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Shi, T. [orcid.org/0009-0002-5991-7609](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5991-7609), Guo, F. [orcid.org/0000-0002-7688-7475](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7688-7475) and Zhang, Y. [orcid.org/0000-0002-7688-7475](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7688-7475) (2024) Transforming public spaces in post-socialist China's Danwei neighbourhoods: The third dormitory of the Party Committee of Shandong Province. *Urban Planning*, 9. 7632. ISSN 2183-7635

<https://doi.org/10.17645/up.7632>

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# Transforming Public Spaces in Post-Socialist China's Danwei Neighbourhoods: The Third Dormitory of the Party Committee of Shandong Province

Tao Shi <sup>1</sup> , Fangjie Guo <sup>2</sup> , and Yali Zhang <sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Shandong Jianzhu University, China

<sup>2</sup> School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, UK

**Correspondence:** Yali Zhang ([yzhang13@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:yzhang13@sheffield.ac.uk))

**Submitted:** 5 October 2023 **Accepted:** 19 February 2024 **Published:** 22 April 2024

**Issue:** This article is part of the issue “Post-Socialist Neoliberalism and the Production of Space” edited by Gabriel Schwake (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and Aleksandar Staničić (TU Delft), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i320>

## Abstract

The urban residential pattern in China experienced two significant transitions during the second half of the 20th century. The first happened in the 1960s, based on the Soviet model, when a large-scale community model was built led by government enterprises and institutions under a planned economy; the second was in 1998 when the real estate market-led socialised community model emerged after the reform of commercial housing. The former is characterised by the integration of supervisory units, service units, and property owners: Residents enjoy the right to use the residences and supporting services provided by their affiliated institutions, while for the latter case, supervisory units, service units, and property owners are separate. New conflicts have been found in Danwei neighbourhoods with the housing commercialisation reform. This research focuses on the Third Dormitory of the Party Committee of Shandong Province as a case study to analyse the transformation of public space in the Danwei neighbourhood during the post-socialist era. Through archival research, interviews, and observation, this research has found that two forces that celebrate marketisation by the new residents and resist marketisation by the original residents coexist in the Third Dormitory. Unregulated spatial practices have resulted from the incomplete control of the owners of public space by the provincial government office. This research offers an example of public space transformations in Danwei neighbourhoods, which have undergone incomplete marketisation. The reflections on the Third Dormitory provide references for future neighbourhood management and policy-making.

## Keywords

China; economic transition; neighbourhood public space; post-socialism; property marketisation; spatial transformation

## 1. Introduction

Residence patterns in China have undergone two phases of change during the second half of the 20th century. In the first phase, the large-scale construction of work units started in the 1960s, following the Soviet model. In the second phase, clusters of housing estates led by the real estate market emerged after the reform of commercial housing (Fei, 2012). A work unit (Danwei) is a type of social unit in China which refers to most enterprises, institutions, or government organs during the planned economy era (Lu, 2006). Work units also own, manage, and provide services for housing estates constructed by the work units. The residents have the right to live in the housing estates and use the services provided by work units, and the work units manage them due to their relations or their immediate families' ties to these work units. The spatial structures of the housing estates and resource allocation methods produced by the patterns of the first phase have encountered a series of challenges since the launch of housing commercialisation reform. On the premise of keeping the basic building layout unchanged, new needs and conflicts emerged because housing estate management gradually transformed into a market-oriented pattern.

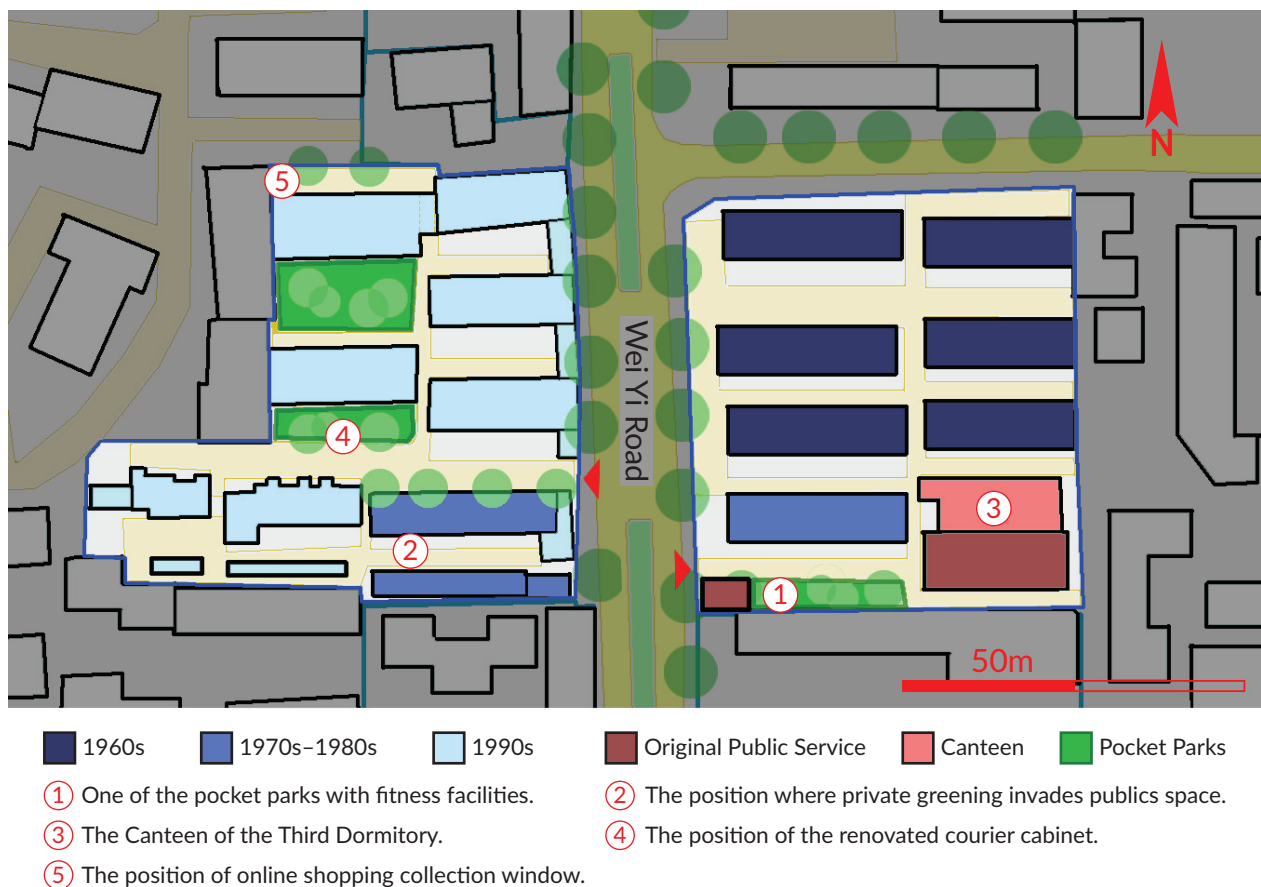
The market reform of the urban living environment in China has been uneven. Research on the changes in China's living environment before and after the reform has focused primarily on first tier and new first tier cities. These studies have often centred on compounds associated with production, research, and educational work units (M. Zhang et al., 2021). This research focuses on "micro districts," which refers to self-contained residential districts typically covering an area of 75–125 acres and accommodating a population ranging from 5,000 to 15,000 (Bater, 1980, as cited in Lu, 2006, p. 35; Sawers, 1978, as cited in Lu, 2006, p. 35). This study diverges from the typical focus by examining a residential district originally built during the planned economy period in the second tier.

