

# **From Work-unit Compound to Homeowner Community: A Literature Review on **Neighborhood Planning and Governance** in Urban China**

Mingrui Shen (申明锐)

shenmingr@nju.edu.cn

Nanjing University



# SUMMARY

- China's urban society is undergoing an intensive restructuring in parallel with the phenomenal urbanization process. The **neighborhoods** in Chinese cities (*shequ*, 社区) and their **governance** (*zhili*, 治理) are a set of imported concepts from the West. When the rigidly-defined jargons shipped to China, the localization and variation process never ceased in practice
- In this paper, we conduct a comprehensive review on the neighborhood planning and its governance of urban China since 1949, sourcing from both academic literature and governmental policies. Through theoretical lens of **public goods** provision, the paper summarizes the paradigm shifts of neighborhood governance from the aspects of **socio-economic environment**, **governing mode** and **design form of neighborhood**
- It is argued that the neighborhood governance paradigms of post-1949 urban China undergo an overall transformation from the state-dominated “**work-unit system**” in planned economy to the “**residents' committee system**” during market-oriented reform, and then to contemporary “**pluralism governance system**” that rising from the awareness of private properties. Though China's communities have witnessed more and more public goods provided by market and volunteer sectors, their self-governance has a long way to go and the intervention of authorities in neighborhood governance never diminishes, even reinforces in some sense

# **RUNDOWN**

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Debating Neighborhood Governance: A Comparative Appraisal
- 3. Planning Regime of Collectivism and Work-unit System
- 4. Institutional Transition and Neighborhood Reconstruction
- 5. Homeowner Community and Market-oriented Provision for Public Goods
- 6. Discussion and Conclusion

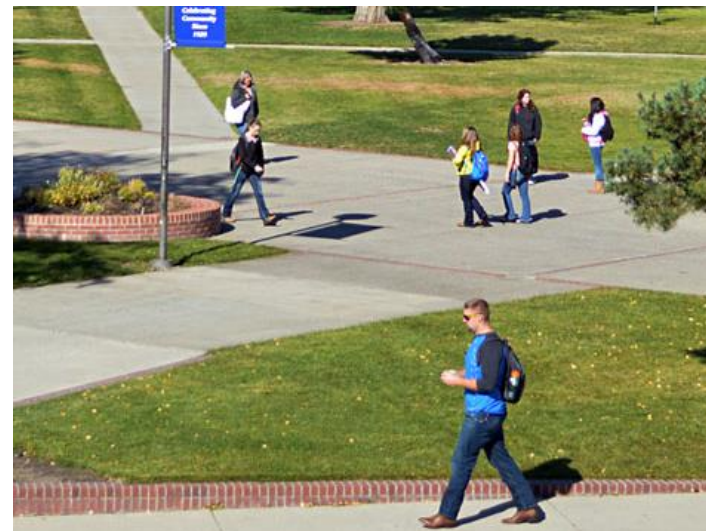
# INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood governance (Bray, 2006; Heberer, 2009; Lo, 2013; Wu, 2018)

- As a **basic component of urban governance**
- Determines **governance capacity** of a city



19th CPC national congress



Functions of a community



Community and planning

- Promoting the modernization of the **state governance system** and governance capacity
- Strengthening the construction of neighborhood governance system
- Consolidating social governance of the grassroots

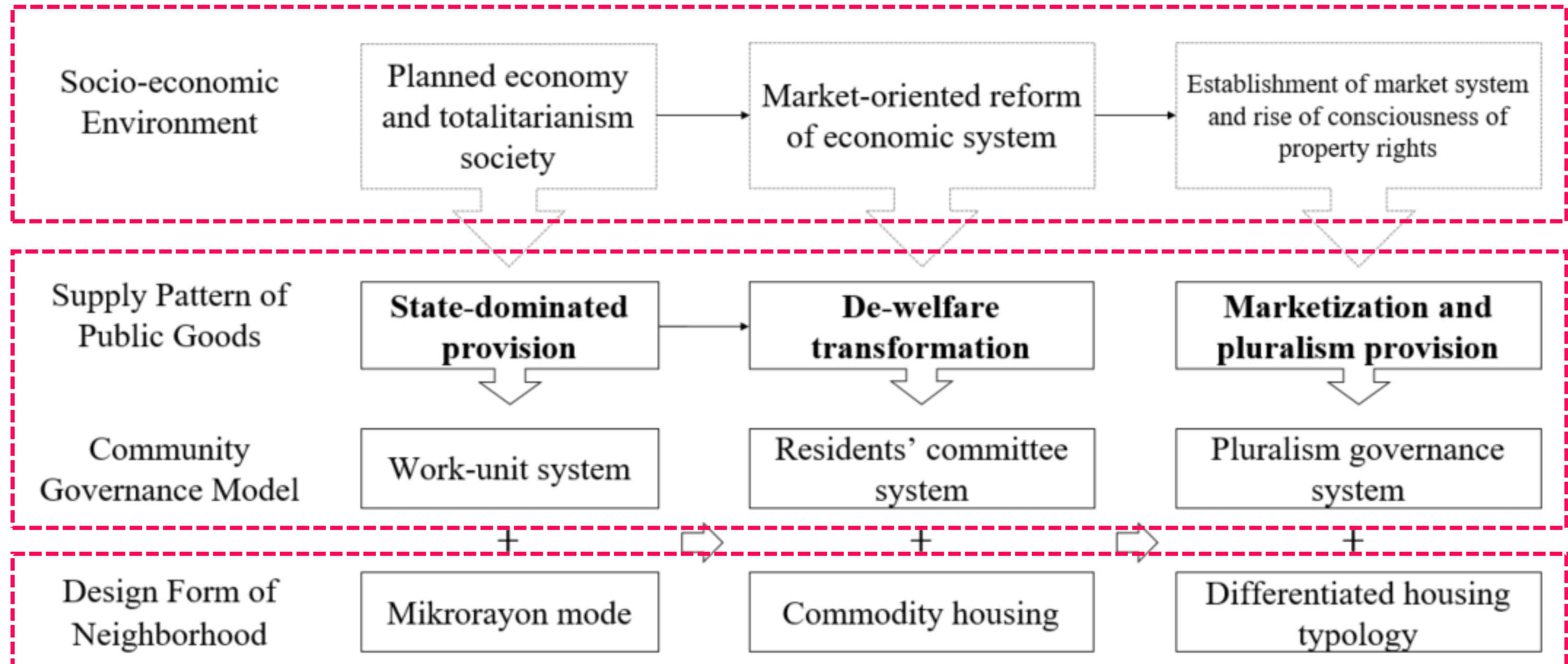
.....

