, substandard conditions that marked the early days of China's urban growth."

Developers commonly endorsed gating as a successful strategy for "emotional marketing."[13] One developer asserted, "Homeowners' desires represented the preferences of the majority of citizens and hence determined the real market demand." One developer-employed principal designer argued: "As

[13] Emotional marketing refers to marketing efforts that arouse emotions in people to induce them to buy particular products and services. (Consoli, 2010).

long as China relies on the private sector to provide and manage housing, individuals' desires will prevail over any sort of abstract public interest." Most developers predicted that "existing GCs will persist and new ones will be spawned." One justified this prediction with market rationale, stating: "Developers would naturally maximize profit and overlook larger ideals of fairness that extend beyond their properties." Another argued: "Developers would naturally tailor their products to the interest of affluent consumers to instil feelings of comfort, accomplishment, and prestige;" hence, "the most successful developers produce the most high-end GCs." A designer-by-training developer stressed, "all homebuyers consider GCs as desirable goods packaged with collective amenities—all designed for comfort and enjoyment—and, therefore, homebuyers would choose the best packaged deal they could afford." "Buying a home in a GC is a token of achievement," one developer remarked, adding "the more luxurious, the more fulfilment." Acknowledging homebuyers' desires, some planning scholars argued that the *laissez-faire* housing market had spatially sorted residents based on their purchasing power, which was largely associated with their social status, and settled the distribution of resources, such as land, amenities, and services. One cautioned, "Ungating would subvert existing power dynamics and trigger the redistribution of wealth and benefits formerly, and formally, secured by walls."

Policy-rejectors regarded the ungating policy as unfeasible. One planner warned, "Implementing this policy would necessitate forcible action from the government and thereby stir social discontent." Another planning scholar insisted, "Ungating is an unwanted intrusion of government interest into personal territories." A legal expert also expressed scepticism, "Removing walls means to open the protection of private property rights to dispute." Forced ungating, they predicted, would spark chaos across China, destabilize the society, and threaten state legitimacy. "Social stability and the CCP's legitimacy are of paramount importance to officials at all levels," one planner stated. Another concurred,

"Officials would avoid the escalation of social conflicts at all cost to protect the CCP's image." One official stressed, "Homeowners in contemporary GCs include China's most educated, capable citizens who form its middle classes." "They have gained an emerging civic capacity to influence benefit distribution," a legal expert added. One prestigious scholar argued: "The ungating policy brought an implicit tension between civil society and government to the forefront." The civic power of homeowners was echoed by a planner: "Homeowners are the most skilful workers who comprise a significant part of a city's human capital. Local governments need to rely on the goodwill of these middle-class citizens since they comprise the talent that drives a city's economic and social development." Another added, "The government may fear that forced ungating could cause middle classes to unite and revolt against it at a massive scale." One developer-employed planner expressed similar reasoning: "Even if the central government called for ungating, the mass of homeowners would insist on their prerogative to maintain gating and, hence, that local governments would have to step back their policy reinforcement in order to sustain growth and prevent conflict escalation." "Local governments would not dare to touch the walls and would have to covertly give up on implementation," one developer speculated. Believers in civic capacity claimed that middle-class homeowners had, in effect, become the ruling classes, wielding an emerging civic power to intervene in contemporary rule-setting and ultimately defy the policy.

A subset of interviewees believed that civic resistance could emerge to counter top-down decisions and illustrated their belief through anecdotes about previous resistance to demolishing walls *within* GCs.[14] These intra-project walls divided a GC into separate areas for market housing and public

[14] Some cities mandated that developers dedicate a portion of their developments to public housing. Public housing residents paid significantly less for community management. Therefore, developers acted on their own discretion and extra-legally built physical barriers, typically intra-project walls.

housing. Although public housing (typically lower-income) residents shared the legal title to collective properties in the GC, they were segregated into underserved areas.[15] The intra-project walls obstructed circulation and community management, causing public housing residents tremendous inconvenience in accessing communal facilities. This led to occasional intra-development conflicts. In Beijing, some public housing residents campaigned against the substandard quality of design, construction, equipment, and service on their side of the intra-project walls and filed a series of formal complaints to Beijing's Municipal Commission. The government feared being portrayed as a supporter of class-based discrimination and issued a statement condemning building intra-project walls as an illegitimate, unethical practice. News items condemning these practices surged.[16] In 2015, Beijing officially banned spatial and managerial separation between market housing and public housing in new GCs.[17] Developers were forbidden to bid for new projects if they failed to demolish existing intra-project walls. Under political and media pressure, several developers took action in Beijing. However, as soon as bulldozers entered the GCs, market housing owners launched protests to demonstrate the solidarity of their opposition. They gathered in front of Beijing's municipal government, pledging "their lives" to "protect the walls." They also collectively sent petitions to municipal officials. The protests happened just as Beijing was preparing for the upcoming Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party. Given

[15] Market housing areas featured high-quality landscapes and facilities, whereas public housing areas typically lacked amenities and maintenance.