In the selected area, the planned economy characteristics were retained; the marketisation of the living environment and the transition of the residential district from complete collective ownership to private ownership have not been completed. The research aims to gain insights into the impact of neoliberalism on China's real estate reform process. Specifically, it seeks to identify the principal challenges encountered during the reform of residential district development.

### 1.1. Research Context

This research is a case study of the Third Dormitory of the Party Committee of Shandong Province (TDPCSP). It is situated in the city of Jinan, a second tier city in China. As the capital city of Shandong Province, Jinan is the headquarters of the Shandong Provincial Government Offices. Since the 1950s, multiple public welfare housing communities have been built for provincial government offices. The property rights of the houses and supporting facilities belong to the work unit, and residents can select the houses and supporting facilities according to their positions in the work units. TDPCSP was first built in the 1960s, divided into two courtyards with Wei Yi Road as the boundary. By the 1990s, 15 residential buildings were built in different periods (Figure 1).

The research site occupies an area smaller than a typical neighbourhood. This smaller size results from the smaller workforce within party and government administrative bodies compared to typical enterprises and institutions. During the planned economy era, it was more convenient to establish residential communities



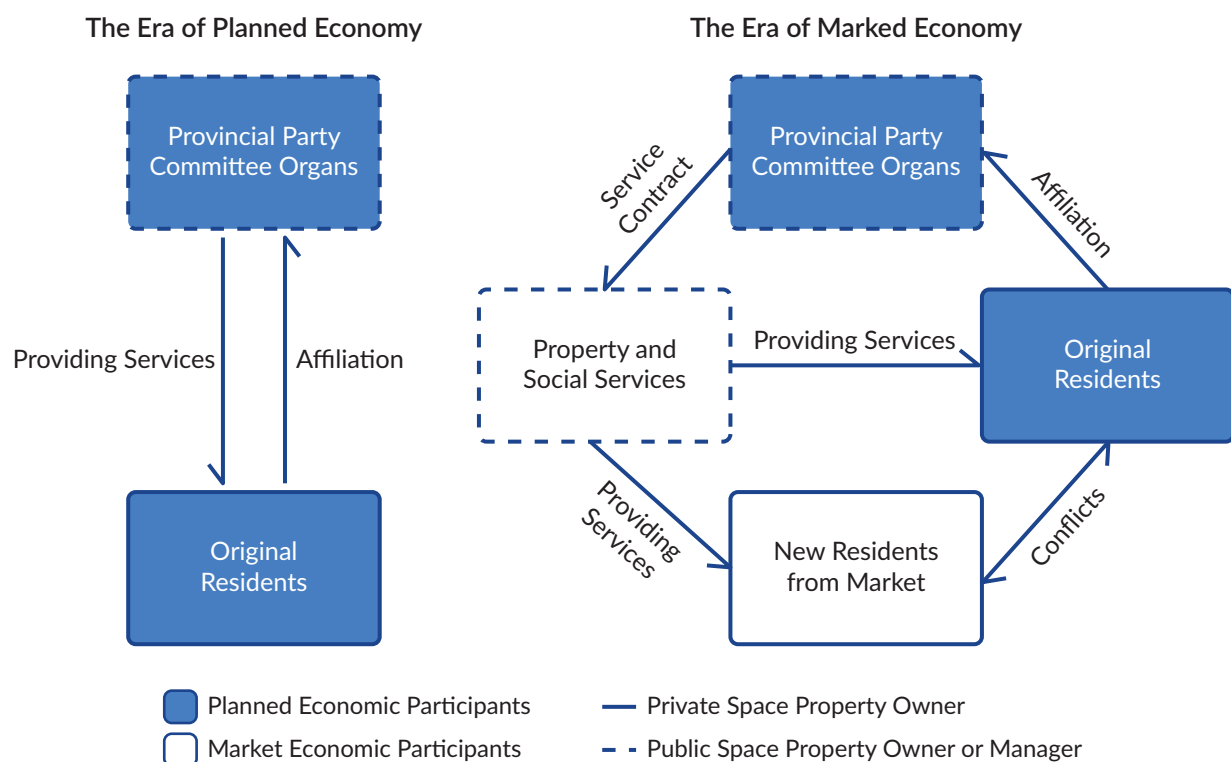
**Figure 1.** Residential area plan.