- Responsible for basic public service and necessary management in cities
- Provides neighborhood attachment
- Direct relevance to the quality of residents' daily life
- Hinge of socio-economic conflicts in cities (Ye, 2008)

- Neighborhood planning offers a technical platform for spatial arrangement of community-related facilities
- **Forming of neighborhood governance** in parallel with the establishment of **supply-demand mechanism for public goods** (Chen, 2007)

# INTRODUCTION

- Narrative but critique review
- Derive from existing literature but offer new understanding beyond
- Framework for literature review (Zhang and Luo, 2013)



# DEBATING NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNANCE: A COMPARATIVE APPRAISAL

## Communities in the West

- Classic definition by Ferdinand Tönnies (1887), *Community and Society*: Community as a social commune of homogenous populations, with close and interdependent relationships
- Chicago School of Modern Sociologists in U.S., ecology and social theories (Park et al., 1984; Wirth, 1938)
- Post-modernism such as “Community Action Program”(CAP): bottom-up civil society, protests against authorities, urban mega projects, transnational corporations, etc (Bray, 2006)
- Fundamental characteristics of a community: geographic boundary, sociality, and autonomy (Xu, 2007)

# **DEBATING NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNANCE: A COMPARATIVE APPRAISAL**

## **Governance theory and neighborhood governance**

- The rise of volunteer sector and governing without government (Rhodes, 1996)
- Other than governmental sector, participation of individuals or social organizations in socio-economic activities (Commission on Global Governance, 1995; Yu, 2000)
- Objectives in neighborhood governance
  - Satisfying dwelling-related demands for community members
  - Managing public affairs
  - Coordinating interests of neighborhood

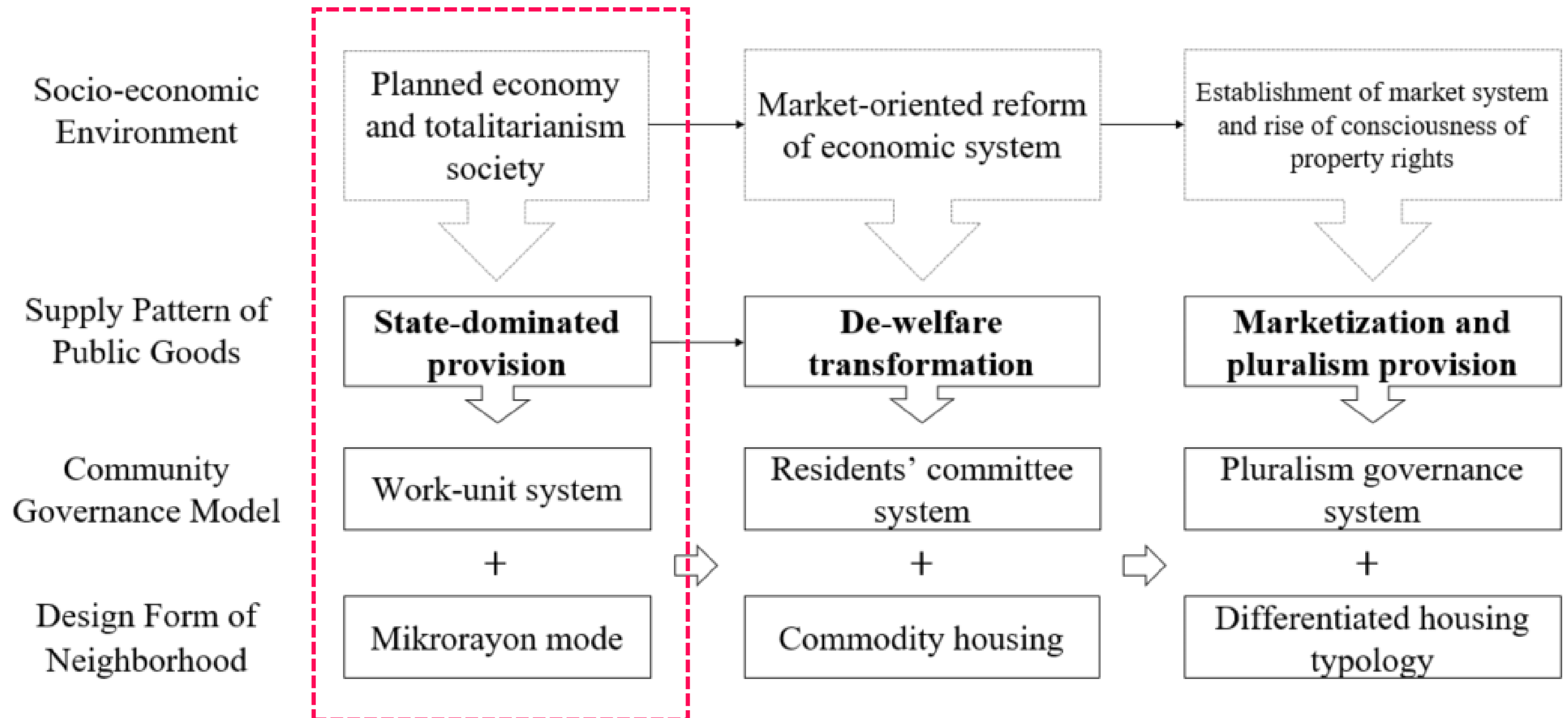
# DEBATING NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNANCE: A COMPARATIVE APPRAISAL

