Introduction: Locating gentrification in the Global East

Special issue: Locating gentrification in the Global East

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Abstract

This special issue, a collection of papers presented and debated at an Urban Studies Foundation- funded workshop on Global Gentrification in London in 2012, attempts to problematise contemporary understandings of gentrification, which is all too often confined to the experiences of the so-called Global North, and sometimes too narrowly understood as classic gentrification. Instead of simply confirming the rise of gentrification in places outside of the usual suspects of North America and Western Europe, a more open-minded approach is advocated so as not to over- generalise distinctive urban processes under the label of gentrification, thus understanding gentrification as constitutive of diverse urban processes at work. This requires a careful attention to the complexity of property rights and tenure relations, and calls for a dialogue between gentrification and non-gentrification researchers to understand how gentrification communicates with other theories to capture the full dynamics of urban transformation. Papers in this special issue have made great strides towards these goals, namely theorising, distorting, mutating and bringing into question the concept of gentrification itself, as seen from the perspective of the Global East, a label that we have deliberately given in order to problematise the existing common practices of grouping all regions other than Western European and North American ones into the Global South.

Keywords
Asia, gentrification, Global East, urbanisation, urbanism

Introduction

This special issue has grown out of the papers presented and discussions debated at a 2012 workshop on Global Gentrification in London, part of an event funded by the Urban Studies Foundation. The event brought together a number of early career and established scholars to critically engage with gentrification questions in Asia more widely. In this special issue we bring together as a set the East Asian cases: from the Tiger economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, the Tiger Cub economies of the Philippines and Indonesia, and the transitional economies of Mainland China and Vietnam. Located geographically proximate to each other in the same region, these countries display some shared experiences such as rapid urbanisation, export-oriented economic development and strong developmental states with authoritarian pasts or inclinations, yet the outcomes of their actual urbanisation and urban development are variegated due to their place-based geographical and historical specificities (e.g. transitional economies versus other capitalist late industrialisers). We group these cases together under the label Global East, a term we have used elsewhere in the introduction and conclusion to our recent edited volume on global gentrifications (Lees et al., 2015; see also Waley, 2015). We use this broad but encompassing term in order to refer to a geographical world region that shares a common historical past but equally importantly demonstrates some stark differences in terms of urbanisation and gentrification. This label- ling is designed to picture the Global East or East Asia as one homogeneous region; how- ever, we are mindful of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's (2007) call for pluralising Asia, which from a postcolonial perspective does not reduce the entire region to a homogeneous 'other', but understands it through its multiplicity of differences. Our use of the term Global East is deliberate; it is an attempt to problematise the existing common practices of grouping all regions other than Western European and North American ones into the Global South. As Paul Waley (2015) comments, '[t]he space created by the global East can be used to sidestep or better to deconstruct the dominant dualism of global North and global South'.

'Locating gentrification in the Global East' is not simply about confirming the rise of gentrification in places outside of the usual suspects of North America and Western Europe. It is also not to over- generalise distinctive urban processes under the label of gentrification. Recently, gentrification has become subject to an increasing degree of scrutiny among researchers and governments as well as in media. Among various forms of gentrification, new-build gentrification has been a relatively frequent theme to be explored in East Asia (e.g. He, 2010; He and Wu,2007; Lützeler,2008). The relationship between education and neighbourhood change has also been subject to some recent studies (e.g. Waley et al., 2015), while commercial gentrification has received steady attentions (e.g. Kim et al., 2010; Wang, 2011). The prevalence of urban redevelopment activities in East Asian cities in recent decades often propels researchers to explore the relationship between redevelopment and gentrification (e.g. Fujitsuka, 2015; Ha, 2004; He and Wu, 2007; Lim et al., 2013; Roderos, 2013; Shin, 2009a; Wong, 2006), although redevelopment often turns out to be a more preferred term to gentrification (see Ley and Teo, 2014). We aim to build upon this accumulated knowledge, but at the same time we are aware that until recently, the

gentrification literature has been overly preoccupied with the identification of particular forms of gentrification without pay- ing adequate attention to how gentrification interacts with other urban processes. In this special issue, as in our recently published edited volume on global gentrifications, we adhere to a more open-minded approach, which understands gentrification as constitutive of diverse urban processes at work. Gentrification can be an established and influential urban process that affects the life chances of local inhabitants in one place, whilst in other places it might simply be a subsidiary, nascent process at work in tandem with other urban processes. Contributors to this special issue attempt to situate gentrification amongst multiple urban processes simultaneously at work in East Asia.