[16] These news articles mainly reported disputes in Beijing and Shenzhen (e.g., Cao, 2017; Chen, 2015; Mao, 2018; Szhouse, 2017; Tejiafang Beijing, 2018).

[17] The ban was promulgated by Beijing's Municipal Commission of Housing and Rural and Urban Construction through a *Notice on Strengthening the Maintenance and Management of Public Housing Projects*.

that timing, Beijing's municipal government worried that protests might escalate so they halted ongoing demolition. As a compromise, developers parked the bulldozers next to the walls yet covertly planned on taking no action. They waited until the contention died down and the government's decision was overturned. Beijing officials then asked developers to withdraw bulldozers and put up notices to halt demolition. The disputes over intra-project walls have been largely dismissed, with few walls actually demolished. One policy-rejectors argued: "Failing to remove the illegal intra-project walls proves that similar incidents of civic resistance will make the ungating policy unimplementable."

In sum, policy-rejectors highlighted tradition and crime prevention to extol the emergence of contemporary gating while invoking residents' psychology and market rationale for defying the ungating policy. With broadening disparities in income, education and social status in China, objections to ungating largely involved dialogue about comfort, privacy, status, ownership, territoriality, and rights. Although policy-rejectors stressed citizens' "quality of life" as the ultimate purpose for maintaining gating, their rationale against ungating was less about safety and more about disparities in housing value, service cost, the distribution of responsibility and benefit, but perhaps most importantly, and troublingly, about the strong perceptions of social difference perceived by China's middle class from the nation's poorer residents, whether public housing residents or rural migrants. These social differences were deeply held by the more powerful class, and ungating was seen as threatening the social concord that stemmed, for better or worse, from the literal segregation of the middle class in GCs. As one planner stated, "Urban living is generally safe today, but ungating would sow discord across China."

4.3 Defenders of the Ungating Policy

Some planners and scholars sympathized with the shifting political attitude toward GCs. These policy-sympathizers speculate that the reasons for introducing the new policy are threefold—to ease

traffic congestion, to allow for equitable access to resources, and to enable a more lively public realm. Some deplored the disagreeable public environments outside GCs and blamed private developments for imposing tremendous socioeconomic cost upon the larger society.

The consensus was that the ungating policy targeted the mitigation of traffic problems caused by gating. Developers insisted that the prevalence of GCs was "an inevitable outcome" of the public-private divide in infrastructure investment. One highlighted, "Local governments prefer to lease large parcels of land for private development in order to reduce municipal financial burden and, hence, governments only invest in portions of infrastructure that are public." One scholar suggested, "This practice incentivized the creation of privatized superblocks and a spatial division between public and private responsibilities." One designer noted, "Developers' masterplans always seek to maximize profit and thus would not allocate developable area to public infrastructure unless required." Another suggested, "Some developers even 'rigged the system' during construction by closing off public roads to exclusively serve their customers," adding: "Local authorities sometimes turned a blind eye to rent-seeking or illegal developer practices." One official suggested, "High-level governmental think tanks have recognized the problems of land-financed urban growth, and particularly that the inefficient usage of roads in enclosed superblocks have burdened public infrastructure and worsened traffic congestion." "Transportation is fundamental to spatial and economic efficiency, and GCs jeopardize such efficiency," one planner stressed. Other planners and scholars concurred that the proliferation of enclosed superblocks disrupted traffic flow, impeded efficient land use, created tremendous difficulty for infrastructure planning, and prevented equitable welfare distribution. By contrast, gate-defenders insisted that traffic problems should be attributed to "the large scale of enclosure" rather than the measure of gating itself. One scholar asked with scepticism: "Is it really gating itself obstructing traffic or the *scale* of gating?" Another

insisted, “Residential communities should not be opened to ease public traffic, and enclosure is necessary to protect residents from fast traffic and outside pollution.”

Urbanists criticized the prevalence of GCs for reinforcing inequitable resource distribution, suggesting that the ungating policy sought to address the “disharmony” caused by private developments. One planner complained, “Enclosing superblocks has created a dark, dull, and desolate atmosphere surrounding GCs.” Another added, “Fortified, monofunctional superblocks lack small retail, induce prolonged trips for daily needs, and inconvenience residents.” One designer explained developers’ reasoning behind walling off a development, stating “although some cities promoted ground-level retail surrounding GCs, developers considered such developments to be cost-inefficient and sought to negotiate the requirements by reducing retail spaces or changing retail types.”[18] Another added, “To developers, the most profitable approach to real estate development is to confine outdoor activities to GCs while concentrating commercial activities in large-scale malls.” Planners criticized such approaches, as one argued: “Walling off developments overlooks the creation of urban streets and public spaces and popularizes exclusionary amenities among middle classes.”