## Neighborhood Governance in China

- The concept of “community” in China
  - *Shequ*, translated and imported by Prof. Fei Hsiao-Tung to China in 1930s
  - Disappeared in socialist China
  - Reappeared in 1980s
- State intervention in neighborhood governance in China
  - Living unit amidst “totalitarianism society” (Sun, 2001)
  - Isomorphism: small commune and great commune (Qin, 1998, 1999; Lin, 2015)
  - Strong state intervention in grassroots communities (Bray, 2006; Benewick, 2004)
  - A kind of governmentality, raised by Foucault (1991)



# PLANNING REGIME OF COLLECTIVISM AND WORK-UNIT SYSTEM



# PLANNING REGIME OF COLLECTIVISM AND WORK-UNIT SYSTEM

## Stated-dominated socioeconomic environment

- Planning regime: spatial projection of 156 Soviet-assisted projects (Li, 2017)
- Community as a living container for state work-units (Wu, 2015)
  - Compound with multifaced functions while exclusive to non-*danwei* members (Zhang et al., 2013; Xu, 2007)
  - Quasi administrative organization (Zhang, 2001)
- One segment in the chain that forming “state space” (Brenner, 2013)

# PLANNING REGIME OF COLLECTIVISM AND WORK-UNIT SYSTEM

## Public goods provision in work-unit system

- Origin: “social condenser” for the consolidation of Bolshevik fortress in Soviet Union, 1930s (Bray, 2005)
- A complex combining jobs and housing, replacing family as the basic unit in social production and reproduction (Bjorklund, 1986)
- “Collective consumption” theory described by Castells (1977)
- Society running by *danwei*: public goods provided in work-unit compound (Chai, 1996)
  - Dwelling-related: tap water, electricity, gas, etc.
  - Daily-life-related: canteen, shop, public bath, etc.
  - Welfare facilities: schools, cinema, stadium, hospital, etc.