The papers in this special issue, therefore, give consideration to the historicity of urban development, and the contributors have been reminded to critically revisit the very Anglo-American 'geography of gentrification'. Unlike much other work on gentrification in East Asia, this collection avoids the assumption that gentrification is simply 'expanding' towards the Global East (periphery) through colonisation or one-way policy transfer, as if it is an imported new phenomenon that builds upon emerging real estate markets. Indeed, this special issue and our forthcoming book Planetary Gentrification (Lees et al., 2016) opens up the possibility that gentrification has been taking place in various guises outside of the West. We are mindful of Eric Clark's (2005) proclamation that we should not confuse the coining of 'gentrification' by Ruth Glass with its origin. It may also be possible that only the systematic and social scientific observation of these pro- cesses is something new, but not the actual phenomena themselves. Furthermore, while Neil Smith referred to gentrification as one of the three key characteristics of contemporary geo-economics under neoliberal states, it may also be possible to theorise that gentrification itself is a function of capitalist states of all disguises rather than simply a function of neoliberal states. The experiences in non-Western contexts deserve careful attention, and the East Asia region, with all its differences and complexities, serves as a primary test site for these enquiries in this special issue.

Conceptualising gentrification: Generality versus particularity

Recently, gentrification has been subject to criticism for its limited consideration of the divergent urban processes that produce dis- placement and dispossession. For some, this has provoked another turn away from gentrification studies, and the ditching of a 'gentrification' framework in the discussion of urban processes outside of the Global North. But these differentially problematic critiques somehow envision a prototype of gentrification built on an imagined western model of gentrification (see e.g. Maloutas, 2012). That is, the critiques launched are based on the cultural association of gentrification with a particular time and space related to its earlier coining and conceptualisation. They refer primarily to what is known to be classic gentrification. The etymology 'gentry' is singled out as evidence for the inability of 'gentrification' as a concept to travel across cultural boundaries; for gentry is a class category that is too specific to England and the term is therefore susceptible to poor translation into other languages (see Lees, 2012: 157–158 for the different concepts employed in countries other than Britain). It is a problem even within the West, as this 'narrative' cannot be translated into Western countries other than England/Britain. But it has been! Indeed critics working in and on non-usual gentrification suspects will always find

aspects that are not captured by classic gentrification, and so it is far too easy to use such aspects as sources of contention to argue against the effectiveness of gentrification as a social scientific concept. We are all familiar with the ridiculing outcry 'not gentrification again', resonating with the similar frustration: 'is everything neoliberal'.

> In formulating a definition of the city it is necessary to exercise caution in order to avoid identifying urbanism as a way of life with any specific locally or historically conditioned cultural influences which, while they may significantly affect the specific character of the community, are not the essential determinants of its character as a city. (Wirth, 1938: 7)

Louis Wirth in his writing on cities and urbanism provides a telling story of how we are to carry out abstraction based on comparative studies of cities. By bringing together 'different types of cities' and identifying 'essential characteristics' they may 'have in common as social entities' (Wirth, 1938: 7), a definition of the city is drawn for him. Comparative studies of gentrification provide a similar opportunity for us to define what gentrification is about and to be able to distinguish particularity from generality, a thought-process that is analogous to the ways in which Karl Marx was making a distinction between commodity-form and value-form (Merrifield, 2014: 6). As Eric Clark pointed out, '[a]bstractions based on non-necessary relations lead to chaotic conceptions' (2005: 258). One major achievement of comparative scholarship on gentrification in recent years is the abstraction of gentrification from conjunctural factors, contesting a decades-long 'time–space delineation' that associated gentrification with a particular point in time and space, that is, inner London in the 1960s during the time of Ruth Glass's investigation into neighbourhood change. We have moved far from that time and place, and come to understand that gentrification as a concept refers to the commodification of space accompanying land use changes in such a way that it produces indirect/direct/physical/symbolic dis- placement of existing users and owners by more affluent groups. Conceptualised in this way, it is only logical to think of various conjunctural factors that produce particular forms of gentrification in around the globe. Furthermore, it is also logical to understand that the gentrification process is conjoined by other processes in order to ensure the facilitation of this transformation, including the use of police forces to suppress resistance, the co-optation of opposition forces, and the imposition of dominant ideologies on subordinate classes. And, these are processes not just seen in countries belonging to regions outside of the so-called Global North, but currently happening in the Global North too, as the state-led gentrification and social cleansing of public housing and the poor attests to (see Lees, 2014a, 2014b).