While gating-promoters insisted that “people with different lifestyles rarely interact with each other in everyday activities” or that “they do not even need to encounter each other,”

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[18] Developers suggested that ground-level retail could not be as profitable as residential sales, especially with the impact from e-commerce and malls. The price of housing in an open area with ground-level retail was roughly two-thirds that of housing in GCs. Housing typically took up 80% of the architectural area of the development. To developers, having ground-level retail meant sacrificing profits from 80% of their estates. Even when ground-level retail generated a good profit, profits from 20% of the estate did not compensate for the compromised revenue stream from the remaining 80%.

policy-sympathizers argued that gating had induced societal fragmentation which could hamper socioeconomic progress. A progressive-minded planner and scholar cautioned, "China today features a fragmented society where various social groups acted on their own behalf."[19] Another argued: "China's *laissez-faire* capitalist production of housing has led to inefficient allocation of goods and services and to a net loss of social welfare." Echoing these concerns, a scholar warned, "Gating-induced spatial segregation and concomitant societal fragmentation impairs the sustainability of economic growth and hinders progressive social reproduction." Some planners emphasized that the antagonism against GCs had been announced simultaneously with the promotion of "small blocks and dense street networks" (*xiaojiequ, miluwang*). One argued: "Taken at face value, these recommendations aim to improve block-scale traffic circulation and create walkable neighbourhoods; however, an implicit and fundamental purpose underpinning the policy shift is to disintegrate the self-interested *mini-societies* in GCs and to foster social cohesion through spatial restructuring." Other scholars believed that the ungating policy signalled China's resolve "to increase state intervention in housing production," "to promote fairness in wealth redistribution," and "to redress the current imbalance among state, market, and society."

4.4 Barriers to Change

Although policy-sympathizers acknowledged the progressiveness of the central government's ungating policy, they, like most interviewees, anticipated tremendous obstacles to implementing the controversial policy. Developers expected ungating to cause fluctuations in housing prices, which could greatly affect wealth distribution. One explained, "Since housing prices have been ever increasing in

[19] The original expression was captured by the Chinese idiom *geziweizheng*.

China, many households regard housing purchases as a low-risk investment with high returns, and many invest the majority of their income in buying a home.” Others agreed that housing comprised a significant portion of Chinese urban populations’ assets today. Assuming that the preference for gating persisted, one developer-employed designer foresaw the likelihood of exacerbating the polarization of benefit distribution if ungating was forced without accompanying institutional and legal reforms. This speculation was illustrated with an example: “If existing GCs were gradually opened up, then the ones that could remain closed would increase in value since they would become more scarce as a desirable product on the housing market. In this way, GCs would ultimately serve chiefly the wealthiest homeowners.” A scholar warned, “It would be difficult to determine which GCs to open first so as to ensure fairness in the process.” Another argued that residents negatively affected by ungating would deserve compensation.

Many experts raised legal concerns, spotlighting the division of ownership and responsibility in open neighbourhoods as another practical challenge to ungating. One planner suggested: “Chinese people have been accustomed to using walls to define legal boundaries of properties and to protect their collective title to the neighbourhood.” “Ungating would turn private communities—currently managed by companies and funded by individuals— into the public realm, which would naturally serve a broader public and incur additional costs,” a developer warned. Another insisted, “The government should subsidize any additional costs.” However, monetary solution would be insufficient. A planner predicted that “without new policies or institutions to incentivize private contributions to newly created, ungated public realms, it is highly unlikely that residents would welcome free riders or that developers would wish to serve non-customers.” One scholar cautioned: “Using walls to concretize the separation of the public and the private has effectively, although rigidly, ensured social contract. Removing walls not only

would reduce homeowners' control, threaten their rights, and incur additional responsibilities, but would also destabilize the division of responsibilities between the government, companies, and individuals." "The reliance on walls to define legal responsibilities and ensure homeowners' rights indicates the limitations of the current legal system and housing management regime," a legal expert remarked, adding that "this reveals the necessity of legal reform that would enable ungating, protect residents' collective title, regulate public usage of collective properties, and/or transfer collective properties to the hands of the public." Another echoed, "Ungating requires a series of forceful, systemic legal and institutional reforms, which would fundamentally alter the state-individual relationship and affect a majority of Chinese citizens." "But even if China launches reforms," they continued, "whose benefits should the laws protect when the interests of the public, the private, and individuals are in conflict? This is a highly complicated, unsolvable question. China's legal order is unprepared for it."

Acknowledging practical and legal barriers to ungating, policy-sympathizers foresaw destabilizing changes to the economy, individuals, the society, and the government, should policy implementation come to pass. For instance, developers expected to drastically adjust housing sales, design, and management in order to retain profit. Officials were afraid that forced ungating could foment unrest. Residents feared that simply removing walls would only allow intrusion into private properties, without improving traffic. Many anticipated harm following policy implementation before ungating could solve any problems. A planner argued, "Ungating is insufficient to transform the inward-looking lifestyles ingrained in Chinese culture." Another expressed doubts, asking: "Is enclosure really the problem?" Also questioning the effects of ungating, a developer insisted that "a *laissez-faire*, capitalist housing system would always favour the ruling classes and lead to uneven distribution of resources and benefits," whether development was gated or ungated. Even socially-minded informants argued that ungating

would not instantly engender stronger efforts to safeguard property rights, democratize public services, and foster social cohesion. Nevertheless, they saw hope in legal reform, institutional transformation, and innovative public-private partnerships in welfare provision. Taken together, policy-sympathizers attributed the failure of policy implement to a combination of practical barriers to ungating and public disbelief in its effectiveness.