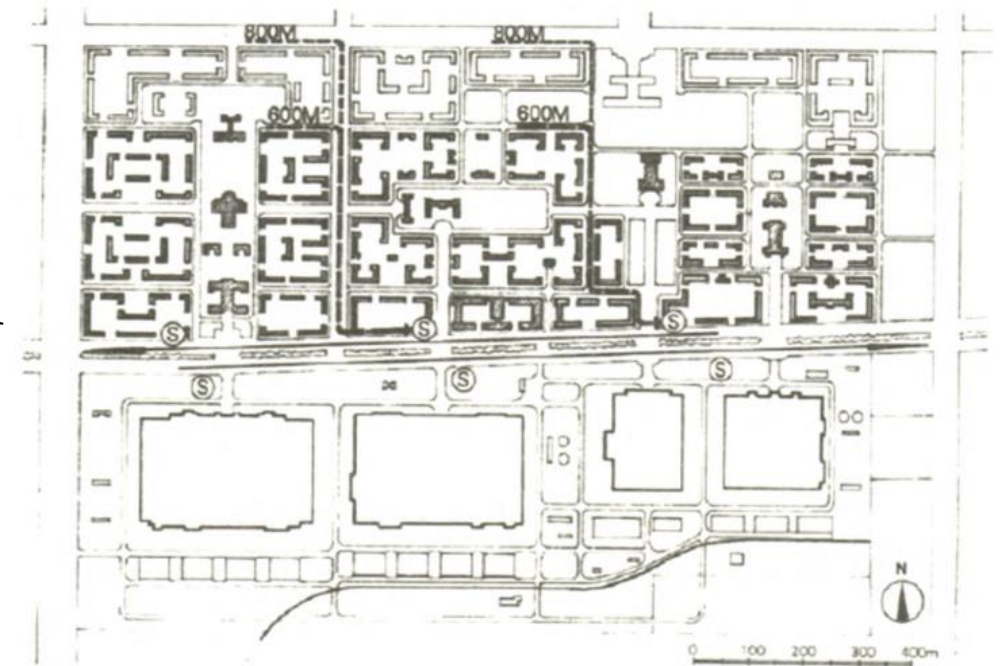


Namyv micro-district in Mykolaiv, Ukraine

# PLANNING REGIME OF COLLECTIVISM AND WORK-UNIT SYSTEM

## Micro-district as a classic residence model

- Originated from *mikrorayon* of Soviet Union (*xiaoqu*, literally micro-district)
- A series of quantitative criteria in design (Gentile, 2000)
- Characteristics of a micro-district layout
  - Integration of jobs and housing, mixed land use (Chai, 2011)
  - “Standard man” criteria (Zhou, 1999; Zhu, 2006)
  - Unified management, from building to maintenance (Liu, 2001)

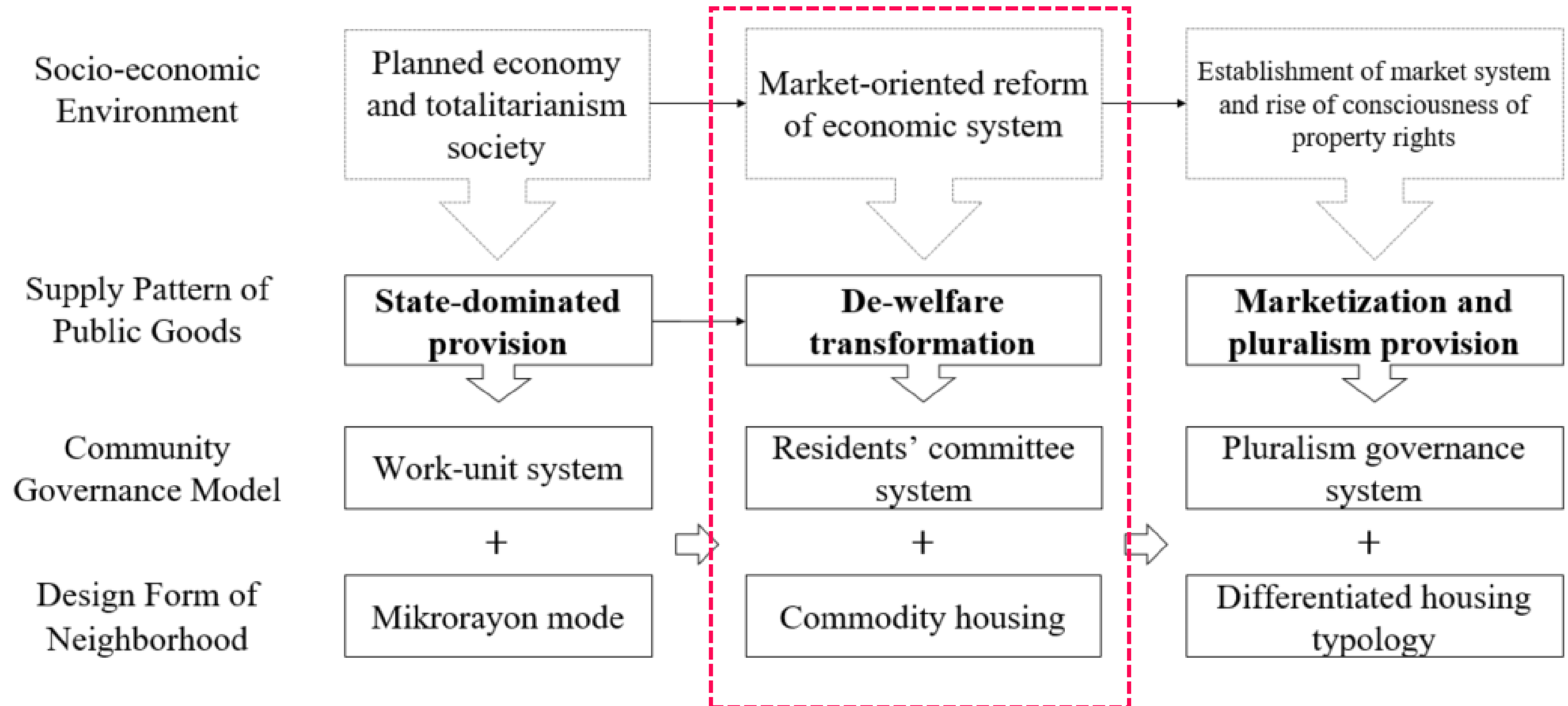


Work-unit layout of Beijing Textile Factory and Dyeing Factory  
Source: Zhang et al. 2009



Three-level system of China's residential district planning  
Source: Zhu, 2006

# INSTITUTIONAL TRANSITION AND NEIGHBORHOOD RECONSTRUCTION



# INSTITUTIONAL TRANSITION AND NEIGHBORHOOD RECONSTRUCTION

## Reform in cities and de-welfare transformation



- “Transforming welfare of housing distribution into individual wage”, and “selling the housing owned by *danwei* to individuals” (State Council, 1994)
- In 1998, abolishment of welfare housing provision, commodity housing as the main provider (Li and Yi, 2005)
- “Trickle-down effect” of wealth, from nationwide circulation to private cumulation