characterised by single property ownership and streamlined management. Consequently, the ownership structure of public spaces within this context was relatively less influenced by market dynamics at the policy level. Policy changes primarily focused on advancing housing property rights and property services reforms without introducing further policies aimed at market-oriented sales or leasing of spaces and land within the community. Furthermore, due to the community's smaller scale, residential buildings and public space planning were used efficiently from the outset. As a result, there was insufficient room for large-scale reconstruction, and only small-scale changes were made.

In 1997, Shandong Province launched a housing monetisation reform plan (Shandong Provincial People's Government, 1997). TDPCSP also completed housing monetisation and marketisation reforms in 2001 (Shandong Provincial Government Housing Committee, 2001). From 2001 to 2010, the original management and service subjects, the Party Committee and work unit, successively reduced and cancelled their service functions. In 2014, socialised property services were introduced, and from 2020, the renovation and updating of residential areas were fully integrated with the municipal management system of Jinan. Usually, in the planned economy era in residential areas of other units and provincial government agencies, residents are subordinate to their respective work units, and various public services are directly provided by their respective units. In the marketisation of community property rights and management systems, the reform of property rights of residential houses and public spaces in residential areas of general enterprises and public institutions is carried out simultaneously. The marketisation of property rights of public spaces in residential

areas accompanies housing privatisation (M. Zhang et al., 2021). However, the privatisation and market-oriented reform of residential property rights of TDPCSP did not drive the reform of public space property rights in residential areas. In the era of the market economy, provincial government agencies that should have withdrawn from community service functions did not give up public space property rights, including community roads and public facilities, and only trusted them to conduct service functions by signing agreements with third party service companies. Also, employees of the original provincial government agencies have transferred their private property rights through the market. As a result, multiple groups, including provincial government agencies, newly introduced municipal services and market-oriented property services, residents who were employees of the original provincial government agencies, and new residents entering the community through the market, all play important roles in the transformation of public space in the residential area (Figure 2). The incompleteness of this property rights reform is a common phenomenon in the residential areas of Shandong's provincial government offices; it has resulted in conflicts between the remaining characteristics of a planned economy and the residents' need for commercial services. These conflicts led to the transformation of public space.

To summarise, this research attempts to understand the transformation of public space within a residential area constructed during the planned economy era. It examines how these spaces evolved due to market economy reforms and shifts in housing property rights managed by multiple parties. Conflicts have emerged between the residents and management parties. By unveiling the transformation of public space in residential areas, this research attempts to answer the following research question: How did the negotiation of the multiple parts induce the transformation of the public space within the Chinese Danwei neighbourhood during the post-socialist period in North China? By answering this question, it is possible to



**Figure 2.** Relations between main participants before and after the marketisation of the residential area.

understand better the development of Chinese neighbourhoods, distinct from cases in Western and Central Eastern Europe.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Neoliberalism and Post-Socialism

According to Harvey (2007, p. 2), neoliberalism is “a theory of political, economic practices” related to private property rights and free markets. Anthropologists understand neoliberalism from two perspectives: “As a structural force that affects people’s life chances and as an ideology of governance that shapes subjectivities” (Ganti, 2014, p. 89). Similarly, Madra and Adaman (2014) think that depoliticisation through economisation is a common feature of various neoliberal approaches. Based on competition, neoliberalism tends to lead to socio-spatial polarisation and the involvement of global actors such as the World Bank (Larner, 2003). In terms of China, whether the Chinese political economy is neoliberal remains a common research question; the economy in China is considered a mixed economy with some attempts at neoliberal reforms rather than the complete application of neoliberalism (Weber, 2018).

In contrast, post-socialism is a form of society (Chelcea & Druță, 2016). Traditionally, post-socialism is a spatio-temporal concept: It refers to the transition in privatisation, marketisation, and democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989/1991 (Tuvikene, 2016). Capitalism and democracy are inevitable results of post-socialism (Pickles, 2010). One significant change in these post-socialist cities is that they returned to the capitalist system’s economic relations (Ferenčuhová & Gentile, 2017). The urban planning of post-socialist cities experienced the transition from state-led to market-led (Tuvikene, 2016). However, Tuvikene (2016) argues that the post-socialism concept should not be restricted by a specific period or region; rather, it should be regarded as a condition that has induced city changes. This is because both socialist and post-socialist cities might share some elements, so it is difficult to divide the socialist and post-socialist cities (Tuvikene, 2016). Discussions on cities’ transformation are opened and enlarged by regarding post-socialism as a condition. The term “post-socialism” itself means catching up with the Western world (Tuvikene, 2016). More specifically, studies on the post-socialist world tend to regard the Western world as dominant but underestimate the special histories and geographies of the post-socialist countries, treating them as states that need to catch up with the Western world. As a result, Western knowledge has received more attention in the field of knowledge production than the local knowledge garnered from post-socialist countries (Stenning & Hörschelmann, 2008; Timár, 2004).

On the one hand, regarding the special incomplete neoliberalism and its social effectivity in China, the research on TDPCSP offers a detailed example to investigate the spatial transformation under the social changes. On the other, the investigation on TDPCSP supplements our knowledge of the transforming public space of the Chinese Danwei neighbourhood in the post-socialist countries.