5. Discussion: Reflecting on Resistance to Ungating

5.1 Cognitive Dissonance Undergirding "Gated Mindsets" in China

Informants raised cultural, political, economic, psychological, technical, legal, and institutional causes for resisting the ungating policy. In so doing, many evinced strongly mixed feelings and—rather than falling neatly into two camps of respondents--offered rationale that both supported and resisted the proposed policy shift. Their reasoning for resistance, in other words, indicates cognitive dissonance[20] regarding policy direction, personal experiences, and societal norms. We highlight this dissonance in seven aspects, each framed as a question.

First, *Is there really a cultural continuity?* While many interviewees highlighted how tradition had shaped the Chinese people's propensity for gated living, their explanations for the necessity of contemporary gating were not about tradition *per se* but more about personal preferences, such as safety, privacy, comfort, rights, and economic efficiency. None of the tradition-lovers emphasized the fact

[20] In social psychology, cognitive dissonance refers to a mental state of having conflicting thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours, especially as relating to behavioural decisions and attitude change. This produces a feeling of mental discomfort leading to an alteration in one of the attitudes, beliefs or behaviours to reduce the discomfort and restore balance. Cognitive dissonance can cause increased resistance to stopping the previously conditioned behaviours (Festinger, 1962).

that contemporary GCs are spatially, economically, socially, and organizationally different from gated spaces in China's earlier history. Most interviewees highlighted the need for exclusion in contemporary GCs, but few considered it a new phenomenon--although exclusion was far from being the predominant purpose of pre-reform (i.e. pre-1980s) gating.

Second, *Are there spatial and temporal mismatches between interviewees' stated impressions of Chinese urbanism and their own lived reality*? When speaking about their living experiences, most interviewees acknowledged the progress of China's urbanization. They described the transformation from a perceived disordered, crime-ridden environment to a safe, agreeable one. Yet they still associated negative impressions with the city outside the walls, while attributing positive impressions to enclosure. Furthermore, although most interviewees considered contemporary cities to be generally "very safe," they deployed descriptors of Chinese cities during a past time, the early reform era, to justify the need for continued gating. In this way, they have attributed today's safety and stability in Chinese cities to the prevalence of GCs.

Third, *Is residents' resistance due to personal defence or desire for amenities?* While most policy-rejectors stressed potential threats to their basic needs such as safety and privacy as reasons to defy ungating, they also downplayed their desire for benefit and privilege when finding favour with GCs. Developers consistently identified "an exclusive territory" with "an enjoyable environment" as the most important feature that their customers desired. The desire for exclusive rights and privilege was also evident in residents' reluctance to mingle with outsiders and in their fear of the redistribution of wealth, benefit, and resources caused by ungating. Homeowners regarded ungating as a disempowering act that could threaten, or even dismantle, their accumulated wealth and socioeconomic advantages. Compared to this threat to status, the threat to security seemed minor by comparison.

Fourth, *Where are the boundaries between individual rights and government responsibilities?* The market-provision of GCs has demarcated residential neighbourhoods as territories under collective investment and private management. With the state's withdrawal from housing production and governance, accompanied by skyrocketing housing prices, individuals feel that they have made huge sacrifices via housing expenses. This has left homeowners the impression that GCs are their own properties, where they have earned their rights, and where governments fulfil minimal liabilities. While residents do not perceive the government as the main entity that protects, invests in, and provides for them in private communities, they also resist contributing to the territories that lie beyond their costly properties. Walls have become the boundaries between individuals' and governments' rights and responsibilities. Until China creates alternative mechanisms to the physical demarcation of such boundaries, most residents will continue to insist on gating.

Fifth, *Is spatial segregation and concomitant societal fragmentation a failure of markets or of governments?* Policy-sympathizers highlighted a key concern of China's public sector today: the prevalence of GCs has caused spatial segregation overlaid with societal fragmentation. Although inequity has been considered a market failure in Western capitalist societies, it has been co-produced by the state and the market in China. The local state's entrepreneurialism and the growth of a market economy have jointly promoted capitalist production of the city. This state-market coalition has been spatially rationalized by walling off public and private territories separately. Yet China's government has now realized broader socioeconomic costs of spatial segregation and intended to improve the design and governance of the public realm, starting with transportation systems. This inevitably triggered debates about whose fault it was and whose responsibility it should be to change: while the public sector blamed private production and governance for incurring social problems, developers accused the government of

prolonged retreat from public accountability. Such debates unveil a shift from aligned government-corporate interests in capitalist growth to their divergence. Nevertheless, China currently lacks socio-political infrastructure and instruments to engender systemic change.

