Gentrification in East Asian cities

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The geographies of gentrification in East Asia

Gentrification was initially coined in 1960s as a critique of unequal urban processes in North London, which involved the transformation of working-class neighbourhoods into more affluent ones while displacing existing residents. Following subsequent gatherings of international and comparative studies, gentrification has come to take on a more generic definition, that is, theclass remake of urban space involving displacement. This remake of urban space mutates across time and space, thus involving displacement. This remake of urban space, that is, the class remake of urban space involved the transformation of working-class from the 1980s together gave rise to new-prevalence of neoliberal urban policies advancement of financialisation and the favourable to gentrification. While the consumption (especially, of the social housing with the commodification of collective places into tourist attractions.

While small-scale individual entrepreneurs become gentrifiers in this process, it is the arrival of real estate capital and speculative interests, which bring about profound commercial changes that create irreversible damages to the lives of local communities. Like all other urban processes, gentrification in East Asia unfolds across geographies in an uneven way. As expressed elsewhere, when studying gentrification, there is a need to ‘belong’ to a more open-minded approach, which understands gentrification as constitutive of diverse urban processes at the same time a more dominant urban process in a given place, while it may remain less influential or even embryonic somewhere else. The variety of urban agglomerations in East Asia attract investments that fuel the sustenance of real estate interests and hence a mix of new-build and commercial gentrification, other more regional cities may experience stagnation or shrinking selective engagement in commercial gentrification and touristification in pockets of scenic attractions. Upon examining gentrifications in East Asia, what is more important than the identification of gentrification in a given locality is to critically explore in which circumstances gentrification has become part of aspirational urbanism, as a state policy and strategy aimed at remaking cities in the imagination of the rich and powerful.

Finally, countering gentrification in East Asia is quite a challenge, not just because of the heavy presence of the state that often displayed authoritarian characteristics including the use of violence to suppress protesters, but also because of the persistent culture of property built on a kind of social-economic influence brought about by real estate investments. The hegemony of property creates particularistic discourses and ideologies that are built on individual property ownership, undermining struggles that call for collective control of property assets or the protection of tenants’ right to stay put. Nevertheless, as witnessed by a recent wave of urban contestations in Taiwan and Hong Kong, there is a potential to overcome the property hegemony in East Asia, perhaps in the way the democratic movements in South Korea were able to overthrow authoritarian governments in the past and more recently.

Notes


4 See Lützeler, R. 2006. ‘Population increase and ‘new-build gentrification’ in central Tokyo (Yamamachi 420-200).’ Social Science in Japan 53(3):471-489


10 Ip, I-c. 2017. ‘State, class and capital: Gentrification on a redevelopment project in Hong Kong,’ Critical Sociology DOI:10.1177/0143207X17715087


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