Beyond displacement: the co-existence of newcomers and local residents in the process of tourism gentrification in China

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Abstract:

The arrival of an increasing number of newcomers to rural areas has contributed to rural tourism gentrification, the sustainable development of which requires the co-existence of gentrifiers and local residents. While current research in gentrification and tourism studies highlights one-way power relations – highlighting the privileged position of either newcomers or local residents, few scholars have explored the more complex power relations between them. To address that gap, this study explores how Rural Tourism Makers (RTMs), a group of middle-class urbanites who lead the process of rural tourism gentrification in China, negotiate to co-exist with local residents. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, the study captures a holistic picture of the relationships between RTMs and local residents in the Chinese context, which goes beyond direct displacement. Although RTMs have brought indirect displacement to local residents, local people have not become victims of rural tourism gentrification. Instead, they benefit from rural tourism development opportunities. Meanwhile, RTMs have compromised to adapt to the *Renqing* society in rural China, in which local residents are supported by a strong social network. The findings demonstrate new forms of indirect displacement and respond to the specifics of rural places in tourism gentrification studies in rural China.

Keywords: Rural tourism gentrification, displacement, host-guest relationship, local residents, newcomers, China

Introduction

The arrival of an increasing number of newcomers to rural areas in the form of gentrifiers, lifestyle migrants and migrant tourism entrepreneurs has contributed to rural gentrification and the intensification of local political issues (Halfacre, 2018; Qu, McCormick, & Funck, 2020; Woods, 2007). A recent national policy launched by the Chinese National Tourism Administration coined a new term, Rural Tourism Makers (RTMs) to describe a new group of urban-rural migrants (GONTA, 2015). Although the policy document does not provide a clear definition of RTMs, it offers examples of people who could potentially be considered as RTMs, such as "graduates, urban-rural return migrants, professional artists, and teams of young entrepreneurs". By encouraging these groups to settle in rural areas that have rich rural tourism resources, a good foundation for tourism development, and shows a promising trend of rural tourism development (termed as RTM Model Base), local governments aim to create

an innovative rural tourism development model. The practices of RTMs, mainly involving the creating of *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural studios, have led to rural tourism gentrification to an extent, as documented in Hines' (2010) research, as middle-class RTMs' cultural projects have led to the expansion of class-cultural space that caters to tourists with similar tastes. RTMs are therefore defined as rural tourism gentrifiers who share the middle-class position and consumption preferences of rural gentrifiers, and who contribute significantly to the production of a gentrified rural landscape that forms a basis for tourism development (Hines, 2010).

As newcomers and local residents do not always share similar values, the potential for conflict can result in detrimental effects on sustainable tourism development (Almeida-García, Cortés-Macías, & Parzych, 2021). It is therefore imperative to study the relationship between newcomers and local residents in the process of rural tourism gentrification. Displacement is an important concept to analyze such relationships. A broad canon of research has documented direct displacement involving forced relocation of any household from its original residence following the arrival of gentrifiers (Ghose, 2004; Marcuse, 1985; Stockdale, 2010). However, the over-emphasis on direct displacement underplays the wider impacts of gentrification, especially on people who are not directly displaced (Davidson, 2009; Davidson & Lees, 2005). Tourism studies on host-guest relationships provide new insights by paying attention to the more complex relationships between newcomers (as guests) and local residents (as hosts) who are not directly displaced (Christou & Sharpley, 2019; Kastenholz, Carneiro, Eusébio, & Figueiredo, 2013). However, existing research tends to focus narrowly on short-term tourists, and ignore longer term newcomers, among whom RTMs form an important group. As a result, existing research fails to provide satisfactory explanations to RTM-led rural tourism gentrification, given that local residents have not been displaced entirely, which diverts from the classic direct displacement framework; and RTMs normally spend more time in the villages and presumably develop more complex and cooperative relationships with local residents, which differs from short-term tourists described in traditional host-guest relationships.

To address these gaps, this study explores the process of RTM-led rural tourism gentrification in China, which, as we will discuss later, differs significantly from rural tourism gentrification in the Western context (Gascón, 2016; Gocer, Shrestha, Boyacioglu, Gocer, & Karahan, 2021; Hines, 2010; Lorenzen, 2021). Drawing on the concepts of displacement in gentrification studies and host-guest relationships in tourism studies, we construct a co-existence framework to examine the ways in which rural tourism gentrifiers and local residents negotiate their relationships to achieve symbiotic co-existence. This enables us to construct a holistic picture of the delicate relationships developed between local residents and RTMs who co-existed in the villages for a prolonged period. The relationships developed transcend those emphasize (direct) displacement and simplified power configurations, and reflect the complexity

and intricacy of host-guest relationships that are embedded in Chinese *Renqing* societies.

The reminder of this paper begins with a literature review which centers on the conceptualization of local-newcomer relationships in gentrification studies and tourism studies. This is followed by a brief introduction to the Chinese context. The qualitative methodology offers a more in-depth understanding of the relationships between RTMs and local residents. By employing the co-existence framework, this research captures a holistic picture of local-newcomer relationships formed in the specific rural China context. Overall, this research reinforces the context-specific character of gentrification research by demonstrating the process and characteristics of rural tourism gentrification in the Chinese rural context. The findings demonstrate new forms of indirect displacement in rural China, where local governments played more significant roles. The coexistence between local residents and RTMs in *Renqing* society challenges the privileged role of newcomers and disadvantaged role of local residents documented in most rural tourism gentrification research in Western countries (Hines, 2010) and responds to the specificities of rural places in gentrification studies.