Sixth, *Who counts as part of the "collective"?* Interviewees presented contradictory normative goals for different conceptions. Most mentioned "quality of life" as the normative goal of housing development. However, the meaning of this notion hinges on the conception of the collective. While policy-supporters regarded infrastructural efficiency, social cohesion, and lively public life in the broader city as important indicators of a "good" quality of life, most policy-rejectors focused on the collective *within* GCs and therefore prioritized communal advantages. While the former understanding of "quality" concerns broader public interest and reflects democratic values, the latter indicates club rationale confined to GCs—what we call "gated mindsets"—and subscribes to market rules. It is worth reiterating that even public-minded informants lived in GCs themselves. Therefore, despite their sympathy for the government's ungating attempt, they also adopted "gated mindsets" when considering their own properties. "Gated mindsets" promote an individualistic desire to secure and increase the value of collective goods, neglecting broader societal problems and disregarding the linkage between communal and societal wellbeing. In turn, such "gated" values, attitudes, and beliefs have normalized self-interested rationale and endorsed market failures while justifying homeowners' prerogative to reinforce their socioeconomic privilege through exclusion.

Last but not least, *What is the central government's chief political goal?* The government proclaimed self-conflicting political goals that were confusing to local officials, practitioners, and general citizens. Gating has always been a measure to promote social control in China (Huang, 2006). Chinese cities' residential landscapes increasingly manifest class-based disparities and social stratification. The

corresponding social and spatial hierarchies undergird contemporary political control and ensure social stability. Yet the ungating policy posited a major upending of such conventions, allegedly to promote traffic control and parking management. Interviewees perceived "spatial mobility"—a goal of the ungating policy—as a threat to "social stability"—the CCP's perennial priority. Given such self-conflicting political agendas, the ungating policy was doomed to failure.

All the above-mentioned aspects of cognitive dissonance reflect moral struggles that Chinese citizens experience today. Caught up in oscillating ambivalence, professionals, who are also city residents, reacted with deep pessimism about the ungating policy's direct impact in practice. They internalized threats to individuals' needs and rights, while the anticipated practical barriers further legitimize the predominant "gated mindsets" in contemporary China.

Ultimately, the resistance against the ungating policy is about more than just a pragmatic concern for better city-making and city design. The covert, collective resistance to ungating signals deeper power struggles in today's China. The country's pre-reform collectivism has been eroded by capitalist, consumerist, and individualist mindsets, which prioritize individual values and facilitate the formation of a spatially fragmented and socio-politically stratified society. One scholar remarked, "Chinese people are never public-minded; the state *is* the public." Indeed, the Chinese state has centralized power for centuries, and has always claimed to represent all its citizens. Before China's economic liberalization, urban dwellers were mostly matched with a spatially demarcated "urban commons" (Harvey, 2012; Ostrom, 1990) to which they belonged and where they were often spatially confined. This was especially true in socialist China, when *danwei* compounds, the sole functioning urban commons of the time, were shared by employees of the same *danwei* and their families. Back then, state "domination" (Foucault, 1997) characterized the institutional setup and shaped physical

structure of urban areas. In contemporary China, homeowners now regard GCs as their “commons”, but “the collective” only includes those who share property title and are co-located within the GC. Homeowners’ shared interest in the gated territory and their commonalities in purchasing power and socioeconomic status have formed a common sense of identity while securing their sense of ownership. Therefore, contemporary GCs are an embodiment of market-enabled choices, and of a temporary escape from state domination. Under *laissez-faire* mechanisms, homeowners voluntarily self-segregate into enclosed enclaves, establishing class-based hierarchies in a society characterized by exclusive private spaces in a manner little different in kind than the sociospatial order organized by American suburban municipalities. Unsurprisingly, everyday social control, including community policing, has also become a privatized service. As a result, GCs are territories with separated, and sometimes conflicting, interests between privatized collectives and the public; the latter has become a synonym of the state. Gatedness concretizes the renegotiated power relations between Chinese citizens and a state shaped by neoliberal political economy. To homeowners, the requested opening up of GCs implied that the government would begin to force private provision of public goods for the wider society, by allowing free riders to partake of residents’ hard-earned, and costly, collective gated goods; therefore, ungating suggests, and could enable, state domination over citizens’ private territories. For homeowners who form China’s middle classes and who have rising but still heavily constrained civic power, to resist ungating is to resist state domination. Nevertheless, homeowners’ shared sentiments for resisting ungating indicate the potential to form civic resistance at a collective level, which the Chinese state would avoid at all cost. Combined, homeowers’ covert, unanimous resistance to state domination and the state’s avoidance of insurgent civic resistance ultimately prevented the implementation of the ungating policy.

The prevalence of GCs in contemporary China demonstrates the cultural and socio-political ramifications of China's decades-long state withdrawal from housing production and the concomitant spread of *laissez-faire* market logic at the local level. This suggests that, without reforming the *laissez-faire* housing production regime, the prevalence of GCs in China will continue dividing society into segregated enclaves, while perpetuating citizen' mindsets that favour exclusion, differentiation, and starker hierarchies in the interest of class self-preservation.