### 2.2. Transformation of the Chinese Danwei Neighbourhood

The transformation of Chinese residential communities in the post-socialist era has been a complex process, marked by significant changes in their spatial and social characteristics. The reform of housing property rights has played an important role in transforming residential communities. China’s urban housing system

has undergone significant reform from allocating housing to obtaining housing through the market; marketisation and commercialisation are the goals of the transition (Meng et al., 2004). Homeownership in China includes full, partial, and minor ownership with different security and liquidity (Cheng et al., 2016). TDPCSP is a typical community that has undergone housing reform but is different to communities where the whole area is commercialised, in which the public space of TDPCSP still belongs to the provincial government agencies.

M. Zhang et al. (2021) focus on property rights redistribution and disordered spatial use to show how the vaguely defined institutional and proprietary order can result in messy spatial outcomes. They suggest that a new contract should be considered to regulate the spatial use of residents and property management companies (M. Zhang et al., 2021). Although it is currently in the post-socialist era, as can be seen in the above cases, many changes are happening in the Danwei communities; Wang (2022) has found that the continuing presence of Danwei still plays an important role in community governance. Neighbourhoods and work units both provide an essential basis for social support and urban governance (Wang, 2022).

From a different perspective, C. Zhang and Chai (2014) present the spatial changes from gated to un-gated Danwei communities to demonstrate that the Chinese community's spatial transformation is unique and different from the spatial changes in Central and East European countries. Similarly, Wielander (2023) also focuses on the walls of Chinese Danwei, but her approach is to read the changes on the walls and understand the changes in Chinese society through these changes. It is inspiring that Wielander (2023) thinks the walls play a role in physical and social boundaries, as the walls differentiate people inside and outside the Danwei regarding welfare and citizenship rights.

Overall, the Danwei neighbourhoods play an important part in Chinese cities regarding their social influence because of the different social welfare and rights of people inside and outside the Danwei. The Danwei neighbourhoods are also important because they still occupy a large area of the Chinese urban space (Wang, 2022). However, the transformation of property rights and land use rights needs to be revised, resulting in many unregulated space-use behaviours. So, it is important—a matter of urgency—to understand the conflicts of power relations in the transformation process. The case of the TDPCSP provides an opportunity to reveal the interactions of multiple parts behind the spatial changes.

### **2.3. Public Space in China**

It has been widely reported that “public space” in the Chinese context is relatively special. Qian (2019) thinks that it cannot be regarded as a place of civic agency separate from the state; rather, public space in China tends to be influenced by state rationales and elites. Similarly, Flock and Breitung (2016, p. 167) state that public space is usually used to demonstrate the success of the reform, with descriptions such as “spiritual civilisation” and “harmonious society.” Miao (2011) argues that public space in China tends to ignore actual civic life but functions instead as a tool to satisfy the goals of the government, investors, and designers. Ho (2020) critically assesses the discourse within the academic community concerning the definition of public space, highlighting its predominant focus on the function design of the official space. The allocation and utilisation of public space, according to Ho (2020), Deng et al. (2015), and Hagenbjörk (2011), are primarily dictated by urban authorities and professionals in a top-down manner.



### 3. Methodology

The research question was contextualised within the Chinese public space of residential neighbourhoods by exploring existing studies on the effects of planned economy models and market-oriented reforms on urban residential communities.

Case studies have been instrumental in examining issues within Chinese communities. Chung (2021) and Q. Zhang (2020) focused on the impact of redevelopment and sustainability, respectively. Liu and He (2017) delved into socio-spatial differentiation and the heterogeneity of poor neighbourhoods, while Forrest and Yip (2007) explored social interactions and changing tendencies within these areas. Gao et al. (2019) and Jayne and Leung (2014) took a different approach, investigating the impact of the neighbourhood environment on the health and well-being of older Chinese immigrants and the role of embodied urban geographies in understanding urban life in China.

Drawing on George and Bennett's (2005) insights, the effectiveness of case studies in assessing causative processes, fostering new hypotheses, achieving high conceptual validity, and addressing causal complexity in specific instances was acknowledged. For example, Chung (2021) specifically used state-led neighbourhood redevelopment in Guangzhou as a case study to illustrate the relationship between spatial change and state intervention in social and economic processes in China. From a similar perspective to linked changes in space and society, this research selected TDPCSP as a case study due to its significance in representing transitions in urban residential patterns.

This study distinguishes itself from a line of studies in China's first-tier international cities by choosing a case study representative of typical second tier cities in North China—a Danwei residential neighbourhood. This case is situated amid the change process in a socialist community under the impact of a market economy, contributing a wealth of detail and data to the study. Through ongoing data collection and collation by the researcher, who has lived in the community for over 30 years, a comprehensive case study is provided to inform other studies.

Initially, we procured archival data, documents, and records from the local Archive Centre and the Government Affairs Disclosure website, seeking information related to the historical development of the community. The collected documents underwent organisation and digitisation. Between October 2021 and July 2023, we conducted in-depth interviews with 35 long-term residents, three representatives from the owners' committee, two property managers, two real estate managers, and two relevant stakeholders who were former participants in the policy-making process of the housing reform policy under study.

During the interviews, we focused on obtaining supplemental pre-2018 details related to the community property rights reform and community space utilisation from the residents. Our goal was to understand the primary demands and contradictions concerning residents' current utilisation of community public space in both new and old communities. We also sought insights from the owners' committee representatives to comprehend the evolution of the commissioning relationship between property owners and the Shandong Provincial Committee (Danwei originally owned the property). Additionally, we aimed to understand the challenges encountered in community management and the principles guiding their resolution from the property managers. Insights into the current demand and supply situation of community housing in the



property market, turnover rates, and the impact of the property market on community space utilisation were gathered from the real estate managers. Participants in the policy-making process obtained information about crucial points in the history of the 1997–2003 housing ownership reform relevant to our community. These interviews provided qualitative data on their experiences and perceptions of the transitions.