Nevertheless, locating gentrification in non-Western contexts still faces numerous challenges, for commodification of space is a process that is manifested in a variegated way. As testified by contributors to this special issue, such commodification may hap- pen in peri-urban areas in a fast-growing metropolitan region such as Bandung City, Indonesia (Hudalah et al., 2014), in historic city centres with the presence of rich heritage sites (Chang, 2014; Jou et al., 2014), or in former urbanised villages in new central business districts (Shin, 2015). Not only existing buildings with formal titles but also informal properties or properties constrained by, for example, the legacy of socialist ownership may be subject to commodification, often in a selective way to suit the purpose of accumulation and beautification (Choi, 2014; La Grange and Pretorius, 2014; Shin, 2015; Yip and Tran,

2015). The diversity of such processes requires us to acknowledge the complexities of land and housing tenure or property relations that can be found in each locality. And these complexities are very much prevalent in the Global North too, hence the importance of not associating a particular form of gentrification such as slum gentrification with the Global South only (see Lees et al., 2015, 2016).

Such complexities may operate to prevent gentrification from becoming a dominant force in a given place: this can happen, for instance, by the presence of heavily fragmented (formal or informal) property rights, acting as insurmountable constraints on converting properties into marketable commodities. Slums such as Dharavi in Mumbai may experience precarious durability (Weinstein 2014), and it may take a much longer time for Dharavi to be subject to slum gentrification, if it ever occurs, than the gentrification of slums elsewhere (e.g. in South Korea; see Chapter 6 in Lees et al., 2016). At the same time, (urban) spaces are always subject to uneven development. As such, it is possible that other places with more formal property relations in a city known to experience pre- valence of informal land and housing tenure are seeing the intrusion of real estate capital and affluent classes taking over properties from poorer populations. This process of uneven commodification of space appears to be an experience shared by many cities introduced in this special issue.

The rising importance of gentrification, in the face of those who wish to turn away from 'gentrification', lies perhaps in the fact that it is the rise of real estate that brings to the fore the importance of capital investment in the built environment, which leads to changes in land use and the composition of residing inhabitants. When we discuss urban processes to identify the on-going dominant processes, who captures the benefits of land revalorisation becomes the key site of contention. It is the fetishisation of real estate commodities and the use of real estate investment as a driver of urban socio-spatial change, resulting in the exclusive use of new spaces for more affluent middle or upper class groups, at the expense of, and exploit- ing the use value held by, lower and working class populations. This process has made gentrification central to urban research since the late twentieth century in particular.

In this special issue we argue that the complexity of property rights and tenure relations cannot be taken as a justification to throw overboard 'gentrification' both as a concept and as a process. As López-Morales (2015: 571) noted recently, 'both a useful and generic gentrification theory and a rent gap theory have much to offer given the increasingly ferocious land and housing mar- kets evident in many developing economies of the global South'. We understand that actually existing gentrification takes multiple forms, thus our labelling of global gentrifications, as gentrification conjoins with local accumulation processes, institutional landscapes, social relations and political struggles, for this is how commodification of space occurs in the real world. Gentrification and non-gentrification researchers alike need to be reminded of these complexities and the simultaneous presence of multiple processes and to have mutual dialogues (e.g. development geographers with researchers, and so on).

Gentrification, public discourse and political mobilisation

In East Asia, until fairly recently, the term 'gentrification' has not been subject to much public debate, and relatively few academic outputs utilising gentrification theory have appeared; those that have tended to follow Anglo-American models and discussions. Within East Asia, more frequently utilised expressions in both the media and academic circles include those that can be loosely translated into 'renewal', 'redevelopment' or 'regeneration'. When referring to the negative impacts of urban projects, expressions such as 'eviction' and 'forced demolition' have been more readily used. To this extent, gentrification as a concept had, until recently, a limited impact on forming a critical discourse among academics, grassroots organisations and activists. By way of comparison, in the Latin American region use of the term 'gentrification' is increasingly inter- twined with the discourses of social activists and policymakers (see López-Morales et al., forthcoming). In the face of this, the papers in this special issue underline the usefulness of 'gentrification' as a critical conceptualisation of urban processes in the Global East.