Notwithstanding resistance, the ungating proclamation should not be considered a meaningless act. It marks China's first attempt from the top to officially problematize GCs. Policy-sympathizers' opinions indicate a growing awareness of GCs' broader social, economic, and environmental costs, representing a healthy scepticism toward China's prevalent development model. However, the effectiveness of using gating for social control is difficult to overturn, especially during exceptional times. In 2020, in response to COVID-19 outbreaks, the Chinese government implemented draconian—and arguably successful—lockdowns largely by sealing off all residential communities, most of which were GCs. Fearing viral spread, residential committees, property management companies, and local governments all supported tightening access restrictions in many GCs. The success of strict GC-based lockdown has renewed society's enthusiasm for gating and may well reinforce the legitimacy of exclusion in the near future (Z. Wang, 2020).

5.2 The Segregationist Effect of Club Approaches in Neoliberal Regimes

Contemporary GCs proliferated in China once the government responded to pressure to rapidly provide massive housing and public services at minimal public cost. To meet that purpose, club approaches have been effective and enabling. While it is cost-effective for the public sector, these also capture the benefits of investment for club members who have contributed. However, China's current

dilemma exemplifies how private provision of housing and services through club approaches can create new power relations by shifting public burden of infrastructure and welfare financing to particular groups of users. Although market provision of public goods can be more efficient and more democratic than government provision, club approaches to housing production can encourage territorial privatization, fragment benefit distribution, and justify uneven quality of public services (Warner, 2011). While GCs internalize benefits to community members, they shed externalities onto broader public systems and undermine support for equity and redistribution at the broader city level, imposing challenges on city governance. The prevalence of GCs, or club goods more generally, institutionalizes practices and mindsets that encourage class-based segregation. History has proven that segregation can jeopardize government's long-term capacity to coordinate across disparate communities with different needs and interests and worsen inequalities. Nightingale (2012, p. 7) argues that "segregation has always involved some form of institutionally organized human intentionality, just as those institutions have always depended on more broadly held beliefs, ideas, and customs to sustain their power." Therefore, long-term social harmony requires broader strategies to foster equity and integration across privatized territories and classes. The solutions require not only practical innovation in the institutions of financing, design, and governance but also ideological transformations in individuals.

5.3 Struggles of Power, Ethics, and Fairness in Private Provision of Public Goods

The resistance to ungating in China suggests that long-term impacts of private provision of public goods on social changes, cultural values, and power relations should be front and centre in debates about neoliberal regimes. China's attempt to end GCs signal a widespread cognitive dissonance in individuals regarding attitudes to society, property, and state. This dissonance in turn reflects how a once-entrenched collectivist culture has gradually been appropriated and replaced by gated mindsets

that imagine how to construe the “good life” during an “economising urbanization” (Wu, 2005). Similar effects of private production and governance of GCs on legitimizing pro-enclosure mindsets and practices can be found across the globe. For example, a survey of planning students and practitioners in South Africa on their views regarding GCs also discovered a prevalence of cognitive dissonance, highlighting contradictions between planners’ personal desires for greater security and their professional beliefs in greater integration (Landman, 2012). As crime remains a serious challenge in South Africa, planners face conflicting rationales when dealing with neighbourhood enclosure requests. Their approval of enclosure are compounded by political pressure, community members’ emotional upheaval, and insufficient legislation (Makhale & Landman, 2018). In Malaysia, where the state has actively supported the securitization of residential enclaves through gating, governments, corporations, and citizen groups have fused neoliberal market principles with ethnic politics and cultural predilections to facilitate their collaborations in (re)producing GCs (Tedong et al., 2015). In Canada, despite planners’ preferences for open, connected, diverse, and affordable public realms, local decision-makers feel compelled to approve gated projects in order to encourage private investment in public infrastructure and satisfy affluent consumers’ preferences for homogeneity and exclusivity (Grant, 2005). These practical dilemmas and ethical struggles that governments, practitioners, and citizens face in the production and governance of GCs showcase locally entrenched rationale underlying a globally common resistance to more open, inclusive, and integrated development in cities produced and governed under neoliberal regimes. Enclosure has become a way to avoid class conflict and ensure social stability. Resistance to openness and inclusion, arising from changing power relations, can become systemic and institutional, perpetuating public-private co-production of enclosure while normalizing a culture of differentiation and exclusion from both supply and demand sides of public goods.

6. Conclusion: Rethinking Gated Communities

Gated spaces have existed in Chinese cities since ancient times, but the function of gating has shifted with China's socioeconomic and political transformations. Contemporary GCs have proliferated as "consumer clubs" as the state has retreated from public goods provision (Wu, 2005). Enclosure today is regarded as an effective measure to exclude free riders according to market rules in the name of fairness. China's *laissez-faire* housing production regime creates favourable contexts for the spread of GCs, forming class-based residential segregation. GCs as club goods provide and enhance locational, economic, social, environmental, and psychological advantages for homeowners. Therefore, the proliferation of GCs reinforces power imbalances in society and institutionalizes exclusionary practices. China's housing market has adopted a "voluntary segregation" model (Nightingale, 2012, p. 9) facilitated by, and reinforcing, gated mindsets. The latter has become entrenched in contemporary China, resulting from the penetration of market logic into the psyche of individual citizens (Saich, 2008). Enclosure has become a means to not only demarcate market responsibilities but secure homeowners' privilege and civic power, while walls and gates have become residential class lines, concretizing public-private divides and state-citizen tensions. China's contemporary residential landscape has become a patchwork of numerous enclosed, self-interested, self-perpetuating, and self-reinforcing enclaves.