Residing within the neighbourhood, the leading researcher conducted systematic observations. His observations commenced in 1998, utilising his life experiences as initial observation data. When the research formally began, observations occurred twice daily—once in the morning and once in the evening—from 2018 to 2023. The areas observed included the community entrance, internal roads, parking lots, public green spaces, spaces in front of houses, express delivery locations, commercial group-buying windows, and the community canteen. Statistics on the number of people using the space per unit of time, the distribution of space usage during the observation period, and the development and upgrade of space facilities were documented. 1,200 photographs were taken, complemented by 200 video recordings, and 800 research notes were compiled. The documentation aimed to capture changes in the spatial layout of the community and the service milieu over three decades, with strict adherence to ethical considerations related to the confidentiality and consent of interviewees to ensure responsible data use.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns in the narratives of residents and stakeholders. The research identified correlations between observed changes in spatial layout and the service milieu, shifts in supervisory and service units, and property ownership. These findings were subsequently compared with broader cases identified in the literature review.

## 4. Three Key Findings

### 4.1. *The Reform of Housing Property Rights and the Phenomenon of Spatial Differentiation*

The construction of public residential areas in the planned economy era was gradual, as shown in Figure 1. The construction period of public housing in the same residential area reached several decades. Among them were brick and concrete residential buildings constructed from the 1960s to the 1980s. Although these buildings are significantly different from buildings constructed in the 1990s, the composition of residents during this period was relatively homogeneous and conflicts in public space utilisation were not prominent. This was because, before the 1997 housing reform, all residents or their direct family members in the same residential building belonged to the same institution or department in the same unit. The application and management of construction were carried out according to the internal departments of the institution. In this case, the neighbourhood relationship of residents was an extension of the working relationship, and the distribution of interests, conflicts, and disputes could be coordinated and handled by the work units in accordance with corresponding rules and regulations.

Since 1997, the policies introduced by the Shandong Provincial Government have paved the way for the privatisation of residential property rights in provincial government agencies. Since then, the People's Government of Shandong Province have successively launched a series of policies and notices to improve the housing reform of provincial government agencies. The Management Measures for the Listing and Trading of Public Housing Purchased by Provincial Government Offices in Shandong Province issued in 2003 clearly defined and recognised the secondary sales and rental behaviour of public housing listed by

provincial government offices after the monetisation reform. Community housing in China, as represented by the subjects of this study, has been reformed to take on the characteristics of privatisation and marketisation characteristic of neoliberalism. However, the policies that have driven this change have still been initiated from the top down.

In addition, TDPCSP is located near the office of the government. It enjoys the best educational resources in Jinan: It is in the school district of kindergartens and primary schools with high education quality and within the 15-minute walking circle of first class middle and high schools in Shandong Province. Since 2003, the market supply and demand of residential properties in this community has shown high growth. Although the identities of people who could buy the flats in TDPCSP are limited as employees and close relatives of state-owned offices, enterprises, and institutions, there is a lack of actual restriction on their identities. Especially since the marketisation of property services in 2015, with the intervention of socialised housing intermediary companies, residents within the community are no longer limited to provincial government staff or their close relatives, and the composition of resident identity has become increasingly complex. New residents who enter through market transactions no longer have a subordinate relationship with the residential area's original provincial government supervisory unit.

The housing property rights policy has led to the privatisation reform of public-owned housing constructed in the planned economy era and made housing enter the market. Based on housing quality, age, and school district, the market revalued the residential buildings. As a result, residents of different economic statuses and social classes are selected. The houses that can smoothly enter the real estate market for trading are mainly residential buildings built after the 1990s, which are relatively new and suitable for modern life. The interviews to the properties found that new residents are mostly driven by school-aged children going to school to purchase houses. After the children graduated from school, almost all houses were re-listed for trading, with sufficient market liquidity. However, other houses in the same community are relatively old and inconvenient to use, and the proportion of new immigrants was generally less than 30%. This housing market mobility with neoliberal characteristics still stems from the mismatch between the value and price of housing brought about by the unbalanced allocation of public resources in society during the planned economy era.

According to the leading author's observation, the marketisation of housing property rights has led to conflicts between the original residents of old houses that the market and the new residents with high requirements for quality of requirements for quality of life have not favoured. According to Li and Huang (2006), the influx of new residents can lead to a two-tier urban society. These conflicts mainly erupt in the public space area at the intersection of old houses built before the 1990s and homes built after the 1990s, reflected in the ownership of public space use rights and their spatial use methods. New residents who settle in through real estate market transactions generally belong to the middle class, and the proportion of private car ownership, its requirements for residential quality, and the public attributes of community public spaces are relatively high. This is mainly reflected in the increased frequency of housing decoration and the demand for community parking and leisure space. At the same time, elderly housing owners who find it difficult to enter the real estate trading market are mainly middle-aged and retired cadres from former provincial government agencies. They generally have high requirements for community privacy, noise control, and the daily use of public spaces. The noise pollution caused by decoration and the changes in the quality and utilisation of public space caused by the driving and parking of motor vehicles within the community have become the focal points of conflicts between the two. The phenomenon of residents occupying public space to park scrapped motor vehicles,

placing private greenery, stacking personal belongings, and even setting up private roadblocks is common in surrounding communities and streets centred around old residential buildings. The above phenomenon originates from the conditions where former residents, mainly employees of provincial government agencies, used public space and private space property rights to integrate and have unclear boundaries in the planned economy era. By occupying public space near one's residence, the old residents attempted to preserve these space rights inconsistent with the market-oriented private space property rights.