In places such as Hong Kong, a former city-state that experienced large-scale clearance of squatter settlements, extensive public housing schemes and the domination of commercial real estate projects (Smart, 2006), classic gentrification as revealed by Ruth Glass does not exist. As Ley and Teo (2014) have argued, it is only when we abstract from the particularities associated with regional/historical variances of gentrification and focus on the key characteristics (of value extraction from land and resulting displacement) that we begin to see the operation of urban processes that bring our attention to gentrification. It is in this regard that La Grange and Pretorius (2014) also argue that the inner-city redevelopment of Hong Kong facilitated by the state agency of urban Renewal Authority has produced gentrification, although it has taken place more selectively and is an incomplete, on-going process.

Other Asian countries, such as South Korea and China, have seen the prevalence of wholesale clearance and reconstruction as the main mode of property-led urban redevelopment for many decades, long before such processes were conceptualised as 'new-build' gentrification in the West (see Davidson and Lees, 2005, 2010, on 'new-build gentrification'). It is important to understand that large-scale, wholesale demolition and reconstruction of entire neighbourhoods has become the norm for urban neighbourhood change. Seoul, for instance, has experienced the so-called 'joint redevelopment pro- gramme' from its inception in 1983 (Ha, 2004). In Beijing and Shanghai, China, wholesale demolition and redevelopment has also become prevalent since the 1990s, when the real estate sector attracted both domestic and foreign capital under state directives. If gentrification was only understood in its classic sense among researchers in East Asia or associated with only gradual incremental changes over time (e.g. Kim et al., 2010; Kim and Nam, 1998; Qiu, 2002), such practices of urban redevelopment would have fallen short of being identified as gentrification. Instead, they bear a strong resemblance to contemporary state-led, 'new-build' gentrification in Western cities. In this regard, Shin and Kim (2015) emphasise the historicity of such processes, which took place before the neoliberalisation of the country, locating gentrification as part of a more intrinsic and endogenous urban process that has characterised Seoul's urban development and its high-density reconstruction.

With the mounting pressure of domicide due to reasons of urban beautification, real estate speculation or the securitisation of the home as an asset (Porteous and Smith, 2001; Shao, 2013; Shin, 2014), the struggle for defending one's own home and for collective consumption becomes a paramount urban question (Merrifield, 2014), which requires a concerted effort to produce alliances that go beyond a given geographical boundary. Despite this, some scholars, even those advocating a critical approach to urban studies, that we have come across at various conferences and meetings, are against the use of 'gentrification' outside the Global North, preferring use of 'urban renewal', 'urban regeneration' or 'urban redevelopment' in lieu of gentrification. Their reasoning is that these expressions are more encompassing, allowing gentrification as well as non- gentrification processes to be considered. We argue against such a proposition, for those same expressions are often mobilised by political and business elites to package their actions in value-neutral terms and to present profit-maximising and self-fulfilling political actions as positive policies for existing residents (see Lees et al., 2008). We understand the destruction of neighbourhoods and communities to have significant detrimental impacts on the lives of local (often poor, marginalised or less powerful) residents, by break- ing their social networks and damaging their social capital. As Ray Forrest (2015) points out, 'using gentrification processes as the analytical lens places class at the centre of the analysis – or at least it should do if it is being deployed correctly'. As far as bottom-up struggles around collective consumption are concerned, gentrification is a politically effective concept that brings together people from around the world, who are suffering from the threats of eviction due to their areas being put into a higher and better use for extracting exchange value. We return to this point in the concluding discussion.