The ungating policy, largely ineffective, sounds a timely warning about government concern for, and bourgeois citizen need for, entrenched socio-political stratification in China today. The widespread, almost unanimous, resistance against ungating reflects today's culture of differentiation and hierarchization in China. The antagonisms expressed toward the ungating policy reveals future government challenges in mediating state-society, interclass and intraclass relationships—in large part due to resistance from a growing middle classes whose welfare largely hinges on marketized housing.

Their resistance reveals how a *laissez-faire* capitalist housing system can become its own reinforcement, homogenizing culture and value, creating then strengthening and hardening social classification, all while widening the divide between individuals and the state and between the public and the private. The social divisions manifested so strongly in the United States during the difficult summer of 2020 are a similar reflection of the damaging, yet seemingly immutable, segregation and stratification created by laissez-faire housing regimes.

Around the world, the mass production of housing and communities is simultaneously an outcome driven *by* social norms and values—especially market ideologies and middle-class mentalities—and a force that *shapes* these social interactions, norms, and values. As Moore (2001, p. 307) suggests, the market has gradually become "not only a way of organizing the economy of a society but also a way for society's members to think about what they should value as individuals, how they might combine together to produce valuable social results, and how lines ought to be drawn in society between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, and the voluntary and the obligatory."

The failed policy attack on gating reflects that guiding urban (re)development through physical planning intervention continues to be a strategy, albeit extremely challenging, for China's authoritarian regime to redistribute socioeconomic benefits and shape socio-cultural norms. Ungating, if achieved, was perceived to trigger the redistribution of wealth, welfare, and power, oblige a private contribution to public goods, and to allow state domination over citizens' private territories. All of these changes, if achieved, would threaten social stability and state legitimacy. The dissonance of rationales for resisting ungating—with their cultural, political, economic, psychological, technical, and institutional dimensions—reveals that even China's top-down planning it ultimately governed by the preferences and

needs of the powerful members of society. However, it is possible that long-term impacts of private production and governance of housing on values, institutions, and ideologies will complicate China's progress, currently halting, toward a more inclusive society. The practical dilemmas and ethical struggles faced by governments, practitioners, and residents in China's ungating policy effort unveil structural elements of China's neoliberal political economy that perpetuate class differences, spatial inequalities and that undergird, yet siumtaneously threaten, urban governance.

Beyond the debates about GCs as excludable club goods, alternative, public-oriented conceptions of GCs could shed light on paths toward improvement. One view regards GCs as spaces where public goods and private governance co-exist and co-evolve, which suggests that the provision of public goods and services requires more nuanced characterization than a simply binary distinction between government- and market-provision (Woo & Webster, 2013). In this regard, it seems worth noting that the ungating policy briefly mentions a desire to "encourage civic participation." Indeed, it is important for any means of providing collective goods and community governance to be voluntary, as opposed to imposed (Foldvary, 1994, p. 111). Therefore, one might reconceive of GCs as an urban commons that is "owned" by both community members and the larger society. Bruun (2015, p. 156) argues that this sort of approach "challenges liberal-economistic notions of property, because ownership of commons depends not on a single titleholder but on layers of social relations and mutual obligations" that co-exist at "varying scales." This revised conception of GCs necessitates investigations into those power relations that maintain an urban commons and sanction moral obligations. It also foregrounds considerations of social justice, the common good, and the link between commons, the social order, and political economy in wider society.

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Table 1. Backgrounds of Informants

location	informants	age 25-35	age 35-45	age 45-55	male	female	current real estate company employee	former public institution employee	current public institution employee	architect	urban designer/ planner	scholar/ educator	living in a gated community	traveled abroad	lived outside China
Beijing	1														
Beijing	2														
Beijing	3														
Beijing	4														
Beijing	5														
Beijing	6														
Beijing	7														
Beijing	8														
Beijing	9														
Beijing	10														
Beijing	11														
Beijing	12														
Beijing	13														
Beijing	14														
Beijing	15														
Beijing/US	16														
Beijing	17														
Beijing	18														
Beijing	19														
Tangshan	20														
Tianjin	21														
Tianjin	22														
Tianjin	23														
Shijiazhuang	24														
Wuhan	25														
Shanghai	26														
Shanghai	27														
Shanghai	28														
Shanghai	29														
Shanghai	30														
Hangzhou	31														
Hangzhou	32														
Hangzhou	33														
Hangzhou	34														
Hangzhou	35														
Zhengzhou	36														
Zhengzhou	37														
Zhengzhou	38														
Chong Qing	39														
Chong Qing	40														
Guangzhou	41														
Guangzhou	42														
Xiamen	43														
Xiamen	44														
Shenzhen/US	45														
Shenzhen	46														
Shenzhen	47														
Shenzhen	48														
Shenzhen	49														
Shenzhen	50														
Shenzhen	51														
Shenzhen	52														
Hong Kong	53														
Hong Kong	54														
Hong Kong	55														
location	informants	age 25-35	age 35-45	age 45-55	male	female	current real estate company employee	former employee of a public institute	current employee of a public institute	architect	urban designer/ planner	scholar/ educator	living in a gated community	traveled abroad	lived outside China
total number		15	21	19	37	18	27	27	28	31	36	23	55	28	27
percentage		27.3%	38.2%	34.5%	67.3%	32.7%	49.1%	49.1%	50.9%	56.4%	65.5%	41.8%	100%	50.9%	49.1%

