



# Stratified evolution of urban residential spatial structure in China through the transitional period: A case study of five categories of housings in Chengdu



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## ABSTRACT

Since the reform and opening up, urban spatial organization in China has changed from a planned economy mode to a market driven economy. From 1978 to 2016, the cities in mainland China have developed five types of housing systems: commercial housing, new Danwei housing, affordable housing, demolition resettlement housing, and self-built housing. The reform of the housing system that was started in the 1990s allowed and led to a rapid growth of the commercial housing market, which also resulted in an obvious suburbanization trend. At the same time, the housing reform policy led to the gradual process of marketing individual Danwei within compound housing systems. The state allowed these properties the right to conduct market transactions. However, some policies from the planned economy period remained in place. The Danweis were allowed to retain right of residence and the original management of the Danwei's courtyard but without any trading rights. Demolition resettlement housing and affordable housing are low cost houses built by the local government for the demolished group and the protected group, respectively. The latter can carry on the market transactions after satisfying certain conditions. Self-built housing mainly refers to the rural collective construction of farmers under the ownership of the housing group. Based on the result of the institutional design and benefit game, the land on which the buildings were to be built was part of the structure of the marketing process. Land acquisition negotiations that ranged from simple to complex and profits that ranged from low to high, showed whether lands were being utilized well or were under-developed. These lands are designated as public lands, farmland, industrial lands, Danwei industry courtyards, farmer's homesteads, and institutional lands and courtyards. This has led to a more stable, multivariate, mosaic mixed hybrid urban residential spatial structure in Chinese mainland cities based on the institutional perspective. At the same time, due to the disadvantaged position of the demolition population in the political and economic environment, the location of demolition resettlement housing and affordable housing are gradually being pushed to the suburbs. It is a distinctly different urban residential spatial structure from the cities in Western countries and countries in transition. This embodies the logic of power operation, capital circulation and accumulation and its dual roles. This structure also reflects the complex feature of cooperation and games between different levels of power and social stratum.

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## 1. Introduction

Lefebvre (1991) pointed out that space is a product of society.

The evolution of social production patterns is a history of space types. Since the Industrial Revolution, in industrial society or post-industrial/post-modern society, the real estate market in western developed countries belongs to the market-oriented mode of free trade with private property rights. Although Harvey (1973) and other representatives of the Neo - Marxist school think that the

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immense real estate in western cities has become an integral part of capital circulation and accumulation, it still does not affect the state of privatization and the nature of free trade. From 1978 to the present, under the premise of maintaining social stability, the Chinese government has promoted a rapid economic development through gradual institutional change, demonstrating the superiority of the market socialist system and promoting the process of national modernization. Since the reform and opening-up, the distribution of social rights in mainland China has been divided into two types: administrative decentralization and market mechanisms, via limited decentralization, gradual marketization, and gradual globalization (Wei, 2012; Yang, Zhang, Meng, & McCarn, 2015). Also in line with the neo-liberalism in effect since the 1970s, through the transformation from the gradual system transformation model to the Western political and economic system (Wu, 2002), market socialism has been constructed through the introduction of a market economy system so far (Nee, 1989) - a typical mixed system model (Yang, 2015). This mixed model of the dual political and economic systems and social structure (supervised and regulated by the central government but the responsibility of the local government) retained part of the system from the original planned economic system components, such as public ownership and its distribution plan for key resources of both resource and land, the state intervention capacity of market access, the state-owned enterprise system of key industries as finance and railways (Wu, Yu, & Fogel, 2012; Yang, 2013).