Locating gentrification as part of multiple urban processes at work

As Ley and Teo (2014: 1296) summarise, gentrification is thought to be a 'conceptual category that provides a critical edge and some theoretical coherence to physical and social change incorporating eviction, displacement, demolition and redevelopment'. Nevertheless, it is important to probe the ways in which gentrification communicates with other theories to capture the full dynamics of urban transformation. Critics may argue that a city is gentrifying on the basis of one case, while other cases from the city may contradict this. Finding out which processes are becoming more dominant needs to be based on a more structural understanding of the political economy of a city and of the country in which cities are positioned. By definition, gentrification entails displacement, which suggests that displaced residents may contribute to densification of other equivalently affordable neighbourhoods proximate to or afar from their original neighbourhood (see e.g. Shin,

2008). Concurrent development of a low-rise neighbourhood's densification could be seen as a simultaneous non-gentrifying process. Peter Marcuse's (1986) discussion of exclusionary displacement also demonstrates the need of going beyond the neighbourhood scale for gentrification research. The gentrification literature often focuses on a single case study that involves a highly localised, contextual understanding of neighbourhood transition, but without adequate connection with wider urban processes. Therefore, before coming to an a priori conclusion that gentrification has a limited or extensive presence in an East Asian city, it is recommended to go beyond the neighbourhood scale (e.g. Shin and

Kim, 2015), possibly examining multiple cases in a comparative manner (Ren and Luger, 2014).

The approach advocated in this special issue is to pay attention to wider urban processes, and for urban theories to speak to each other in order to highlight and critically examine the implications of an urban phenomenon such as neighbourhood redevelopment in a rich, multifaceted way. For instance, high- lighting the scale of development-induced displacement facilitated by infrastructure projects in Manila, the Philippines, Choi (2014) explains how landed elites possess power to promote private development to create exclusive spaces, and how informal occupation of urban land and residents' informal nature of employment propel such residents to face multiple vulnerabilities including chances of direct and indirect displacement. She further hints at the possibility of how infrastructure construction may contribute to future elevation of property values in adjacent neighbourhoods, which in turn may prompt gentrification (see also Lees et al., 2016, Chapter 7, on the relationship between gentrification and infrastructure construction). This highlights the importance of not only having a longer-term perspective when investigating urban processes, but also going beyond the immediate boundary of urban changes to examine knock-on effects.

Furthermore, as Shin (2015) highlights with regard to mainland China in transition from a planned economy to a market economy, public assets including public housing have been subject to dispossession by local states. Some properties held by former villagers and their collectives may also remain informal, and be positioned outside the formal real estate market. This is due to the legacy of socialist planning and its persistent disjoint from the expanding housing and land market. While fragmented property rights often act as a barrier to the commodification of urban space, entrepreneurial local states as de facto landowners (Hsing, 2010; Shin, 2009b) resort to their state power to help expropriate properties from existing users and owners, and turn them into commodities for further accumulation. In this context, the process of expropriating real estate properties and existing users' property rights could be understood by utilising the theory of 'accumulation by dispossession' (see e.g. Glassman, 2006; Harvey, 2005, 2006). In the broader context of Chinese cities' urbanisation and urban accumulation, this process of dispossession of people's rights and their properties acts as a precursor to a gentrification that leads to the displacement of local residents who lose their decades-long attachment to residential spaces and social net- works. The process of commodification and class re-making of existing space can be broadly termed as 'gentrification', but the marriage between the theory of 'accumulation by dispossession' and 'gentrification' allows us to delineate the particularities of socialist and post-socialist relations and the specificities of the (post-)socialist state in its role to intervene in urban socio-spatial restructuring (see Shin, 2015; see also Wu, 2015).

In the context of seeing a fundamental political economic transition, historic legacies may continue to exert influence on urban development trajectories (path dependency), while new innovations and the inclusion of new domestic/foreign actors create a break from the past (path breaking). McGee (2009) discusses the hybridity of city-making based on the combination of socialist and capitalist modes of production in times of transition. If urban spaces are subject to different forces, they would also go through variegated experiences of

transformation. As a transitional economy Vietnam is seeing a more controlled approach to city centre redevelopment and the relocation of its residents. As Yip and Tran (2015) argue, Hanoi's contemporary urban redevelopment has not produced extensive (direct) displacement due to the fact that it has focused largely on brownfield sites, faced the complex structure of property ownership (as a socialist legacy), and witnessed weak state capacity. Hanoi's residents have also staged 'persistent and relentless struggles to claim their legal rights' (Yip and Tran, 2015, this issue), thus resulting in a heavier emphasis on local residents' re-housing. The characteristics of Hanoi's urban redevelopment prompts them to claim that gentrification may not be applicable to the analysis of contemporary urban changes in Hanoi's city centre, but they prefer not to rule out the possibility of gentrification looming over the city in the future when real estate redevelopment is seemingly likely to become more predatory, accompanied by the potential weakening of the protection of residents' rights.