Conceptualizing local-newcomer relations in tourism gentrification studies

Gentrification and displacement

The term "gentrification" was originally coined by British sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964. She defined 'gentrification' as a process involving the refurbishment of residential properties by middle-class gentrifiers and the displacement of working-class residents (Glass, 1964). However, the classic definition of gentrification has been contested following its application in a wide range of contexts and the emergence of a variety of new forms of gentrification. First, its narrow focus on the rehabilitation of residential buildings has been broadened to include a wide range of building forms or land uses in both urban and rural contexts (He, 2019; Ley, 2003; Phillips, 1993; Wu, Zhang, & Waley, 2016). For example, new-build gentrification involves the transformation of urban brownfield or rice-paddy field to residential apartments or commercial buildings (Davidson & Lees, 2005; Waley, 2016). Second, it is not necessary that working-class residents being displaced by middle-class gentrifiers' (Phillips, 1993). For example, in the process of rural gentrification, the displacement of rural residents may happen before the incoming of middle-class gentrifiers. Therefore, gentrifiers bring in 'repopulation of an already depopulated and still depopulating countryside' (Halfacree, 2018, p.28).

As a result, researchers expanded the scope of gentrification. For example, Clark (2005) refers to gentrification as "a change in the population of land-users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated change in the built environment through a reinvestment in fixed capital" (p. 263). Rather than restricting gentrification to residential buildings, Clarke enlarges it to include changes in other types of land use. Moreover, this broadened definition only requires an upgrade of socio-economic status but does not require the new users to be middle class and the previous groups to be working class. Similarly, Shin, Lees, & López-Morales (2016) define gentrification as "the commodification of space accompanying land use changes in such a way that it produces indirect/direct/physical/symbolic displacement of existing users and owners by more affluent groups" (p. 458). This definition highlights various forms of displacement as the outcome of gentrification. Despite variations in definition, three main characteristics of gentrification remain, namely the investment of capital, the alternation of land uses or landscapes, and the socioeconomic change of gentrified neighborhoods (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). These characteristics underlie different forms of gentrification, including tourism gentrification in this research.

The concept of displacement has been one of the key concepts in gentrification studies. It is originally used to describe the eviction of local residents from gentrified neighborhoods, normally due to rising house prices (Ghose, 2004; He, 2010; Phillips, 1993). However, this rather narrow definition of displacement has been criticized by some researchers, who recognize the more significant influence of gentrification which goes far beyond direct displacement (Davidson, 2009; Davidson & Lees, 2005; Marcuse, 1985). Drawing on his observation of the process of gentrification in New York, Marcuse (1985, p. 207) argues that "displacement affects more than those actually displaced at any given moment". He thus suggests expanding the classic definition of displacement to include 'exclusionary displacement' and 'the pressure of displacement'. 'Exclusionary displacement' emphasizes the prevention of certain demographic groups from being able to move into a neighborhood that has been gentrified, and 'the pressure of displacement' highlights how changing characters of a place make it less favorable for long-term residents. These two forms of displacement have been categorized under the heading of indirect displacement in gentrification studies.

Cultural pressure is an important factor leading to indirect displacement. Middle-class gentrifiers' habitus and search for social difference contribute to the exclusion of lower-income residents (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015; Zukin, 2008). Zukin (2008, p. 735) argues that "cultural factors like aesthetics, comfort level, and the tendency to use, and understand, consumption practices as expressions of difference" contribute to social exclusion. "Whether the specific discourse of consumption is based on distinctiveness [...] it becomes a means of keeping others out" (ibid). For example, Hines's (2010) research of rural tourism gentrification in south-central Montana demonstrates how the

newly arriving middle class promotes their preferred forms of land use, which were designed to produce experiences more suitable to tourists at the expense of preferred local industries like mining.

Tourism gentrification and host-guest relationship

Tourism gentrification is one of the mutation forms of gentrification. Based on the research in advanced capitalist economies, Gotham (2005) refers to tourism gentrification as the "transformation of a middle-class neighborhood into a relatively affluent and exclusive enclave marked by a proliferation of corporate entertainment and tourism venues" (p. 1099). However, his conceptualization of tourism gentrification does not travel well to developing countries. In most developing countries, tourism forms one of the main forces for gentrification (Gant, 2016, 2018; Wortman, Donaldson, & van Westen, 2016), especially in China. As Liang & Bao (2015) points out, tourism gentrification in historical areas in China normally involves the renovation of the historic landscape and the construction of consumption spaces. Besides, new-build tourism projects formed an important part of tourism gentrification in China (Liang & Bao, 2015).

Despite contextual differences, researchers have agreed that the core of tourism gentrification is the transformation of social space, which usually takes place progressively (Donaldson, 2009; Gotham, 2005). A stage model has been developed to analyze the process of tourism gentrification, involving 'tourism development/ investment, demographic changes, physical infrastructure/landscape/facility development, and culture/lifestyle shifts' (Liang & Bao, 2015, p. 4). To some extent, tourism gentrification in developing countries, especially in its early stage, shares some similarities with touristification, which involves the transformation of an area into a place for tourist consumption (Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Lorenzen, 2021; Ojeda & Kieffer, 2020). In its later stages, however, tourism gentrification differs significantly from touristification. As Sequera and Nofre (2018) argue, excessive touristification may lead to the exodus of middle-class gentrifiers, indicating an end of tourism gentrification.

Tourism gentrification in developing countries acts as an important way of stimulating local tourism development (Chan et al, 2016; Zhao, 2019). Tourism gentrifiers, primarily middle-class urbanites, act as both consumers of the ideal rural landscape and producers of a new rural tourist landscape (Chan et al, 2016; Eimermann, 2015; Liu, 2020). Their practices promote endogenous initiatives and boost rural revitalization (Klien, 2010a). In such cases, the developing relationships between newcomers/gentrifiers and locals become central issues in understanding the effects of tourism gentrification in rural contexts. While balanced relationships between both groups contribute to sustainable rural development (Klien, 2010b), unbalanced relationship dominated by one group may lead to forced exit of the other and undermine local tourism development (Almeida-García et al, 2021).