# INSTITUTIONAL TRANSITION AND NEIGHBORHOOD RECONSTRUCTION

## The collapse of work-unit system and the establishment of contemporary community

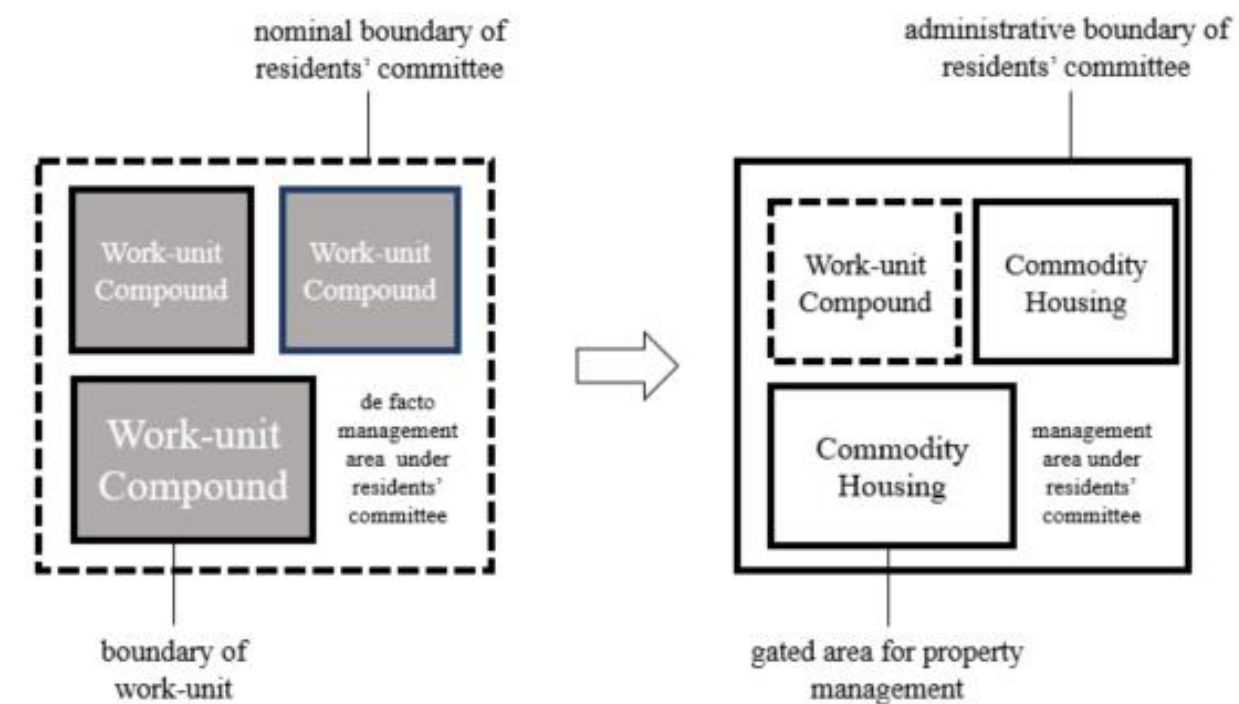
- Hollowing-out of *danwei* community
- Technocracy in governmental administration
  - Community service (1986), the return of the concept of “community”
  - Harmonious community (2002)
  - Community service system construction (2011)
  - Community work service (2013)
  - Smart community (2015)