Based on the institutional perspective, this mixed system model gradually breaks down or disintegrates the urban Danwei society with its mosaic model (He & Wu, 2007; Tian, 2015). Danwei, called work units, is one of the principle territorial forms used to organize China's urban population; it is often characterized by its socio-economic-political characteristics and their spatial implications in the transformation of Chinese society (Bjorklund, 1986). China's urban spatial organization pattern also changed from a planned economy model to a market economy model with Chinese characteristics, creating urban spatial types and structural models which are different from the Western developed countries, the Soviet Union, and the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Wu, 2001; Gu & Shen, 2003; Gu, Chan, Liu, Kesteloot, 2006): first, the market mechanism indeed produces increasing commercial or market space, in turn promoting the urban space which is extensively transformed from the Danwei model, transforming rural land to market system land, and promoting the urban spatial reorganization (Yang et al., 2015). For example, if the rural land is converted to urban state-owned land, it needs to be first converted into urban construction land in accordance with state regulations through land acquisition (using economic compensation to obtain the transformation of the ownership nature) and then enters the market transaction process through public auction. Second, although the Danweisystem has been rapidly transformed but has not been done away with, it has formed a neo-Danwei arianism, resulting in a new Danwei space (Chai, Xiao, & Zhang, 2011; Xiao & Chai, 2014). Third, the rural system and its space has undergone partial transformation, that is, the management system of rural land in the urban administrative area has been basically retained, but the rural land has appeared to go in a market-oriented direction of non-agricultural use and land transfer (Ho, 2005; Xu, Tang, & Chan, 2011; Po, 2011). Fourth, affordable space is becoming available rapidly. In this way, it completely breaks down the Danwei urban spatial structure model of the hierarchical mosaic in the planned socialist period (Xiao & Chai, 2014), and constructs a mixed structural model of urban spatial organization with marketization space, and new Danwei and rural space (Yang, 2015). In this macro context, the real estate market and its spatial structure model are no exception in the Chinese

mainland cities.

Since 1978, the Chinese government's market-oriented reform has actually promoted the development and rapid expansion of the real estate market. However, China's real estate market is not intending to establish a system similar to the free market system of the Western developed countries, but has taken a progressive strategy to establish the target and the process; that is, it is a step-by-step, hierarchical way of paid land use through separating land ownership and its use rights, introducing the relevant factors and products to land capital market and real estate market with different trading rights and opening degree (He & Asami, 2014), and then gradually enhancing the marketization level. The mainland cities of China have formed a housing market model with Chinese characteristics. These were commercial housing, neo-Danwei housing (Chai, Chen, & Zhang, 2007), affordable housing, demolition resettlement housing, self-built housing (Liu, Yan, & Cao, 2010; Yang, 2013). The housing system reform initiated by the Chinese government since the 1990s, such as housing monetization, has allowed and promoted the growth of various housing markets (Bian, Logan, Lu, Pan, & Guan, 1996; Chen, 2009, 2010).

Commercial housing (especially commodity residence, as below) refers to the housing exploited by real estate development companies with the business qualifications after obtaining land use rights via transfer mode (use of life for 30 years/50 years/70 years) in the market economy conditions. In addition, the housing owns the normal market transactions, and its security, property, etc. that are also fully market-oriented (Wu, 1996). Scholars have analyzed the spatial distribution and evolution of commercial housing with special interest on the impact of housing price on the development of commercial housing (e.g., Wang, Fang, & Sheng, 2013). From the economic and social perspective, analysis was done on the power mechanism of the commercial housing's growth and its high price, and argued that the monopoly profit pursuit of growth alliance is the main reason.

Recently, with the increasing polarization of social income and the differentiation of the housing market, the Chinese government draws lessons from the experience of the western developed countries, and constantly improves the housing system of market socialism. As Cliff (2015) discussed the concept of neo-Danwei, adapting to the new economic conditions, the neo-Danwei housing indicates a resilience of traditional socialist forms of housing organization and its social structures. The neo-Danwei is not an official level of government, but it performs many governmental roles providing many types of services, including housing that will be explored in detail in section 2. For social stability and taking into account the contribution of workers to the country for many years, the state takes the way that the original Danwei used for housing at a very low "welfare" price that will be sold to the original tenants (low wages for many years restricted what residents were able to afford in the housing market), and, in principle, allows free market transactions (Wu, 2004), greatly promoting the development and expansion of the real estate market (Liu & Yan, 2015). The land property rights still belong to the state by law, thus continuing the original management model of Danwei yard and the owner actually has only partial ownership and use rights (Liu & Wu, 2006). Some residential courtyards in Danwei still retain the "Danwei nature", part of the neo-Danwei arianism (Chai et al., 2011). Whether by selling Danwei residential courtyard housing or by inheritance to children, this will inevitably lead to the gradual "confounding" of their occupants and the equilibrium state in the living subject will be broken, starting the socialization of the Danwei courtyard (Chai et al., 2011; Yang, 2011; Zhang & Chai, 2009).

From 2000, the government gradually increased the supply of affordable housing. Affordable housing is the low priced/leased commercial housing constructed for low-income groups (also

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