Meanwhile, the public space in TDPCSP is mainly roads, and the space for third-party management agencies, such as property management, to coordinate conflicts is limited. Thus, these conflicts cannot be resolved entirely in a short period. Only after the renovation project of old residential areas launched in Jinan in 2020 was the problem of private occupation of public space in residential areas partly solved. The resistance to the privatisation and marketisation of community housing thus also comes from the original residents of the community who are deeply tied to the workplace of the planned economy and whose vested interests are infringed upon by the neoliberal character of community change.

The changes in the Provincial Party Committee's three dormitories in the post-socialist era, represented by the privatisation and marketisation of housing, have evident neoliberal characteristics. However, whether it is in the policy sources of change, the role of public resources in rediscovering the value of housing, or the resistance of the original residents based on the defence of their vested interests, neoliberal influences in community change are inevitably subject to various kinds of resistance.

#### **4.2. Changes in Supervisory Units and Community Renovation**

From 1997 to 2020, the completion of the housing property rights reform in TDPCSP brought about the diversification of community residents' identities and promoted the transfer of responsibilities. At the same time, the property rights of public roads, public gardens, and welfare supporting facilities in residential areas still belong to the Shandong Provincial Government when the document was completed in 2023, and nominally also belong to the provincial government's management. The reform of public space property rights in residential areas has lagged. This contradiction between the ownership and use rights of public space has become a significant feature of the market-oriented impact faced by provincial government units in residential areas with a strong characteristic of the planned economy era.

Before the 1997 housing reform, the management department for TDPCSP was the Shandong Provincial Government Affairs Management Bureau, and it managed all affairs of the community. After the housing reform in 2001, this unified management model was limited to managing public space property rights and daily maintenance of community facilities. Various elements related to the residents' lives were gradually integrated into the municipal management. Although this process did not involve the direct participation of the market, the shift of part of the management power from the workplace to the society is still an important mark of the post-socialist period that distinguishes it from the era of the planned economy.

Since 2015, Jinan has renovated many pocket parks and fitness squares with public welfare attributes in the campaign to create a healthy and civilised city. During this period, TDPCSP was also renovated and upgraded with some greenery and additions according to municipal standards (pocket park with fitness facilities in Figure 1; Figure 3). The public space of municipal-led residential areas had spatial characteristics

similar to that of urban streets public spaces, such as concentrated layout, small scale, and open boundaries. However, because the property rights of the public space in the residential area still belonged to the provincial government, and the residential area was still under closed management, the upgraded community pocket park added by the municipal department was only used by internal personnel in the community. The usage efficiency was much lower than the pocket park connecting the municipal streets. Attributing property rights to public spaces has become a major resistance to integrating community spaces into the city.

Since 2020, the city of Jinan has implemented renovation measures for old residential areas (The Departments of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of Jinan, 2020), enhancing the internal road accessibility, wall decoration, and lighting in these areas. This has effectively levelled the differentiated spatial quality and transportation convenience based on the varying construction years of residential buildings. The initiative positively contributes to integrating the internal space of residential areas into the urban space (Figure 4). Preceding the housing reform, the management department of the residential area, where residents worked, resulted in unclear boundaries between private and public spaces, with residents occupying much of the public space. Post housing reform, the municipal-led community renovation project cleared private facilities and items from public spaces, establishing clearer boundaries between public spaces owned by work unit collectives and privately owned spaces with distinct property rights (private greening invading public space in Figure 1; Figure 5). Since then, the municipal sector's involvement in community management and spatial remediation has replaced the work unit's role. Although the situation cannot be completely described as neoliberalism, it reveals the characteristics of neoliberalism.

#### ***4.3. Marketisation of Supporting Services and Logical Reset of Residential Space***

Since 2003, because of the urbanisation process in China, the proportion of the Chinese economy's service industry has been increasing yearly (P. Zhang & Nan, 2018). In the planned economy era, various supporting services such as catering, health, education, entertainment, and so on provided by work units have emerged



**Figure 3.** Pocket Park with fitness facilities.





**Figure 4.** Before (a) and after (b) renovation.



**Figure 5.** Private greening invading public space.

as more market-oriented alternatives in the development process of cities. At the same time, various work units in the planned economy era have successively reduced or cancelled the welfare mentioned above services based on their new positioning and economic benefits changes in the market economy environment (Lu, 2006), so the changes have affected the use of public spaces in residential areas. This has provided the possibility and necessity for introducing market-oriented property services into the residential areas of provincial government agencies.

The welfare housing community, formerly owned by the Shandong Provincial Government, operates within a planned economy framework. Despite the gradual elimination of most welfare services, the community's marketization process exhibits a prolonged duration and minimal changes in the facility property rights compared to other residential areas tied to production, scientific research, or educational units. This stability arises from the provincial government's unified management of public space and facility property rights. Preceding the 1997 housing reform, the community boasted a comprehensive set of welfare-oriented service facilities, including a collective cafeteria, bathhouse, barber salon, theatre, milk station, snack bar,

and drinking hot water station. These facilities, planned and constructed uniformly by provincial authorities, held property rights.