# INSTITUTIONAL TRANSITION AND NEIGHBORHOOD RECONSTRUCTION

## The collapse of work-unit system and the establishment of contemporary community

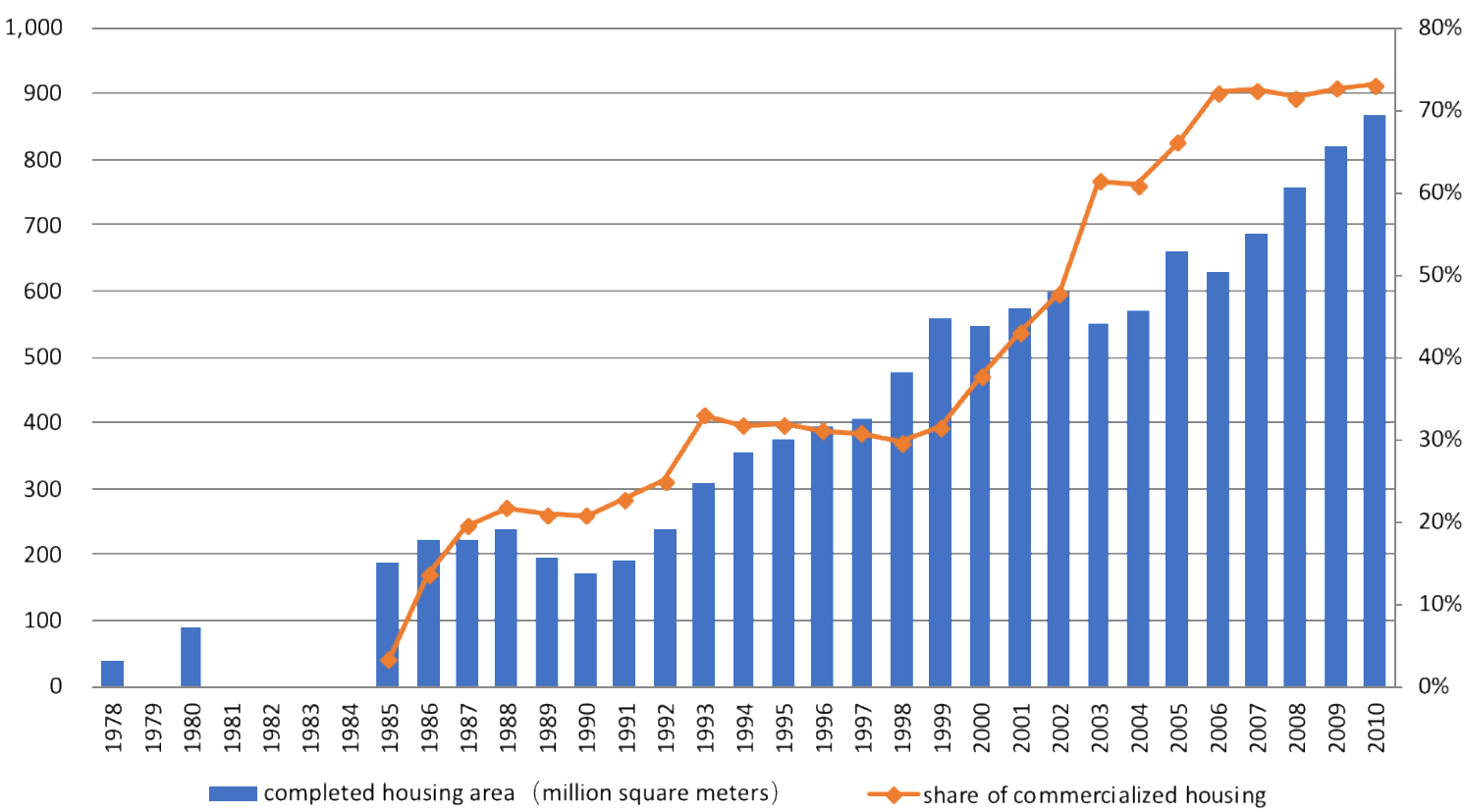
- Institutionalization of the community
  - From an academic concept to “quasi administrative entity”
- Characteristics of Chinese contemporary community (Bray, 2006)
  - The nature and function of the community are determined by the government
  - Mainly responsible for administrative affairs
  - Each community has clearly-defined boundary
- The re-territorialization of community



Re-territorialization of residents' committee of community in transitional urban China