To further explore potential relationships between gentrifiers and local residents, we turn to the discussion of host-guest relationships which offers new insights. In tourism studies, host-guest relationships linking local residents and tourists are strongly affected by the ways the two groups interact. Some researchers suggest that the more frequently hosts interact with tourists, the more likely they will be able to appreciate other's views and generate feelings of companionship and assimilation (Sinkovics and Penz, 2009; Kastenholz et al, 2013). However, others argue that such interactions may also result in "negative sentiments of restrictions and obligation" for tourists and "a sensation of invasion of privacy" on the part of hosts (Kastenholz et al, 2013, p.370). These arguments are challenged when considering the relationships between local residents and guests who stay longer in the tourism destinations (e.g. second homeowners, or rural tourism gentrifiers) (Matarrita-Cascante & Stocks, 2013; Su & Chen, 2017). Some researchers have observed different behavioral patterns of long-term guests. For instance, Gant & Lopez-Gay (2020) found that although long-term guests spend more time in the tourism destination, they tend to stay closer to other migrants and keep their distance from local residents. However, a detailed examination of the delicate relationship between long-term guests and local residents, especially the prolonged process of negotiation, is still missing in existing research.

To sum up, gentrification researchers have observed how gentrifiers have led to direct and indirect displacement upon local residents, and tourism studies have explored host-guest relations more widely from the view of newcomers. Drawing on the two strands of research, we construct a co-existence framework to examine tourism gentrification in rural China. We focus specifically on how newcomers and local residents negotiate with each other to achieve co-existence in the process of tourism gentrification (Figure 1), highlighting the overlap between tourism development and gentrification (Gant & Lopez-Gay, 2020), as well as the interdependence of newcomers and local residents (Klien, 2010a). However, co-existence does not imply the two groups are free from conflict (Hines, 2010; Klien, 2010a). The key to sustainability lies in the ability to negotiate conflicts and seek joint development. The aim of this framework is, therefore, to reveal the complex relationship between gentrifiers and local residents and detail the ways through which they managed to negotiate to achieve co-existence.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The Chinese context

Although similar processes of gentrification have been observed around the world, special attention should be given to contextual specificities when interpreting local patterns and trends of gentrification (Phillips & Smith, 2018). This is especially so as the existing analysis of gentrification and displacement in the Western context does not translate well into the Chinese context (Chan et al., 2016; Zhao, 2019). One important

reason is China's rural land use policy, especially the special homestead system. As official members of the villages, rural residents have the right to use rural homestead land to build residences but they do not have the right to legally sell them to incomers (Land Administration Law in China, 2019). This means that rural residents cannot be evicted or priced out of the local housing market as happens in some Western countries (Ghose, 2004; Stockdale, 2010). This also explains why some rural residents in China have become active agents in revitalizing properties and capturing land values by renting, at last parts of, their houses to newcomers (Qian et al, 2013). Local residents have also facilitated gentrification process by enlarging their houses and running them as tourism accommodation (Chan et al, 2016).

Indirect displacement has also been observed in rural China, where the unique identity politics contributes to the cultural pressure experienced by rural residents. In modern China, rural residents have often been treated as inferior to their urban counterparts, who enjoy the privilege of better job opportunities and social welfare. Although such privilege has weakened in past decades, its long-lasting impact on rural-urban migration is non-negligible (Fei, Hamilton, & Wang, 1992; Park, 2014). Urban dwellers are assumed to have higher levels of *Wenhua* (educational and cultural capital) and better tastes, as shown in Zhao's (2019) research. Drawing on the observation of guesthouses developed by tourism entrepreneurs in Dali, Zhao argued that changes made by the newcomers to local architecture, characterized by ethnic minority Bai culture, should be seen as a form of cultural displacement, as the local way of life has been significantly altered by the development of the guesthouse industry.

Furthermore, rural tourism gentrification is shaped by a strong *Renqing* society in the Chinese rural context. In his seminal book *Xiangtu Zhongguo* (Rural China), Fei (1985) shows that a key character of Chinese rural society is that people grow up knowing everybody around them and are compelled to abide by a set of social norms to promote and maintain good interpersonal relationships (Hwang, 1987). Rural Chinese society is thus interpreted as 'heavily shaped by the hierarchically structured network of social relations (guanxi) in which people are embedded, by the public nature of obligations, and by a long time during which obligations are incurred through a self-conscious manipulation of the face and related symbols (*renqing*)' (Hwang, 1987, p. 944). One of the social norms underlying the *Renqing* society is reciprocity, suggesting that if one has accepted *renqing* from someone else, they should pay back by showing *renqing* to the giver when there is a chance (Hwang, 1987). While rural residents are embedded in local social networks and exercise *renqing* in everyday life, newcomers entering rural areas are expected to adapt to these networks and follow, if not able to alter, existing social norms and behavioral rules.

Methodology

Four RTM Model Bases were selected: Moganshan International Rural Tourism (Yangjiale) Clusters (here after Moganshan RTM Model Base) and 29-Room House RTM Model Base in Zhejiang Province and Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTM Model Base and Mingyue Village International Pottery Art RTM Model Base (hereafter Mingyue Village RTM Model Base) in Sichuan Province (Figure 2). Both provinces have played leading roles in rural regeneration and rural tourism development in China (Luo, Jin, Zhao, & Chen, 2016). The four model bases were selected after comparing all the seven RTM Model Bases in Zhejiang province and five in Sichuan province during a pilot study. The four model bases were selected because they have attracted a relatively larger number of RTMs who actively engaged in the production of a new rural landscape and generated prominent effects on the villages and lives of local residents. As such, the four model bases selected do not represent stereotypical examples, but are instead prototypical or archetypical cases; first or extreme cases, the characteristics of which may become generalized over time (Brenner, 2003).

[Insert Figure 2 here]

The eight-month fieldwork was completed in two phases: between November 2017 and January 2018, and between October 2018 and April 2019. Interviews were used as the main method of collecting qualitative data. One strength of interviews is the ability to engage in a flowing discussion with interviewees to uncover new research themes (Valentine, 2005). As we attempted to gain a better insight into the perceptions of individuals—both RTMs and local residents—interviewing offered a good way to develop this understanding. Based on the research questions, three sets of interviews (with RTMs, local residents, and local government officials) were conducted, and the detailed and comprehensive conversations provided the main source of data (Silverman, 2014). In total, sixty-five interviews with RTMs and forty-one interviews with local residents were carried out to explore the ways in which they interacted with each other and the relationships that had developed as a result. Twenty-five interviews with government officials offered important information about the development trajectories of the villages and relevant policies. To guard against over-reliance on self-reporting (Silverman, 2014), interview responses were validated and supplemented using data from participant observation by one of the researchers, who lived and worked alongside RTMs for approximately two months at each field site.

