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Student Name:

Lee Ging Nok Joshua

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An Exploration of Gentrification's Negative Influences on the Social Networks of Aged Neighbourhoods in Hong Kong: A Case Study of the Centre Street

Abstract

Along with the case study of Hong Kong Centre Street, this research seeks to conduct an in-depth investigation in terms of the negative influences of gentrification on residents' connectivity within the aged neighbourhoods of Hong Kong. Throughout the implementation of various urban redevelopment projects in Hong Kong, the phenomenon of gentrification continues to grow among the majority of existing old neighbourhoods. Apparently, the emergence of the phenomenon of gentrification was intended from the purpose of urban redevelopment because it possesses a positive impact on the neighbourhood by improving the hygiene conditions and renovating the environment through enhancing the worn-out buildings within the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, several connectivity issues were being aroused by the phenomenon of gentrification among the aged neighbourhoods due to its influences have divided the residents into two types of people, newcomers and original, long-term residents, thereby beginning to impact the social networks within these neighbourhoods. Quantitative research was carried out based on the data collected through field observation of the Hong Kong Centre Street, as well as interview probes with 1 original, long-term resident and 1 new resident that are currently living

in Centre Street as a case study to achieve the objective of exploring the actual effects of gentrification on their social networks in an aged neighbourhood.

The findings show that the process of gentrification possesses several negative influences on the connection of social networks within the aged neighbourhoods, including the disappearance of primitive geographic culture, replacement of the aged buildings, and residential displacement, which will break down the social ties and gradually causing the original social networks to disintegrate.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Objectives

Considering the growing phenomenon of gentrification in aged neighbourhoods and its negative influences on residents in Hong Kong, the purpose of this research is to investigate and further understand the negative impacts on one of the outcomes caused by the phenomenon of gentrification that relates to local resident's living conditions, especially the issues of social networks between residents in an aged neighbourhood, including original residents and newcomers. From a global perspective, even though the phenomenon of gentrification has attracted global concern in academic research and public media, most of the related research continues to primarily focus on the gentrification issues in North American and European cities (Ye, Vojnovic & Chen, 2015). Ley and Teo (2014) also argued that there are inadequate

explanations and inspections of gentrification's influence on the mobility of Hong Kong neighbourhoods, including the social network issues between the affected residents, in which Hong Kong's socio-cultural significance and perceived effects of community gentrification may be different compared to the world (He et al., 2021).

In the context of Hong Kong, as highlighted by Ley and Teo (2014), most of the Hong Kong's current building stock comes from a period of rapid population growth and development in the mid-20th century or later, the construction of these buildings is expected to be replaced within 50 years, thereby encouraging a relatively high rate of occupant turnover, along with the continuous cycle of creation and destruction that inculcating residents to embrace the tremendous neighbourhood change. Therefore, this research also seeks to examine the current connectivity situations of the aged neighbourhoods specifically with Hong Kong Centre Street as the research context as a means to explore the particular socio-cultural condition of Hong Kong under the impact of gentrification.

1.2 Definition of Gentrification and Social Networks

As the core terminology of this research, “gentrification” was first coined by Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe the transformation of social structure and inhabitation in inner London, particularly the situation of working-class residential areas being invaded by upper-class populations. In addition, Smith and Williams (1986) defined “gentrification” as a procedure of

“rehabilitation of working-class and derelict housing and the consequent transformation of an area into a middle-class neighbourhood.”

In terms of “social networks”, it refers to a social structure that involves a group of individuals who voluntarily interact based on their expressed interest, such as a belief, an issue or a product, which has three principal aspects: “ the consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions of the community, and the moral responsibility of the individuals it comprises” (Guinalíu, Moreno & Subero, 2013).

1.3 The Beginning of Gentrification in Hong Kong

As the initiation of gentrification in Hong Kong, after the establishment of the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) under the Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance (URAO) in 2001, plus their partnerships with private developers for the purpose of managing the multiple ownership of the worn-out buildings (Yin & Qian, 2018), various urban redevelopment projects were carried out as a means to conduct rehabilitation and redevelopment schemes for the aged neighbourhoods. Throughout these undergoing urban redevelopment projects in Hong Kong, the aged neighbourhoods, such as Sai Ying Pun, Sham Shui Po and Kwun Tong, are experiencing a massive transformation in terms of their infrastructure and residential areas, in which the majority of the worn-out buildings within these neighbourhoods were replaced by contemporary buildings, thus creating new business activities and becoming an affluence district gradually (Lee, 2020). As a result of the urban development process, it establishes the phenomenon of

gentrification within the neighbourhoods due to the comprehensive development of transportation and infrastructure constructed by the URA has attracted various affluent people and people working in the central business district to enter these working-class neighbourhoods (Lo, 2018). Hence, the emergence of gentrification in Hong Kong can be traced back to the establishment of URA with its urban redevelopment schemes.

