



## Social differentiation and spatial mixture in a transitional city - Kunming in southwest China



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### ABSTRACT

Socio-spatial segregation, and particularly racial and ethnic segregation, has been extensively studied in the Western context but is less researched for Chinese cities, particularly those in less developed regions. The city of Kunming in remote southwest China is characterized by a transition from a socialist manufacturing center to a free market service economy and the strong presence of a diversity of ethnic groups. Kunming provides an opportunity to examine the similarities and disparities in the socio-spatial landscape compared to well-developed cities in China and other post-socialist contexts as well as those in the West. In this paper, population census data at the community level from 2000 together with its spatial boundary data are used to create 39 demographic, educational, occupational and housing variables for 431 communities. Principal component analysis, hierarchical clustering and spatial segregation indicators are combined in order to identify, classify and analyse the spatial segregation of diverse social groups. The study finds that, unusually for Chinese cities, ethnic minority and gender are significant factors, and it demonstrates that both spatial mixture and social differentiation simultaneously characterize Kunming.

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### 1. Introduction

Socio-spatial segregation has long been a focus of analysis in Western cities (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2013), such as the classical orientation of the Chicago school and its diverse foci on racial segregation, educational stratification and social division (Jenkins, Micklewright, & Schnepf, 2008; Massey & Denton, 1993). In recent years, it has also become the focus of analyses in new contexts characterized by fundamental political, economic and social transformations with implications for the spatial segregation of social groups during rapid urbanization. One key example is the post-socialist countries of the former Eastern Europe, where

geographers have attempted to assess the impact of the rapid marketization of society on urban social segregation (eg. Golubchikov, Badyina, & Makhrova, 2014).

Given the extraordinary growth in Chinese cities and the fundamental shifts in China's political economy, China is another key context in which these issues are being analysed (Gu, Wang, & Liu, 2005; Wu & He, 2005; Wu, Cheng, Chen, Hammel, & Wu, 2014). The substantial transformation of the Chinese economy since the beginning of free-market reforms has created one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding urban systems in the world. Studies of the larger and more developed cities in the east (notably Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Nanjing) have identified that socio-spatial differentiation is a feature of Chinese cities and is undergoing dynamic change as part of this urbanization (Gu et al., 2005; Li & Wu, 2008; Wang, Li, & Chai, 2012; Wu et al., 2014).

These studies suggest that such Chinese cities – those exhibiting a high degree of spatial segregation due to the two dominant processes of the impact of the planned economy and the

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subsequent ongoing transformation to a free-market economy - demonstrate a different model of socio-spatial segregation from Western cities. However, what remains little understood is 1) whether such patterns are also typical in other Chinese cities in less developed areas; 2) whether these patterns emerged in the same time frame; and 3) if they are not and did not, what are their unique characteristics compared to larger Chinese cities in more developed areas?

To provide an original contribution to these debates, this paper presents an analysis of socio-spatial segregation in Kunming in southwest China - a provincial capital in a relatively remote and less well developed region. The next section reviews key case studies of socio-spatial segregation in Chinese cities. Section Three describes the case study area, the data used and the analytical methods applied. Section Four presents the results of the analysis and interprets the patterns revealed. Section Five aims to develop a theoretical model based on the findings. The paper ends with some general conclusions on the implications of the findings for understanding segregation in Chinese cities more generally.

### 1.1. *Social differentiation and spatial mixing in transitional Chinese cities*

During over three decades of rapid growth, China has had to confront a restless, endogenous social stratification driven by neoliberal marketization. Wu (2003) argued that these neoliberal pro-growth practices caused social-spatial transformation characterized by social differentiation and geographical segregation. While a small number of newly-emerging urban rich took advantage of marketization and the transformation of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and Collective-Owned Enterprises (COEs) in the 1980s, a large proportion of their former employees became the jobless poor. At the same time, accelerated urbanization attracted new types of migrants, such as farm workers, rich mine owners and international immigrants.