The sampling of local residents in this research was limited, skewing towards those who are engaged in rural tourism-related work and business. This imbalance is likely to have emerged because of a lack of rapport between the researcher and local residents who were not engaged in rural tourism-related work and business. Despite this, the researcher was able to observe and sense the relations between RTMs and local residents daily during extended stays in the villages. Informal talks with local residents

and RTMs also provided important information on the relations between local residents and RTMs. The information collected from interviewing local residents and RTMs, as well as from informal talks and observations, has been triangulated to make the claims about the relationships between local residents and RTMs in this paper.

The qualitative data collected from the field were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach using NVIVO 12 (Nowell et al, 2017). Deductive and inductive approaches were combined to generate themes. As a wide range of concepts emerged in the research, higher-order codes were created deductively based on the theoretical approach and interview guides (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). These deductive codes often formed the main themes of the research. For example, key concepts from gentrification studies, such as displacement, were drawn upon to connect the data to existing research while subthemes were created through inductively generated codes and themes such as *Renqing* society. The validity of each theme was considered to determine whether it reflected the "meanings evident in the data set as a whole" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 91).

Overview of the process of tourism gentrification in sampled RTM Model Bases

Drawing on the stage model put forward by Liang & Bao (2015), this section traces the process of tourism gentrification in sampled RTM Model Bases. Similar processes have been observed in all the four model bases, which we divided into three phases: the pre-gentrification, the RTMs-led gentrification, and the self-gentrification phase. To provide an overview of how tourism gentrification happened on the ground, we examine in each phase the characteristics of tourism development/investment, demographic change, the transformation of physical infrastructure/landscape, and the alternation of culture and lifestyle (Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 here]

Pre-gentrification phase was before the arrival of RTMs. During this period, almost all the case villages were undergoing depopulation because of disinvestment in agricultural or local industries (e.g. artificial crystal making industry in Xinguang village where 29-Room House RTM Model Base is). Similar to what happened in other hollowed out villages in China, some local residents migrated from the case villages to counties for better job opportunities and living conditions. As a result, many residential houses in the case villages left unused temporarily or permanently. In this phase, there were limited living facilities in the case villages, and the rural landscape and lifestyle of which were similar to other ordinary rural communities in Zhejiang or Sichuan provinces. There was almost no tourism development in the case villages.

Following the incoming of RTMs, the second phase started. In Moganshan, for instance, the arrival of middle-class RTMs since 2010 has initiated RTMs-led gentrification. The RTMs invested in *Minsu* guesthouses or cultural studios through creative renovation of residential houses left behind by local residents. These guesthouses and cultural studios have attracted a large number of tourists and boosted rural tourism development in the villages in Moganshan town, which were in turn endorsed by local governments and consolidated in the national RTMs policy published in 2015. Following Moganshan, the RTMs policy has been accepted and promoted in other case villages. Local governments have played active roles to attract RTMs through investing in rural tourism development. They started from improving physical environment of the villages (e.g. road conditions, house conditions, and other infrastructures) to preparing spaces for RTMs by partly relocating local residents. By the time of this fieldwork, 29-Room House, Daoming Bamboo Art Village, and Mingyue village RTM Model Bases have attracted about thirty-two, fourteen, and thirty RTMs respectively. Although the absolute numbers of RTMs seem to be relatively small in each model base, the demographic changes they brought to rural communities were enormous, turning these villages which used to be hollowed-out villages with the old, the women and, and the children, to mixed gentrified communities with middle-class RTMs, low-income residents, and variegated tourists from all over the world. Apart from demographic and environmental changes, RTMs also brought traditional Chinese cultural elements and Western fashion into *Minsu* guesthouses and cultural studios and created a new rural cultural landscape. The practices of RTMs have led to rural tourism gentrification with their cultural projects leading to the expansion of cultural spaces catering to urbanite tourists with similar tastes (Hines, 2010).

Inspired by the success of RTMs, local residents started to engage in rural tourism business, which initiated the self-gentrification phase. Local rural residents themselves became active assistants of gentrification rather than victims (Chan et al., 2016; Qian et al., 2013). Not only left-behind residents but also some migrants who have already moved out returned to the villages to run various types of rural tourism business, such as *Minsu* guesthouses (in Moganshan and Mingyue Village RTMs Model Bases) and recreational and retail businesses like restaurants, food vending, or handicraft selling (in 29-Room House and Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTM Model Bases). Local residents invested in renovating their old properties and building new ones to meet the requirements of tourists. Consequently, the overall conditions of housing and standard of living have been further improved in case villages. During this phase, the villages have gradually become gentrified tourist resorts, with a mixture of different groups (RTMs, local residents, and tourists), different land uses (*Minsu* guesthouses, cultural studios, bars and restaurants), and different cultures and lifestyles (rural lifestyle for local residents and urban lifestyle for tourists).

Over the past several years, the case villages transformed from ordinary villages to RTMs' ideal countryside, and to a tourist resort with a mature tourism-gentrified

community. RTMs and the rural tourism development led by their cultural practices have played important roles in this transformation. Having demonstrated the tourism gentrification process of the RTM Model Bases, we turn to examine the relationships between RTMs and local residents and the way they negotiate with each other based on the co-existence framework (Figure 3).

[Insert Figure 3 here]

The co-existence of RTMs and local residents

Indirect displacement of local residents

Tourism gentrification in the sample RTM Model Bases is primarily driven by RTMs' cultural practices and facilitated by local governments. The arrival of RTMs has resulted in indirect displacement of local residents in both sociocultural spaces and physical spaces. The most salient feature of displacement in sociocultural space follows local residents' imitation of RTM's cultural practices, particularly the construction and decoration of *Minsu* guesthouses. Following RTMs, local residents started to renovate their houses into *Minsu* guesthouses of better quality in terms of their appearance and level of comfort. As a result, *Nongjiale*, which was previously a dominant form of rural tourism that involves eating and living in rural residents' houses, was avoided by local residents. As commented by many local residents interviewed, *Minsu* guesthouses are perceived as *superior* to *Nongjiale* because they not only cater more suitably to the requirements of urban guests but also are aesthetically more attractive.