The nexus between the state and the capital

In his afterword to the third edition of Uneven Development, the late Neil Smith (1984/2008) identified three key features associated with the rise of geoeconomics, seen from the perspective of neoliberal globalism. One of his key features was the rise of gentrification as 'a global urban strategy', facilitated by the neoliberal transformation of the state. This coincided with the thesis of other researchers who also wanted to demonstrate the global reach of gentrification in recent years in the context of neoliberalisation around the world (e.g. Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). The rise of new-build and state-led gentrification from the mid-2000s in the UK and North America was also dis- cussed in the context of the increasing influence of neoliberal states (Davidson and Lees, 2005, 2010; Hackworth and Smith, 2001). As such, the question of the state and its neoliberal transformation is paramount in contemporary understandings of how gentrification unfolds. The importance of the state is emphatically put forward by Loïc Wacquant (2008: 202) who suggests that 'the primary engine behind the (re)allocation of people, resources and institutions in the city is the state', arguing that critics have paid less attention to 'the crucial role of the state in producing not only space but the space of consumers and producers of housing'.

This special issue examines the extent to which gentrification has emerged from or been hidden behind the context of condensed urbanisation in Asian developmental states, taking a more nuanced understanding of the neoliberalisation of the state and its relation- ship with gentrification (Park et al., 2012; see also Jou et al., 2014; Shin and Kim, 2015). Studies on the Global East allow us to address this shortfall in existing studies, and to understand how gentrification can be part of urbanisation and urban accumulation strategies. While scholars have paid attention to geographical contingencies and to the contextual understanding of gentrification, there is a greater scope for gentrification researchers to take into account the political economics of urban development in non-Western cities and in particular in the Global East. East Asian states have dis- played a strong presence in the economy and society, often displaying militaristic, authoritarian characteristics (Leftwich, 1995; Park et al., 2012; Woo-Cumings, 1999). For a long period, liberal democracies were con- trolled or hindered in order to facilitate mobilisation of available resources for economic development and political gains. Economic prosperity through an export- oriented economy and

investment in fixed assets was supported by the exercise of state power to coalesce and suppress oppositional voices. Asian states addressed their own legitimacy through a particularistic combination of selective/productivist welfare pro- grammes and brutal suppression of civil societies (Castells, 1992; Holliday, 2000). These are manifested in the way displacement is handled in times of urban restructuring, and in the way existing dilapidated (squatter/informal/formal) settlements were subject to upgrading, clearance and redevelopment. Asian states in the course of condensed urbanisation and industrialisation have also made efforts to take care of the politics of displacement, often resorting to the use of violence and co-optation strategies to ensure clean sites are acquired for capital (re-)investment (Shin, 2015; Watson, 2011).

Furthermore, this special issue provides a viewpoint that differs from the usual arguments on state-led gentrification in the Western context. Unlike the return of the state in times of neoliberal roll-out statism throughout the 1990s in particular, spear- heading state-led mega-projects and easing regulations to help finance speculative real estate projects (see Smith, 2002), East Asian states, especially Tiger economies, have been strongly intervening in and guiding the channelling of surplus capital, purposefully, into the built environment. And, this is not necessarily as a result of the neoliberalisation of the economies in the region but as part of state building, urbanisation and industrialisation under developmental stat- ism (see Lees et al., 2016). These processes have been supported by strong authoritarian states that have worked closely with, for example, the popular sector and foreign cap- ital in Singapore, large capitalists known as chaebols in South Korea, small and medium capitalists in Taiwan, large conglomerates in Japan having its origin in zaibatsu during the imperial era, and capital-owning classes under the Suharto regime in Indonesia (McCormack, 1995; Park, 1998; Robison, 1988; Woo-Cumings, 1999). State socialism in Vietnam and mainland China essentially fused the state and businesses together to create the state sector during the socialist era, which continues to exert influence upon contemporary urban development practices.