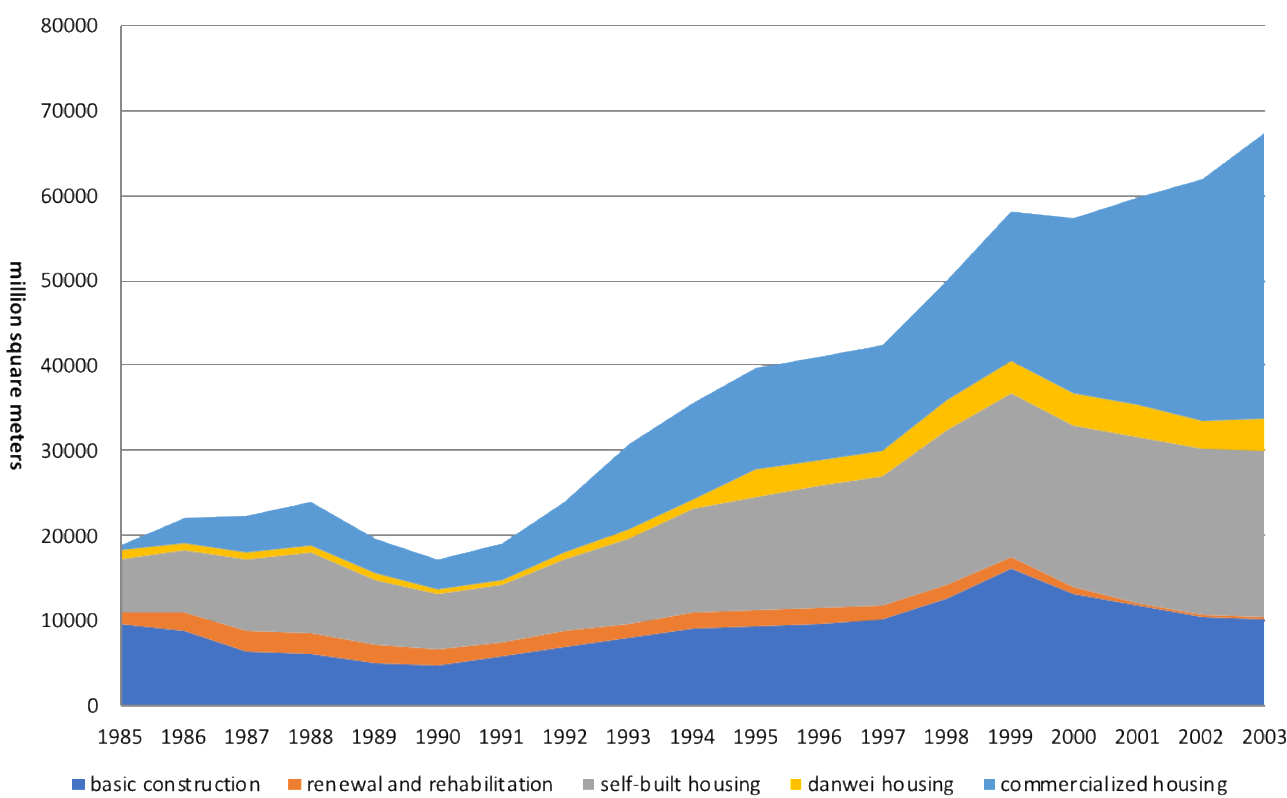
# INSTITUTIONAL TRANSITION AND NEIGHBORHOOD RECONSTRUCTION

## Market as the main provider for urban housing



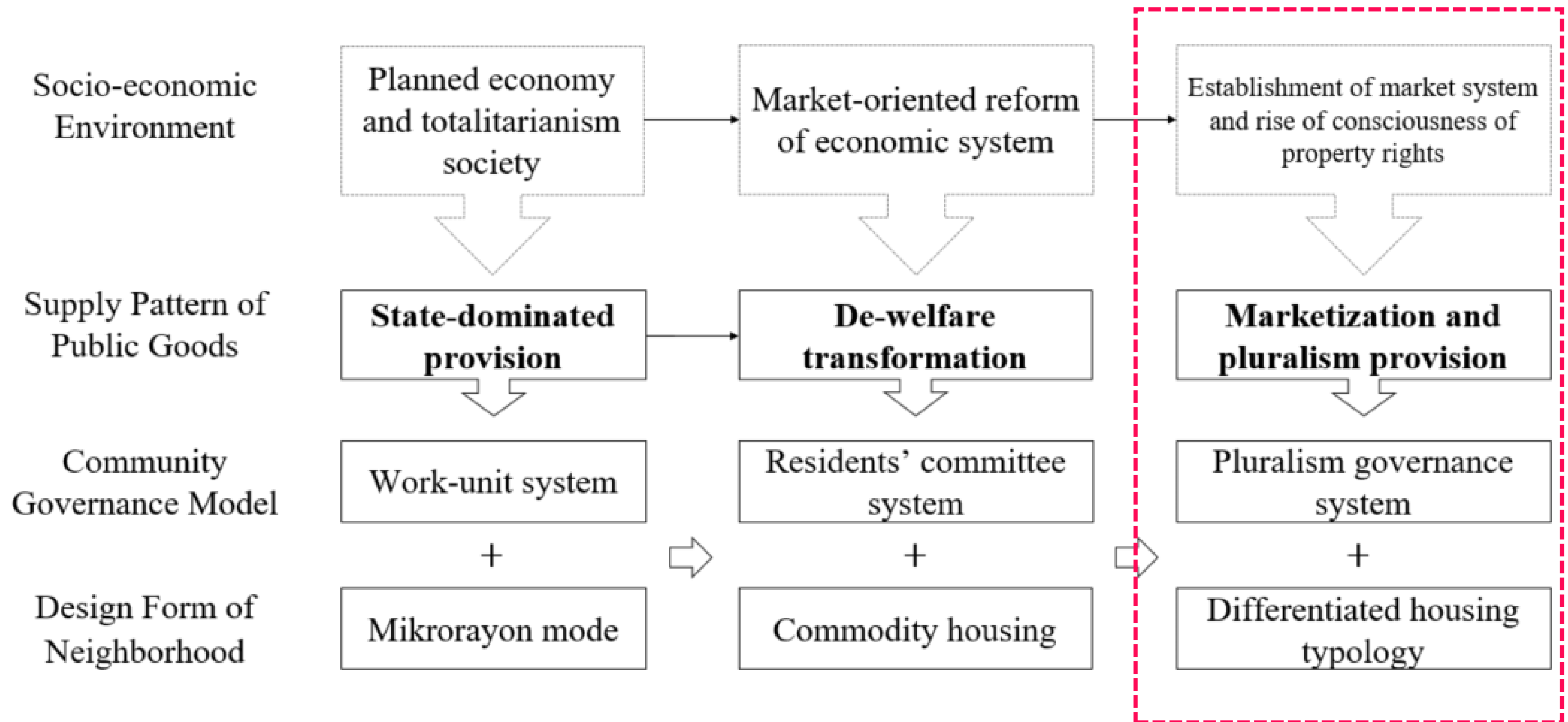
Completed housing area in transitional urban China and the share of the market provider

Source: China Statistical Yearbook and China Real Estate Statistics Yearbook Data and Shen et al. (2013)



Housing stock sorted by providers in transitional urban China  
Source: China Statistical Yearbook and China Real Estate Statistics Yearbook Data and Shen et al. (2013)

# Homeowner Community and Market-oriented Provision for Public Goods



# Homeowner Community and Market-oriented Provision for Public Goods

## The marketization of public goods and the consciousness of private property

- Channels for public goods provision in communities tend to be pluralistic (Wu, 2018)
  - Residents could enjoy community services through market purchase or volunteer activities, even via self-employers at the early stage
- Public goods tie up at specific housing-related locations (Shen, 2011), while get rid of *danwei*-dependence
  - Good schooling catchment (Wu et al., 2016; Liu, 2018)