Many local residents admitted that they were strongly influenced by RTMs and their ways to build *Minsu* guesthouses. One local resident told us:

> *"We did not invite a designer because the design costs can be as much as the money for refurbishing. We visited some Minsu guesthouses with professional design styles in Moganshan and then we discussed with the contractor to choose a style that would be most suitable for our house".* (Interview 1L5, female, 1980s).

Similar to this respondent, most local residents learned from RTMs by visiting *Minsu* guesthouses that had been professionally designed or by talking to the construction teams the RTMs had used. By imitating RTMs, local residents distinguished their guesthouses from *Nongjiale* guesthouses by borrowing Western-style design elements. For example, local residents in Moganshan RTM Model Base used elements such as bilingual information boards, world maps, and photographs of foreign tourists to decorate their houses. Meanwhile, new functional spaces such as tea and coffee facilities, fireplaces, swimming pools, and bars were added, and high-quality bedding,

showers, air conditioning, and TVs were installed in local residents' guesthouses to meet the needs of urban guests. Therefore, there was the transformation of the sociocultural space from one for local residents to one for urbanite guests.

Besides the indirect displacement in sociocultural spaces, local residents also experienced indirect displacement in physical spaces. The physical displacement takes two main forms. Firstly, although local residents were not forced to move because of rising house prices caused by gentrifiers, indirect displacement occurred with local government played the role of intermediary. For example, in the case of the 29-Room House RTM Model Base, local residents who had lived in the building of 29-Room House which had a historical value were required by local government to relinquish space to RTMs. As a result, they were resettled in other places in the villages, receiving a certain amount of compensation from local government.

Secondly, invisible physical displacement also took place in local residents' homes, as they gave over larger and better spaces to tourists and kept less space for themselves to run guesthouse. To make the most of their houses as money-making ventures, rooms with better conditions (such as airy, bright, and south-facing) were used as guest rooms for tourists. The hosts moved to smaller "backstage" rooms in their own homes. In one case, a homeowner refurbished his house and converted it into a guesthouse for tourists only (Figure 4). His family instead moved to the makeshift house in the backyard (Figure 5). Other local residents reduced their own living spaces and shared them with tourists. For example, one family rented out six rooms to tourists and shared the remaining two rooms among the four family members. Meanwhile, when most rooms for tourists had modern additions like air conditioning and en-suites, the hosts' rooms had fewer facilities and they shared bathrooms. In cases like this, local residents reduced the size and quality of their own living spaces to make room for tourists. For them, it was a good opportunity to make full use of their houses and a worthwhile sacrifice to make extra money.

[Insert Figures 4&5 here]

Local residents' adaption: flexible engagement in rural tourism work and business

Instead of becoming victims of indirect displacement, local residents started rural tourism businesses by making use of the tourism development opportunities offered by RTMs. Some rural-urban migrant workers returned to the villages to start rural tourism businesses, indicating that they gave up their work in cities and moved back to the countryside permanently. In the cases where local residents run *Minsu* guesthouse, it often involved intergenerational division of labor across the extended family, engaging grandparents, parents, and son/daughter. Parents were the core part in running guesthouse. The younger generation often help with online check-in or other communication issues and the older generation often help with daily maintenance issues,

such as cleaning and bed-making. Some female members also work for *Minsu* guesthouses run by RTMs as cleaners, room attendants, or kitchen helpers. This not only offered the employees another source of income but also gave them the chance to take care of their families when working close to their homes. However, fewer men were employed in guesthouses because the type of work involved were more commonly considered women's work, especially in the patriarchal rural environment. The salaries offered for this work were also not enough for men as the primary wage earners in rural families.

In some other cases, rural residents flexibly adapted between tourism and non-tourism work. Instead of a complete replacement for their previous work and lifestyles, rural tourism-related work was seen as a supplement to their habitual work choices. For instance, in the cases of 29-Room House and Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTM Model Bases, local residents started small tourism business like restaurants, food vending, or handicraft selling. However, instead of working full-time in tourism businesses, local residents alternated between migrant work and tourism business in different seasons. This was particularly obvious among rural-urban migrants, who returned to the village during peak seasons of tourism and worked as migrant workers during off seasons. For example, one local resident who ran a small food truck in the 29-Room House RTM Model Base told us she only returned to the village during the times when she could make the most profit from rural tourism business, such as '*wuyi [the May Day Golden Week], shiyi [the National Day Golden Week], Chinese New Year [or] during weekends' (Interview 2L1, female, 1970s).* For other times, her family stayed in the county center and did artificial crystal processing as the main source of income. Such a flexible approach provides local residents with chances to make the most of work opportunities in both urban and rural areas.

Adapting to the *Renqing* society in rural China

The relationships between RTMs and local residents were further complicated by the *Renqing* society in rural China, in which local residents are supported by strong social networks. In this research, the first and most important way in which RTMs and local residents build connections was through house leasing. RTMs normally signed ten or twenty-year leases with property owners. There should not be any legal conflict between RTMs and local people in terms of housing leases, but local residents' lack of enthusiasm and backtracking on contracts were frequently mentioned by RTMs as a strain on local-newcomer relationships. One of the RTMs from Shanghai gave an example:

> "We Shanghainese are very simple. For example, if I want to sign a contract with someone else, it is very efficient. If everything is OK, then we sign the contract. If not, we discuss it face to face until we achieve an agreement. Both of us will obey the contract. However, it does not work that way in the village. Local people change

the things they said and go back to the documents they signed yesterday. The reason can be that the man's wife did not agree. You spend so much effort to persuade his wife, then you find that his son disagrees. I think it is ridiculous." (Interview 1R17, male, 1980s)

By comparing between Shanghainese and local people, the RTM accused his hosts of changing their minds frequently and making the process of signing a contract "ridiculous". The comments revealed no legal issue but rather the frictions between the two groups: the middle-class RTMs who portray themselves as 'simple', 'efficient' and law-abiding, and local residents who were heedless of formal regulations but regulated by informal social norms and family obligations.