Table 2. Categories of the Discourse -- Key questions and Responses (with the numbers and percentages of interviewees who mentioned them)		
Question: What is your opinion on gated communities? Discourse component 1: the general acceptance of gating		
Gated communities are prevalent in China	55	100%
Gated communities are traditional, widely accepted, and normal	48	87.3%
Gated living has been common sense throughout China's history	36	65.5%
Gated communities in China are peculiar to Chinese conditions and incomparable to Western or foreign ones	29	52.7%
Gated communities emerged naturally in China's urban development	28	50.9%
Gated communities have positive impacts	16	29.1%
Gated communities have negative impacts	6	10.9%
Question: What is your opinion on gated communities? Discourse component 2: the rationales for the prevalence of gating		
Developing gated communities aligns with Chinese tradition; gating has historical roots and cultural continuity in China	54	98.2%
Gating allows for economic, efficient neighborhood management at a reasonable scale	52	94.5%
Gating enhances safety and fosters a sense of security	52	94.5%
Gating is necessary to exclude freeriders and protect residents' ownership, proprietary rights, and benefit	50	90.9%
Walls and gates mediate relationships and reconcile social disparities among stratified classes	46	83.6%
Residents want gates and walls due to their fear of outsiders and migrants	44	80.0%
Gating is preferred by residents and aligns with market or economic rationales	41	74.5%
Gating is necessary to protect the privacy of residents' life	30	54.5%
Walls are necessary for the division of public and private territories and different land uses	28	50.9%
Gating empowers residents to have control over their neighborhood	26	47.2%
Gating is necessary for political control and urban governance	24	43.6%
Gated communities are the inevitable outcome of neoliberal economies and housing privatization	24	43.6%
Gating demarcates the scope of responsibility and ensures the quality of properties and their management	22	40.0%
Building codes require gating	22	40.0%
Gating ensures housing value	20	36.4%
Developing gated communities is a successful business strategy that works well in practice	19	34.5%
Gated communities are symbols of socioeconomic status	16	29.1%
Chinese people lack public mindsets and are individualistic	13	23.6%
Themed communal spaces and private gardens must be exclusive to certain users	12	21.8%
Gating helps to maintain social stability	12	21.8%
The commercialization of neighborhood management has been a successful business model	10	18.2%

Gating fosters a sense of belonging	8	14.5%
Gated communities are generated due to land-based financing	8	14.5%
Chines people love gates, courtyards, private gardens, and introverted spaces	8	14.5%
Walls and gates demarcate the division between private and public territories, responsibilities or powers	6	10.9%
The desire for gated communities is driven by consumerism	2	3.6%
Gating allows for traffic control in the community	2	3.6%
Question: What is the impact of the new policy against gated communities?		
The new policy is a failure and has no impact	55	100%
The new policy serves as an ideological push	2	3.6%
Question: Why was the new policy introduced?		
To address traffic problems	46	83.6%
To reduce supersized blocks and districts	14	25.5%
To learn from Western cities	10	18.2%
To prevent social conflicts caused by uneven resource distribution	6	10.9%
Question: Why did the new policy fail? (All interviewees argue that the new policy has failed.)		
Ungating lacks feasibility	42	76.4%
The general public cannot accept, and will resist, ungating	30	54.5%
Open communities are against Chinese tradition and too foreign to Chinese people	26	47.3%
Local governments' discretion power in policy design will prevent the implementation of central policy	20	36.4%
Ungating is against common sense; it is a strange idea	15	27.3%
Issues of property rights are unresolved	14	25.5%
Open communities are unfit for Chinese conditions and can cause problems for Chinese societies	12	21.8%
Chinese practitioners lack knowledge and experience to develop open neighborhoods	12	21.8%
Local implementation of policies usually lacks supervision which will compromise the policy’s effectiveness in reality	9	16.4%
Unclear responsibility of potential cost incurred by ungating	6	10.9%
Rigid and outdated planning regulations and building codes prevent ungating	6	10.9%
The new policy has not led to any mandatory change	2	3.6%
Question: Have there been, or can there be, changes that are aligned with the new policy's goals?		
Gating itself is not a problem; instead, other problems should be addressed (traffic, supersizing, public services, social cohesion)	18	32.7%
Planning regulation and zoning specification should promote smaller parcels and mixed land use	12	21.8%
Alternative spatial design can reduce gating or achieve ungating	14	25.5%
Policies of land leasing and the collaboration between the public and the private should be adjusted	8	14.5%

Housing developments increasingly incorporate commercialized public spaces, which promotes public life and reduces gating	4	7.2%
Public participation can foster new mindsets and promote the acceptance of ungating	2	3.6%