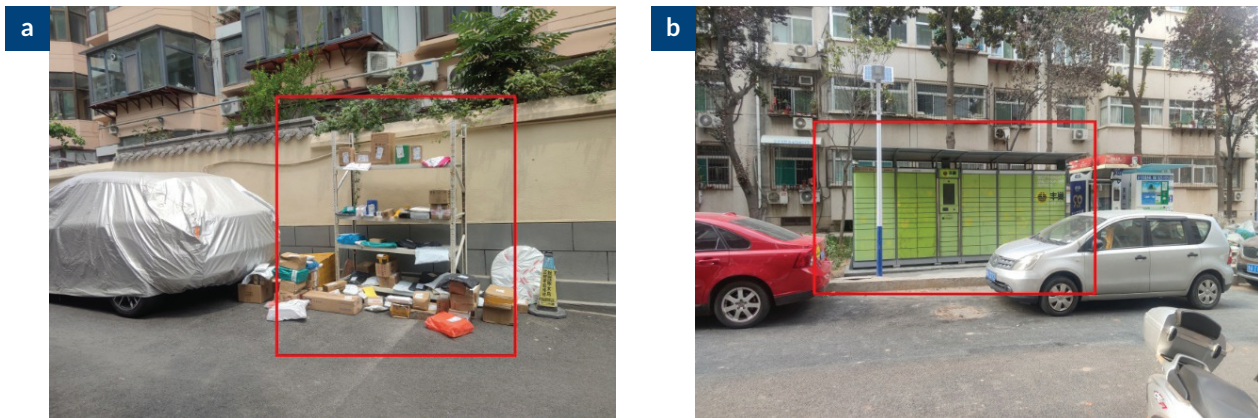
Post the 2001 housing reform, facilities like bathhouses, theatres, milk stations, snack bars, and hot water stations were discontinued due to high market maturity and operating costs. In 2019, hot water services for bathing were halted, and public canteens were outsourced, primarily catering to provincial government office staff. The government reclaimed all supporting service building facilities except the public cafeteria for functions unrelated to residents' daily lives, such as offices and storage. This shift in social services development accompanied workplaces' gradual relinquishment of service functions, easing the financial burden and creating space for market intervention to optimise service functions. The social attributes of affiliated or adjacent public spaces linked to these service facilities were also lost (the canteen of the Third Dormitory in Figure 1; Figure 6).

As welfare facilities in residential areas face elimination, residents' demand for property services is shifting towards third party providers in the market. Since 2015, the Shandong Provincial Government Service Centre has implemented market-oriented property management by introducing property companies through social bidding. The property owner's provincial government reclaimed the original welfare facilities space for alternative purposes. Property services have made minor adjustments to the internal public space of the community within the existing road system. The original centralised garbage collection station was replaced with multiple collection points along community roads and residential buildings, maintained regularly by property management personnel. This has enhanced hygiene levels near the original garbage collection station. Parcel and takeaway food collection points, initially near the residential area entrance, were prone to issues like lost packages. The introduction of third party delivery cabinets in the community garden temporarily resolved these problems (Figure 7). Market-driven property services have notably increased the efficiency of public space utilisation, offering the community a more diverse and flexible range of services by opening up the market to third party providers.



**Figure 6.** The Canteen of the Third Residential Area.





**Figure 7.** Before (a) and after (b) the renovation of the courier cabinet.



**Figure 8.** Online shopping collection window.

In 2016, the rise of the domestic internet economy introduced community group buying services, a platform offering fresh food information and shopping services. However, the TDPCSP did not adopt these services because government work units retain property rights over public spaces. The small scale of TDPCSP also made group buying services less profitable. Nonetheless, during the Covid-19 pandemic, intermittent closures significantly affected residents' lives. The Leshan Street Community, an adjacent residential area, opened a service window at the boundary buildings, connecting TDPCSP to third-party group buying services (Figure 8). This window, maintained since then, is positioned at the end of the internal road, enhancing public interaction and altering the community's spatial structure, reducing publicness from the entrance to the inner part (online shopping collection window in Figure 1).

In short, the marketisation of TDPCSP's community services has allowed former workplaces to relinquish their service functions and space for market-based services to intervene in the community. However, this has not affected the rights of work units to public space and public facilities, and the influence of neoliberalism in community public space has only touched on the right of use, with no impact on ownership.



## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Characteristics of Community Spatial Transformation in Post-Socialist China

C. Zhang and Chai (2014) argue that China's community spatial transformation in the post-socialist era differs from the phenomenon of community decline in Eastern Europe. The evolution of communities in China's post-socialist era, represented by the studies of C. Zhang and Chai (2014) and Wang (2022), presents two different outcomes. The former research shows that urban public resources are fully integrated into communities under market economy conditions after the decline of community-owned units. The original community management system based on units is gradually giving way to urban authorities represented by neighbourhood committees. The latter shows an entirely different evolutionary model from neoliberalism. The work units still possessed high-quality social resources and strengthened their management and services to the community. Thus, the socialist spatial characteristics of the community remained.

The TDPCSP in the post-socialist period is affected by marketisation through the redistribution of social resources and by resistance to marketisation by the provincial government office. This ambiguity of its position has led to the process of evolution from socialism to post-socialism, and it is an important sample for the study of the evolution of the processes and mechanisms by which social change with neoliberal overtones affects this type of community.

### 5.2. The Dynamics of Community Transformation in China

The transformation of Chinese communities under the influence of the market economy came later than in Central and Eastern European countries. The privatisation of housing property rights created the conditions for houses to present their value in the market. The socialist era's living pattern was that people working in the same working unit lived in the same area. This pattern was gradually replaced by the pattern that people with the same consumption capacity and social class live in the same areas. This change provided an opportunity to change the work unit led neighbourhoods produced during the socialist era (M. Zhang et al., 2021).

In addition, with the rapid development of the marketisation process in China (P. Zhang & Nan, 2018), the services originally provided by work units have been divided and provided by different organisations. Services that were unsuitable for the market economy were cancelled, while social resources, including schools, hospitals, and public transport hubs, have endowed the nearby neighbourhoods with market values that were not presented during the socialist era. These changes have further accelerated the process of integrating these neighbourhoods into the marketised areas and reflecting a clear neoliberal bias.