RTMs also had strained relationships with local residents in daily encounters. Many RTMs discussed their experiences of conflict with their neighbors. One RTM who had a *Minsu* guesthouse in Moganshan town mentioned a time in which he had a problem with his neighbor because of some 'comparatively insignificant' issue:

"Once, some tourists staying in my guesthouse cut down some bamboo shoots in our neighbor's bamboo forest by accident. A few days later, the neighbor damaged the water pipe to my guesthouse, turned off the electricity, and parked a car on the only entrance to my guesthouse." (Interview 1R12, male, 1980s)

This RTM soon became aware of the strained relationship between himself as a newcomer who did not have much support in the village and local residents as hosts whose relatives formed a strong social circle for them, as he stated:

"In this village, it seems that all the households are close or more distant relatives. But I am alone in the village. I have to be very careful not to make trouble for myself." (Interview 1R12, male, 1980s)

Similar experiences were mentioned by many other RTMs and most of them chose to compromise whenever conflicts were significant or trivial. Showing respect to local residents has become a common strategy to build good relationships with them and to adapt to the *Renqing* society in rural areas. One way of doing this was sending gifts to local residents and greeting them during festivals. This strategy was exercised by many RTMs as a useful way of building good relationships and avoiding any potential troubles. Some said that they greeted their neighbors during important festivals like the Chinese New Year and the Mid-Autumn Festival, while others invited local residents to their houses for dinner. Another way for RTMs to show respect was employing their unemployed neighbors to work for the *Minsu* guesthouses, and treating them according to principles of *renqing* instead of corporate management rules and practices.

Having shown respect to local residents, newcomers expected acceptance and support from villagers in a way similar to how recipients are supposed to respond in *Renqing* society (Hwang, 1987). For example, one RTM showed us a wall of his guesthouse (Figure 6) which he had sealed as the neighboring local residents were disturbed by the noise of the air conditioner from that room. In comparison, he spoke of another newcomer who was not allowed by the local residents to use the only road into the village because of his lack of *renqing*.

[Insert Figure 6 here]

However, some RTMs found the *Renqing* society too complicated and attempted to keep a distance from local residents, as put by one RTM:

> *"I was expecting local residents in the village to be unsophisticated and easy to get along with. I tried to get on well with my neighbors when I first arrived, but I found it really hard. We think in completely different ways"* (Interview 1R17, male, 1980s)

Tired of dealing with local people in the village, this RTM decided to avoid any direct contact with local residents. One way of doing this is to turn to local government for help. In fact, in 29-Room House and Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTM Model Bases, most RTMs rent properties from local government and were concentrated in specific areas marked out as tourism development cores. As a result, there were more distance and less interactions and *renqing* exchange between RTMs and local residents.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study captures a holistic picture of rural tourism gentrification in the Chinese context, drawing on case studies in four prototypical RTM Model Bases. The demographic, sociocultural and physical changes that have taken place in the RTM Model Bases fit the broad definition of gentrification. Our observations show that local properties that have experienced long-term disinvestment have been revived by the newly arriving RTMs, resulting in the indirect displacement of local residents who in turn engaged in the gentrification process flexibly as assistant gentrifiers (Qian et al., 2013). Our findings suggest that rural tourism gentrifiers and local residents coexist, and that this coexistence is shaped by specific Chinese rural contexts, namely the combined effects of land use policy, urban-rural identity politics and the unique social norms of the *Renqing* society.

The findings of this research mainly make three theoretical contributions. First, this research demonstrates new forms of indirect displacement in the Chinese rural context, where local governments played more significant roles. Unlike what has happened in the Western context, where rising house prices brought by gentrifiers forced local residents to move out (Ghose, 2004; Phillips, 1993), there is no evidence

of direct displacement of local residents by RTMs in the villages studied. Property regimes governing China's rural land provide a plausible explanation for this phenomenon, as Chinese rural properties cannot be sold and are thus not open to the classic forms of displacement-oriented gentrification (Kan, 2021).

However, this research uncovered indirect displacement in both sociocultural and physical spaces. While indirect displacement in sociocultural spaces is caused by the unequal identity politics between urban and rural residents in China (Fei et al, 1992), indirect displacement in physical spaces is strongly driven by local governments. The indirect displacement in physical spaces confirms the strong power of state in the process of gentrification in the Chinese context (He, 2010; Waley, 2016). The kind of forced relocation of local residents in the RTM Model Bases resembles exclusionary displacement described in Marcuse's (1985) research, since only RTMs were allowed to move into the specific areas vacated by local residents. However, it is not the increasing housing prices brought by gentrifiers but the local government, who actively facilitated the evacuation of local residents from specific buildings (e.g. 29-Room House) and the attraction of RTMs. In another word, while the indirect displacement in Marcuse's (1985) research happens as a result of market economy, indirect displacement in this research is brought by the developmental state (Shin et al., 2016). Local states clean sites to attract the reinvestment from the rural tourism gentrifiers in the way as their urban counterpart (Shin, 2016). What is different in the rural context is that local states not only clean the sites but also improve them to attract reinvestment. This might have been the strategy of the local states to attract reinvestment to the rural areas, which is relatively less profitable than the urban redevelopment projects. Local states also take care of the politics of displacement by relocating local residents in the same villages or nearby places. This finding, therefore, suggests that displacement might involve an intermediary besides the gentrifiers and local residents.