Nevertheless, it should also be pointed out that more recent experiences have witnessed changes to the political economic configurations of the East Asian economies. Democratisation, decentralisation and liberalisation have taken place, albeit in a variegated way. For instance, mainland China's transition to a market economy has taken place under the relatively strong leadership of the Party State, while local states are given a certain degree of negotiated autonomy in terms of making decisions on land use and urban development projects (Shin, 2015). This is in contrast with the situations in Vietnam, which is thought to display fragmented state power and weak administrative capacity (Yip and Tran, 2015). Indonesia, after its democratisation, is known to exhibit 'institutional gaps', produced by a fragile regional government structure (Hudalah et al., 2014). In Taiwan, the neoliberalisation of its authoritarian developmental state, coupled with democratisation after the end of nearly four-decade-long martial law, has arguably weakened the tie between the national and local governments, driving local governments to be increasingly entrepreneurial in their pursuit for economic and real estate development (Jou et al., 2014). In the Philippines, landed elites continue to exert strong influence on planning and out- come of urban development (Choi, 2014). The need of contextualising such variegated

political economies makes us become cautious about seeing gentrification as a simple tale of neo-colonial global process as Atkinson and Bridge (2005) did. It is important to view actually existing gentrification processes as both historical and contextual, rather than created and imposed by external forces. Hence, any discussion of gentrification in the West that misses out the role of the state needs to be reminded about how gentrification has shaped East Asian countries, where interventionist states have been guiding the societal and economic developments for much of their development trajectory and have mutated over time vis-à-vis pressures of democratisation, neoliberalisation and other political economic conjunctures.

An interesting commonality that has emerged from some of the case studies in this special issue is the control of state-owned land as key assets. Hong Kong, Singapore, China and Vietnam all envisage the dominance of state land-ownership in urbanised areas. Taiwan is also an economy that sees a heavy presence of the state in land owner- ship (e.g. military ownership of key sites in cities). The presence of large-scale public housing programmes in Singapore and Hong Kong, supported by their extensive public transport network and dense living environment, is also argued to be minimising resistance to displacement in times of redevelopment (Ley and Teo, 2014). According to La Grange and Pretorius (2014), Hong Kong has seen the presence of affordable housing stocks and a lesser degree of social segregation in the city centre, but they argue that this situation is gradually changing, as the city centre is subject to state-led gentrification in order to reap land/tax revenues for the Hong Kong state and profits for real estate developers whose presence has been influential for much of Hong Kong's recent history (see Haila, 2000). Chang (2014) also provides a similar account of the state's power in controlling and constraining more autonomous forms of artistic inhabitation in heritage sites. Here, power is attributed to the Singaporean state's control of state land assets in addition to its authoritarian political culture. Mainland China is not an exception in this regard, as Shin (2015) explains: state control of urban land assets and the reform of land administration has turned entrepreneurial urban governments into de facto landlords (see also Shin, 2009b). Mainland Chinese cities are perhaps far more advanced in terms of wielding their power to remove socialist legacies in terms of creating vibrant property markets, but this process has come about due to the state exercising its power to bring properties into the market domain through the dispossession of people's rights. What has become increasingly problematic in China's large-scale redevelopment is the displacement of ineligible private tenants, most of whom are migrant workers and their family members who go through socio- economic constraints and exclusionary experiences on a daily basis.

Conclusion

In this special issue, we have tried hard to make sure not to 'read gentrification in the Global South as simply the recreation of the periphery (the urban South) in the image of the supposed centre (London or New York)' (Lees, 2012: 158). The special issue is an attempt to problematise our own under- standings of gentrification, which is all too often confined to the experiences of the so-called Global North, and sometimes too narrowly understood as classic gentrification by other scholars, often coming from a post- colonial perspective. We agree with Roy (2009) and Robinson (2011) when they argue for a sort of free theory

travelling and construction. We also appreciate their call to deconstruct and reconstruct theory from the South, and for academics from the North to be humble enough to incorporate theory- making from the South. The contributors to, and editors of, this special issue have made great strides towards these goals, namely theorising, distorting, mutating and bringing into question the concept of gentrification itself, as seen from the perspective of the Global East. In so doing this special issue contributes to global debates and provides insightful interpretations of gentrification that might be useful to scholars from the North as well.