Urban structure and morphology also changed but retained something of a mixed character as market-based urbanism reshaped an urban social geography based on the *danwei* system (Walks & Maaranen, 2008; Li, Hou, Chen, & Zhou, 2010; Wu et al., 2014; Li & Wu, 2008; Bray, 2005; Wu & Webster, 2010). Market-based urbanism involved a series of processes, which drove a complex mix of segregation and mixing. Urban sprawl produced suburbs with new residential areas, industrial zones and recreational parks. Many inner-city residents were either forcibly displaced by urban regeneration (Wu et al., 2014) or volunteered to move to suburbs to obtain more spacious housing and a more livable environment (a “rice-paddy” gentrification process - Waley, 2016). In a counter-process, many urban rich moved back to inner cities in a kind of revanchist urbanization, displacing inner-city blue collar workers from the bankrupt COEs and SOEs in the first wave of “slash-and-build” regeneration (particularly in large-sized coastal cities around the new millennium). Furthermore, some culture- or education-based gentrification appeared in inner cities without physical change in the built environment, eg. gentrified communities of artists or “jiaoyufiers” (Harris, 2012; Wu et al., 2014; Wu and Waley, 2017). Meanwhile, a large number of farmers moved into urban villages for work (Gu et al., 2005; Liu & Wu, 2006).

Therefore, at the new millennium, Chinese cities undergoing neoliberalist reform - from coastal areas to inland areas - more or less and sooner or later experienced this unprecedented social transformation (Wu, 2003). Both socio-economic stratification and its spatial disparity were spatio-temporally differentiated in the

transition period. Consequently, Chinese urbanization exhibited social change marked simultaneously by both differentiation and mixing.

In contrast to the four types of factors (discrimination, disadvantage, preferences, and social networks) identified as contributing to segregation in the Western context (Allen & Turner, 2012), transitional urban China demonstrated an inclusive complexity. This complexity is characterized by two sets of dual relationships between social stratification and social diversity and overall mixing but place-specific segregation at the local scale propelled by at least three sets of dialectic dual-structure forces.

First, segregation was shaped by the balance between the planned economy and market forces. The effect of socialist policies on the socio-spatial structure of Chinese cities is still significant (Madrado & van Kempen, 2012). The principle features of socialist-era urbanization are still present in most cities with *danwei* or work-unit housing and *hukou* status persisting as powerful forces in the housing market (Bray, 2005). Li and Wu (2008) highlighted the importance of socialist policies in shaping the socio-spatial structure of Shanghai in 2000 and Li et al. (2010) demonstrated that these forces were influential in the spatial structure of Guangzhou in 2000 which exhibited clear social area distinctions. However, the social-spatial structure of Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou were more shaped by neoliberal global forces and market power (Gu et al., 2005; Li & Wu, 2008; Li et al., 2010; Liu, Dijst, & Geertman, 2014). Thus, in contrast, in some contexts the increasing role of market forces created socio-spatial segregation in part through the power of the housing market (Wang & Murie, 2000) and in part through the strong pull force of urban growth fueled by the development of a free-market-based neoliberal economy.

Secondly, when housing became part of a real estate market, it also offered choice about a suitable location in which to live (Li & Wu, 2008). In-migrants, because of cultural exclusion or local people's resistance, or due to their self-identification and self-protection in cultural reproduction as well as daily experiences, may group together giving rise to urban enclaves both in the inner-cities and suburbs (Li, Ma, & Xue, 2009). Analogously, ethnic minorities also tend to live together for cultural reasons or self-identification when they move into new urban territory (Breitung, 2012; Gu et al., 2005), giving rise to different settlement patterns, e.g. ghettos or enclaves (Mallee & Pieke, 2014).

Thirdly, the urban mosaics were also reshaped by the mixture of in-migrants with residence with existing residents for whom *hukou* register reform in the later 1980s meant a loosening of residential control (Chan & Zhang, 1999). Thus, travel and interregional and intra-city migration became more possible. So, rural migrants swarmed into cities leading to the development of significant, identifiable and relatively poor segregated social areas in cities. This can be seen in the case of coastal-region cities, such as Beijing (Gu et al., 2005), Shanghai (Liu et al., 2014) and Nanjing (Wu et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the urban rich or dominant classes have gradually developed urban enclaves in traditional city-center or high-quality suburban residential zones and displaced the original poorer inhabitants.

Therefore, with respect to social differentiation and spatial patterns, some differences emerged between Chinese coastal-region, developed areas and inland, less-developed areas. Chinese social transformation demonstrates *regionalization* (Giddens, 1984), differentiation in geography, or a disparity in the path-dependence of space production.

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