Second, the relationships between local residents and RTMs in rural *Renqing* society challenges the privileged role of newcomers and disadvantaged role of local residents documented in most rural tourism gentrification research in Western countries (Hines, 2010). This finding responds to Phillips & Smith's (2018) call for attention to the specificities of rural spaces and places and its effects on rural gentrification. The co-existence of RTMs and local residents and the advantaged position of local residents is shaped by the norms of *Renqing* society in the Chinese rural context. In modern China, despite the social changes and the emerging contract-based society, traditional methods of exchange among acquaintances in *Renqing* society still play important roles, especially in the rural society (Chang, 2012; Feng, 2011). Different from the assumption that rational individuals make decisions based on self-interest, it is the reciprocity (*bao*), which is influenced by 'the hierarchically structured network of guanxi' (Hwang, 1987, p.968) in the local society, that is prevalent. In this process, local residents have come to enjoy a more privileged position, because they are supported by strong local social networks that make up the *Renqing* society (Hwang,

1987). Unlike typical tourists who tend to stay in tourism destinations for a short time, RTMs running tourism businesses usually stay for prolonged periods and have developed more complicated relationships with local residents. Indeed, to ensure that they are welcomed in the villages and that their tourism business run smoothly, we found that most RTMs attempted to embed themselves in the local society by showing *renqing* to local residents through house leasing, employment, and other daily encounters, a process that normally only develops over time in *Renqing* society (Chang, 2012). This is based on norms of reciprocity or social exchange, i.e. RTMs are expecting the payback from local residents through giving *renqing* first (Hwang, 1987). This finding reminds rural gentrification researchers to pay more attention to social network and social capital of local residents in the rural context, which may have significant implications for their position to and relationship with gentrifiers who are perceived to come in an advantaged position considering their cultural and economic capital (Ghose, 2004; Hines, 2010).

Third, this research reinforces the context-specific character of gentrification research by demonstrating the process and characteristics of rural tourism gentrification in the Chinese rural context, which has been much less explored compared with its Western counterpart. We found that the rural tourism gentrification demonstrated in the sampled RTM Model Bases resembles the tourism gentrification discussed in Gotham's research, in that the development of tourism has followed the gentrification of a neighborhood. However, the difference is that RTMs as gentrifiers formed key drivers for tourism development, rather than becoming victims of tourism gentrification. Besides, the negotiation process between RTMs and local residents in the case Model Bases differs from the kind of touristification that takes place in the historic centers of European cities (Bruttomesso, 2018; del Romero Renau, 2018; Tulumello & Allegretti, 2021), where tourism gentrification drives out local residents first and early-stage gentrifiers later. It also differs from tourism gentrification led by transnational lifestyle migrants who prefer to stay with other gentrifiers in the tourism destinations and share their spaces with tourists or fellow expatriates, forcing local residents from their homes (Gant & Lopez-Gay, 2020).

While recognizing the homogeneity of the Chinese cases, we remind researchers not to reduce the entire rural China as a homogeneous region, but to understand it through its multiplicity of differences. In relation to the two points above, our observation demonstrated different extents to which local state acted as the intermediary, and different level of *renqing* involved in the gentrification process within the four RTM Model Bases. For instance, in Moganshan and Mingyue Village RTM Model Bases, most RTMs rent houses directly from local residents in the villages. Therefore, RTMs mixed, more or less randomly, with local residents, with whom they had more chances to interact based on the norms of *Renqing* society. In these two cases, the local government played less important roles, although town or village level government officials were asked to show up as witness in some cases when RTMs signed house

leasing agreements with local residents. However, in 29-Room House and Daoming Bamboo Art Village RTM Model Bases, local government played more significant roles by improving the physical conditions in the villages and preparing spaces for RTMs, who agglomerated in specific areas planned as tourism centers. As a result, RTMs in these latter cases had relatively less chances to interact with local residents, and therefore less *renqing* exchange.

The practical implications of this research are twofold. First, a more inclusive rural environment should be created by local governments to guarantee the co-existence of the newcomers and local residents, both of whom are important for the sustainable development of rural tourism. Besides, local governments should play more active roles in facilitating communication between the two groups to reduce misunderstanding and conflicts. To achieve this goal, mixed distribution of local residents and newcomers should be encouraged to create opportunities for inter-group interactions and fostering mutual understanding and companionship. Second, to cope with new trends of urban-rural migration and facilitate rural revitalization, context specific policies should be designed and carried out to encourage the incoming of RTMs and the return of local residents. The differences between the four RTMs model bases in this research suggests the path-dependent characteristics of rural tourism gentrification. In another word, the previous development character, depending on the locations of the villages, their sociocultural and natural resources, the previous industries etc, affect the kind of RTMs a village can attract and the kind of rural tourism business they may practice. Therefore, local government should proactively analyze the characters of their villages and make policies to attract and support the incoming of RTMs, and the subsequent return of local residents.