While we acknowledge and agree with the importance of provincialising urban theories and decentring urban theory-making (Chakrabarty, 2000; McFarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Roy, 2009), we also call for the importance of entering into a healthier dialogue between gentrification researchers and post-colonial researchers. Instead of downplaying the usefulness of gentrification as a concept for those places experiencing informal land-markets or fragmented property relations (e.g. peri-urban or outer rural spaces) (see Ghertner, 2015), it is important to have a longer-term perspective and under- stand how existing constraints are often dealt with by the state to clear the pathway to gentrification. Indeed, as La Grange and Pretorius (2014) acknowledge, the gentrification story remains incomplete. In Hong Kong, uncertainties loom over the city in terms of continuing with its current practices of heavy reliance on land sale for the government's revenue generation combined with developers' profit-making through new-build gentrification. Property assets have contributed to the widening social inequality in Hong Kong, and large-scale redevelopment projects are facing an increasing degree of public discontents. In Manila, Choi (2014) refers to the possibility of the gentrification of informal settlements as a result of infrastructure upgrading, prompting us to question the relationship between development-induced displacement and gentrification. Yip and Tran (2015) also take a reserved position about the future of Hanoi's redevelopment practices, as they anticipate the possibility of new-build gentrification if and when predatory pursuit of profits takes over from a more equitable social agenda.

We also retain our opening position that gentrification as a critical conceptualisation remains useful. There is so much to learn from each other's experiences in order to explore more effective strategies to fight threats of displacement. For instance, Taipei, which is reportedly subject to revanchist urban policies may learn from Seoul or Hong Kong, which provide public housing as part of in-kind compensation schemes for eligible displacees. However, Seoul's experience also provides a telling story of how the provision of public housing as a fruit of struggles against the state could lead to the co-optation of displacees' movements (Shin and Kim, 2015). In fact, the case reported by Jou et al. (2014, this issue) further suggests that neighbourhoods as sites of emancipatory and progressive politics could easily be usurped by financial and property capital if 'the singular principal power of landed developer interests' are not disciplined. The experience of former villagers in Guangzhou is another telling story of how important it is for inhabitants to have full control of the neighbourhood redevelopment process instead of being pushed over by the coalition between the local state, the developer and the village collective (Shin, 2015). Hudalah et al. (2014) also emphasise the importance of scrutinising the nature of Indonesia's growth

coalition, arguing that while the country's democratic transition helped the government to consider a populist coalition with both capitalists and villagers, the government–capitalist nexus had an upper hand in order to achieve their common aim of reaping benefits from gentrification. In this regard, Vietnamese residents in Hanoi (Yip and Tran, 2015) have a lot to learn from their neighbouring economies in order not to lose their collective bargaining power that has helped hinder gentrification so far.

Moreover, the usefulness of introducing the concept of gentrification to a place where urbanisation and redevelopment does not mobilise gentrification as an analytical concept lies in the capacity of 'gentrification' to be used as a powerful discourse of socio- political mobilisation across national bound- aries (Lees, 2014c, forthcoming). It enables local inhabitants of one place/country to be readily connected with those in another place/country, realising that their fate of dis- placement in the midst of real estate speculation is not a singular experience but something that is shared by people around the country and across the world. In East Asia in particular, such solidarity across boundaries provides a possibility for effective resistance against the aggressive power of the state and capital to extract exchange value from land and housing, a key characteristic of urbanisation and urban development in the Global East repeatedly emphasised in this special issue. Indeed, from the contributed papers, we come to understand that the fate of former villagers in Guangzhou (Shin, 2015) and of slum dwellers in Seoul (Shin and Kim, 2015) mirrors that of Taipei's inner-city residents (Jou et al., 2014) and of Hong Kong's residents living in dilapidated buildings subject to state-led new-build gentrification (La Grange and Pretorius, 2014). They have all faced the threat of displacement and of losing their right to stay put in the midst of the conversion of their properties into a higher and better use, while their tenure security saw a varying degree of protection reflecting variegated trajectories of regulatory practices and historic struggles. Such accumulation strategies have been central to these economies (and elsewhere in the Global East too) and to the retention of power by their political and economic elites. It is in this regard that local inhabitants' struggle against gentrification and displacement, and by extension their fight for collective consumption, has an immediate political significance.

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