# Homeowner Community and Market-oriented Provision for Public Goods

## Pluralistic governance system

- Market sector, administrative sector and self-governance sector
  - Property management enterprise
  - Homeowner committee
  - Local/ grassroots government
  - Housing department
- Voluntary organization



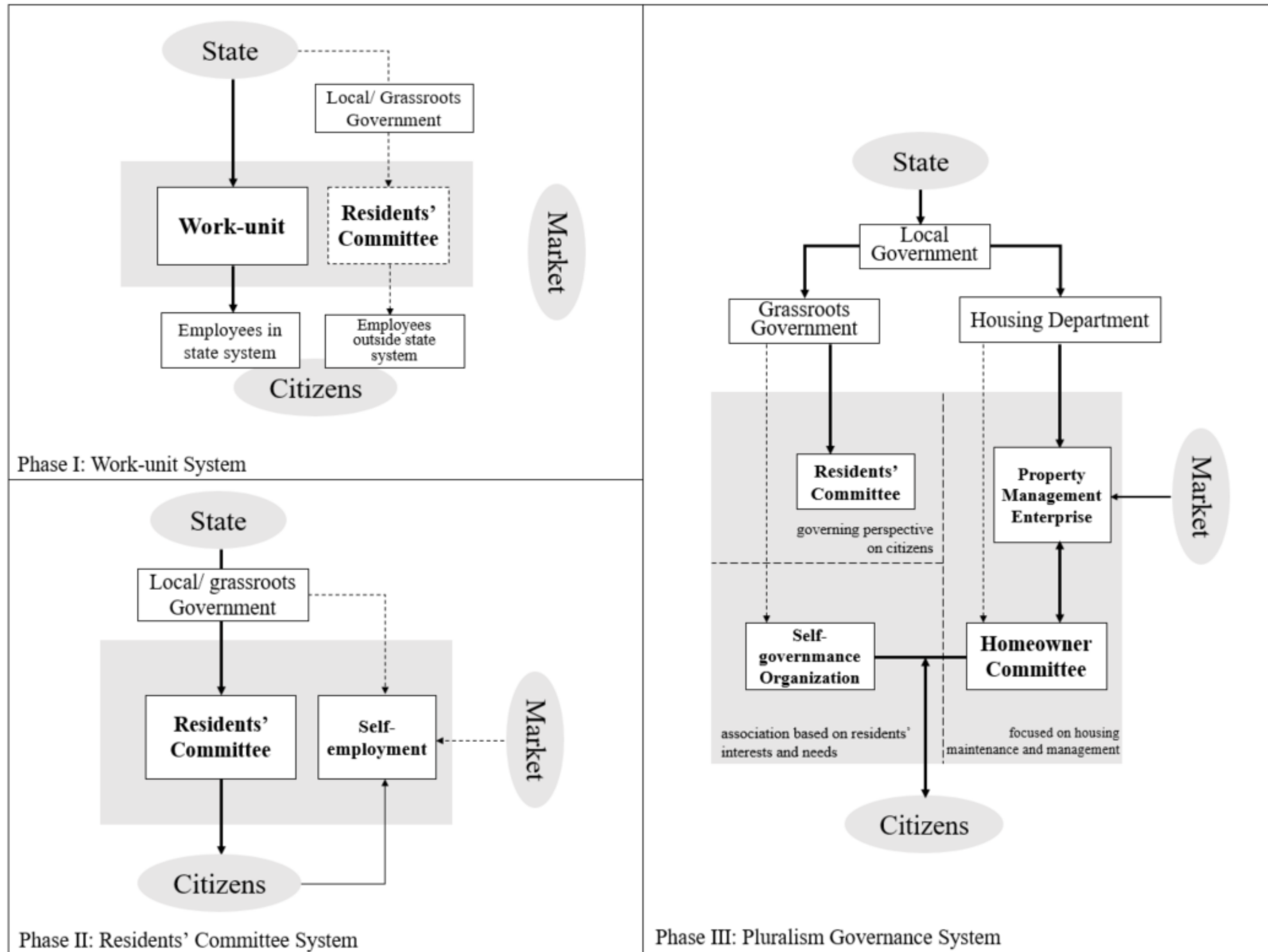
Cooperative landscape: Voluntary organization initiated by Tongji University for Shanghai community garden building  
Source: Tongji University (2018)

# **Homeowner Community and Market-oriented Provision for Public Goods**

## **Differentiated design principles and segregated urban space**

- Gated community
  - Club goods (Webster, 2002, 2003)
  - Public space occupied by private space (Giglia, 2008)
  - Devitalizing public space in streets (Song, 2010)
- Inner cities: mosaic city, collage of old and new
- Fragmented urban space (Falk, 2007)

# Discussion and Conclusion



# Discussion and Conclusion

- Community in China
  - Not inherently possess a mechanism for public goods provision
  - In accordance with administrative boundary
  - In charge of many administrative affairs
  - Manifest the will of authority
- Neighborhood governance in China
  - Strong government intervention
    - Pathologically diagnose for problems in community
    - Technically regulate neighborhood activities in community
    - Deliberately creat orderly built-environment and monotonous culture in community
  - A long way to go for self-governance



Hawker and residents in a Xi'an community, 21 March 2018

**THANKS!**  
Comments are welcome!

Mingrui Shen (申明锐)

shenmingr@nju.edu.cn

Nanjing University