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Declaration of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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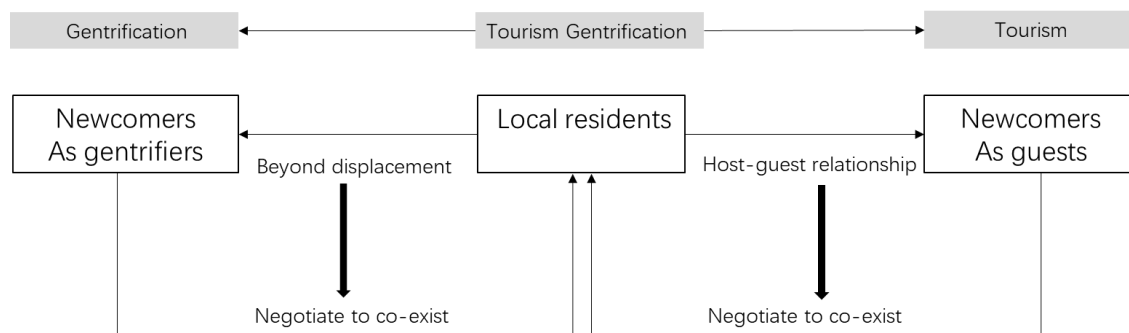
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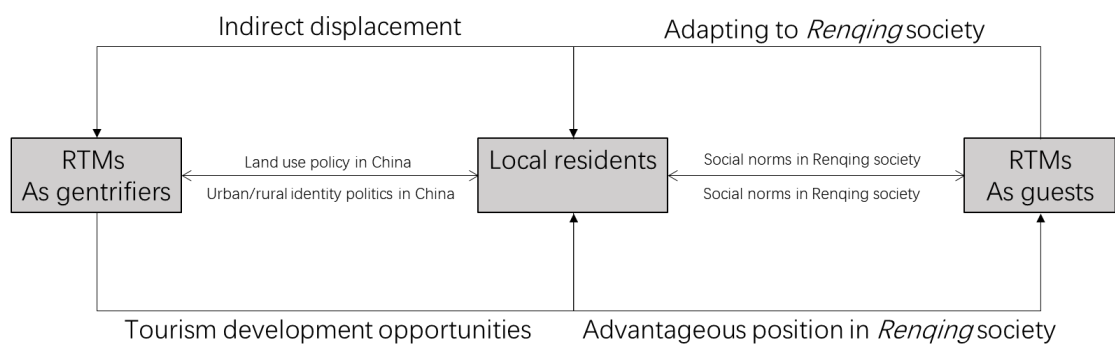
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Figure 1: Theoretical framework of Tourism Gentrification
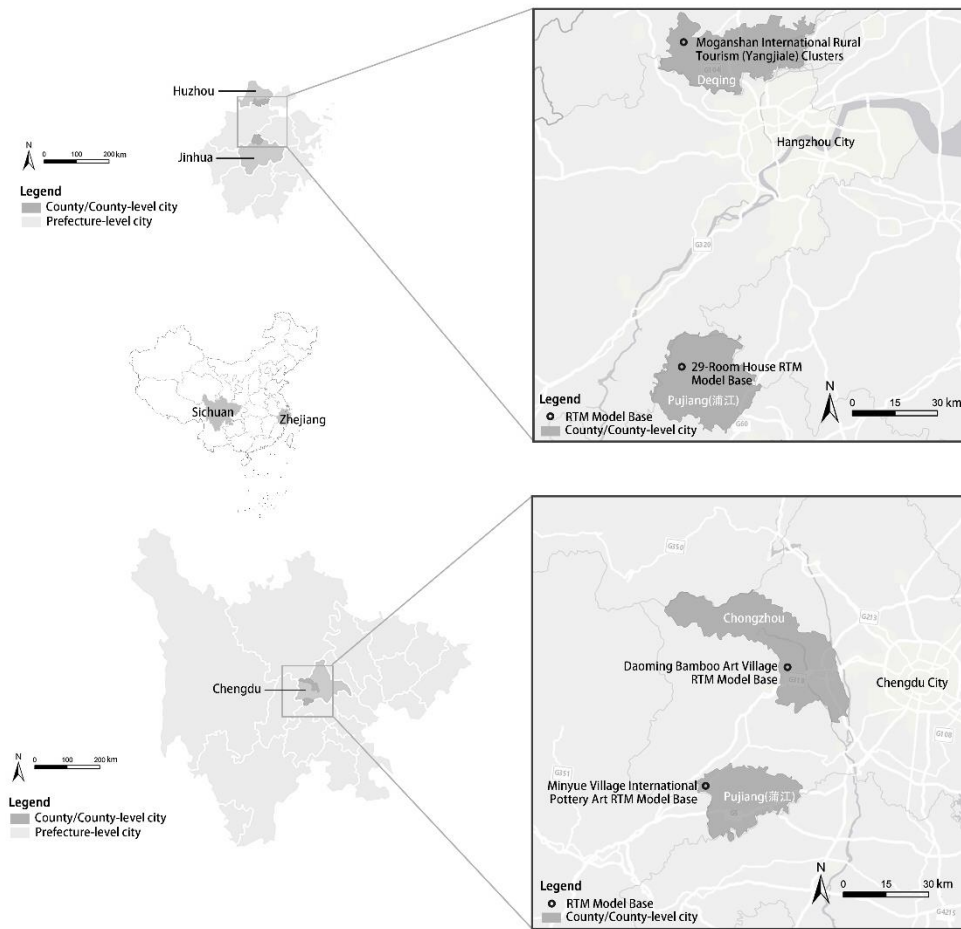
Figure 2: The location of the four RTM Model Bases selected

Figure 3: The co-existence of RTMs and local residents

Figure 4: A *Minsu* guesthouse run by local residents (Left) (Author's photograph)

Figure 5: A newly built two-story makeshift house (Right) (Author's photograph)

Figure 6: The sealed wall of a guesthouse run by an RTM (Author's photograph)

Table 1 Temporal analysis of tourism gentrification in sampled RTM Model Bases

Phase	Tourism development/investment	Characteristics of local population	Characteristics of physical infrastructure / landscape / facilities	Characteristics of local culture / lifestyle
Pre-gentrification phase (before the incoming of RTMs)	Disinvestment in agriculture and other industries (e.g. artificial crystal making in 29-Room House RTM Model Base).	The villages were occupied by long-term local residents, mostly peasants. They experienced depopulation, especially the outflow of young and male labor, temporarily or permanently.	Increasing numbers of uninhabited houses, limited living facilities.	Traditional Chinese rural lifestyle
RTMs-led tourism gentrification (incoming of RTMs)	Newly arriving RTMs invested in *Minsu* guesthouse or cultural studios; Local governments invested in physical infrastructure for rural tourism development.	The incoming of middle-class RTMs, forced relocation of some local residents to give space to RTMs.	The emergence of *Minsu* guesthouses and culture studios, with improved infrastructure like roads and public toilets in the villages.	A mixture of traditional Chinese culture and Western fashion catering to the urbanite tourists.
Self-gentrification (the engagement of local residents in rural tourism business)	Local residents invested to renovate their own houses to run *Minsu* guesthouses or other small tourism business.	The returning of some local residents to engage in tourism-related work/business.	The overall conditions of the houses in the villages and the standards of the living facilities have been significantly improved. Some coffee shops, bars, restaurants or even KTVs were constructed.	A mixture of rural lifestyle for local residents and modern urban lifestyle for tourists.