As presented above, TDPCSP completed the housing property rights reform and became eligible for sales. As the TDPCSP own high-quality educational resources, the flat prices are higher than average in the city of Jinan, and the flats have high market liquidity. The high flat prices and market liquidity induced constant changes in residents in the neighbourhood.

### 5.3. Governance of Communal Public Space in the Chinese Context

Public space in the Chinese context tends to be produced top-down (Qian, 2019). The logic of spatial production can also be found in Danwei neighbourhoods, such as TDPCSP. Although the marketisation of

home ownership and public social resources has brought new residents and the new residents brought new needs to the neighbourhood, the management institutions are still usually the urban authorities (Bray, 2005). The study by Chung (2021) argues that the Chinese government constantly involves itself in socio-economic development, and as a result, the country's spatial transformation and the changes in social classes are inconsistent.

In the case of TDPCSP, the property owner is the highest level Party Committee in Shandong Province. Although the Party Committee does not directly manage the neighbourhood, it is still influential in the management of the neighbourhood. The functions of the Party Committee include decisions on closing the neighbourhood, renovating facilities, and choosing property management companies. This management model suggests that in the evolution of China's post-socialist communities represented by the TDPCSP, the former workplace, which still plays the role of a management agency, is the leading actor resisting the neoliberalisation of the community and that the legitimacy of this tendency to resist comes from the workplace's property rights over the community's public space and its ancillary facilities that have not yet been privatised and marketised.

## 6. Conclusion

Since the late 20th century, housing property marketisation has been critical in the Chinese economic transition. During this process, neighbourhood services were also commercialised, and the high-end services unsuitable for some communities have been cancelled while some new services have emerged. This is a result of the redistribution of resources in the market economy.

This research has presented and analysed how public spaces within the neighbourhood have changed under the transition of the economy in a governmental Danwei neighbourhood. This research reflects power relations from three perspectives: (a) the diversification of urban housing property ownership causing spatial differentiation, (b) the changes of management subject causing the renewal of community public space, and (c) the market management mechanism influencing the proposition of residential supporting spaces. Due to the special status of provincial government units, the affiliated residential areas built during the planned economy era have been relatively sluggish in market-oriented reform due to the top-down policy reform. This case study explained Chinese communities' incomplete transition to neoliberalism during the post-socialist period. However, new demands and services generated in a bottom-up way during housing market-oriented reform in residential areas continued to develop. The fundamental reasons for the various community conflicts are the unchanged public space property rights caused by this policy lag and the changes in public space utilisation caused by the promotion of practice.

In this research, the provincial office still owns and functions as the management of the public space in TDPCSP; at the same time, the emergence of the market economy has brought new residents to the Danwei neighbourhood. With different identities, purposes, and spatial appropriation habits from the original residents, the residential dynamics reformed by the original and incoming residents have produced public spaces with new characteristics. The phenomena indicate the question: How have the community public spaces been made and changed during the economic transition? In the case of the Communist Party Committee Dormitory, the usage rights of public spaces have remained unclear, which has caused disorder in the appropriation of these spaces. The management of community public spaces has been separated from

the unified ownership-management body of the Danwei to the social service and property services. The induced services partially meet the needs of residents. However, the conflicts between the inconsistency of the ownership and management remain. Although the remaining original residents prefer that all the residents are from the same work unit, the arrival of new residents brought by the market economy is inevitable. How to balance the needs of the closure and opening of the neighbourhood should be considered, and it can provide solutions for Chinese neighbourhood development which differ from those adopted in Western or Central Eastern European cities.

In China, the distribution of market-oriented residential residents and supporting service facilities is less influenced by race and religion. Still, it is largely influenced by the location and resources of the city, resulting in a phenomenon of income and class-based differentiation (Sun & Wu, 2009). In the planned economy era, workplaces and courtyards attempted to achieve residential equity by allocating flats to people from particular working units. In residential areas like TDPCSP, during the market economy reform, the interests and powers of multiple parts intertwined in the process. Conflicts inevitably emerged due to the lagging reform of public space property rights. However, these conflicts did not hinder the new management, new services, and new residents, who constantly changed the community's public space. TDPCSP provides an ideal example to investigate the communities under the conflicts of reflecting neoliberal market economy tendencies vs. resisting neoliberal planned economy elements. Although limited in the number of cases examined, this constraint allows for a detailed and thorough examination of the selected case. This research offers an example to understand the role of neoliberalism during the spatial transformation and can contribute to future policy-making on the marketisation reforms of similar communities.

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the interviewees who have participated in this research for the information and help they have provided, including the people working in the Office of Shandong Provincial Party Committee, the property management company staff, the representatives of the resident committee, and other residents. The authors would also like to express their gratitude to Dr. Colin Roth for his suggestions for the improvement of the article.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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## About the Authors



**Tao Shi** is a graduate of Shandong Jianzhu University and has been serving as a lecturer at the same institution since 2011. His research focuses on Chinese vernacular dwellings and settlements, the history of traditional Chinese architecture, and the landscape and culture of small towns and villages in North China. Among his notable works is *The Comprehensive Record of the Major Restoration of the Yan Temple in Qufu*.



**Fangjie Guo** has a major in architecture and obtained her PhD at the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield. Guo has worked as an architect, urban designer, and teaching assistant in China. She is a member of the Space, Culture, and Politics Research Group of the Sheffield School of Architecture. Her research focuses on “what exactly is happening” with interests in public space, spatial structure, informality, and urban infrastructure.



**Yali Zhang** is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Sheffield. She was an architect and urban designer who practised in Europe and China. Her research explores the nexus of technology and domestic environments, examining how internet connectivity and digital assistants shape contemporary homes with an emphasis on gender roles within Asian cultural contexts. Her past studies have investigated the distribution of urban green parks and landscape policies for small towns and rural areas in North China.