2. Literature Review

Primarily, this chapter will focus on reviewing the social impact of gentrification on Hong Kong aged neighbourhoods under the process of urban redevelopment, as well as the impact of gentrification on the social networks of original residents among the gentrifying neighbourhoods.

2.1 Gentrification's Social Impact on Hong Kong Aged Neighbourhoods

Certain studies have shown that the phenomenon of gentrification possesses social advantages for the disadvantaged groups since it is intended to improve residents' livelihood and enhance the overall living environment of the whole neighbourhood. In general, the benefits of gentrification include delivering vitality to the neighbourhood, lessening crime activities, plus other health and education advantages (Mehdipanah et al. 2018; Papachristos et al. 2011). Particularly, Byrne (2003) indicates that a gentrifying neighbourhood can create contemporary stores, shopping malls, residential buildings, increased land and housing values, as well as new

job opportunities for the neighbourhood residents. Thus, certain scholars suggested that gentrification can maintain the sustainability and vitality of the aged neighbourhoods by reconstructing the worn-out structures into contemporary structures.

Nevertheless, as stated by Ruth Glass in 1964, “once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed”, which indicates the process of gentrification possesses complex physical improvement of the housing stock, shifts in housing tenure from rental to ownership, increase of the commodity prices and the displacement or replacement of working-class populations by a new middle-class (Hamnett, 2003). Similar to the phenomenon of gentrification from the Hong Kong perspective, the ongoing urban redevelopment projects in old districts have caused a serious impact on the local urban residents. Under the process of gentrification in aged neighbourhoods that transforms dilapidated buildings into high-end buildings, despite the fact that it contains positive effects on enhancing residents’ livelihood and environmental conditions within the districts by replacing most of the aged shops and buildings such as grocery stores and tenement buildings with private residential properties, infrastructures and other contemporary buildings, it leads to a significant increase in housing prices and rents due to private developers who tend to maximise their profit through stimulating the housing market by boosting the land value and housing prices throughout their developments in gentrifying areas (He, 2020, Higgins, 2019, as cited in He et al., 2021). For instance, the phenomenon of gentrification has already emerged from the first phase of the residential estate “Park Metropolitan” project conducted by the URA, in which the average housing prices of “Park Metropolitan” have raised far exceeding the compensation standard set by the URA for the

affected households (Yin & Qian, 2018). Even though the URA states that the “Park Metropolitan” project aims to enhance the living environment in Kwun Tong, these high-end commercial buildings and burgeoning housing prices in fact show that Kwun Tong Town Centre turns out to be a gentrified neighbourhood (Yin & Qian, 2018).

Moreover, under the process of gentrification that influences the value and population of the relevant areas, it attracted the development of new transportation facilities which also contributed to the major factor that leads to the growth of property prices. A study by He et al. (2018) has mentioned that certain nostalgic buildings have been replaced and utilised for the expansion of the MTR network during the process of gentrification which has enhanced the values of certain gentrifying areas. While the expansion of the MTR network has significantly improved the transport accessibility, private developers were also attracted to establish residential development for redeveloping working-class quarters connected to MTR stations into high-end residential areas, thus creating a condition that will gradually squeeze the low-income households out of those gentrifying locations because of the tremendous increase of commodity prices and rents (He et al., 2018). For instance, housing properties in Hong Kong in proximity to new MTR stations have increased by 30% (Cervero & Murakami, 2009), which is supported by Higgins (2019)’s study as the opening of the West Island Line had significantly boosted the housing prices in Hong Kong, particularly a 26-41% difference in housing prices between properties located near certain new MTR stations. Hence, with the fact that new commercial and transportation facilities within the gentrifying neighbourhoods have resulted in rising property prices, and an influx of middle-class and upper-class residents that puts pressure on the housing market and commodity prices in the working-class areas, these factors have generated a

high-priced living environment within the gentrifying neighbourhoods where the majority of the working-class residents cannot afford in order to continue their livelihood in this location.

Thus, these phenomena have created conditions for direct residential displacement through market competition and rising rents (Zukin, 2009, as cited in Zuk et al., 2015), thereby establishing class segregation that excludes the disadvantaged groups due to landlords' buyout behaviours, particularly the coercion that forced disadvantaged groups to relocate in other areas (Wang, 2005). For instance, in a study conducted by Susnik and Ganesan (2013), through analysing the data from the older housing estate population and projections based on building demolition, they had suggested that there are an estimated 14,000 Hong Kong residents being displaced involuntarily due to the redevelopment projects annually. Therefore, as a result of gentrification, original working-class inhabitants are being forced to relocate to other residential areas or even displaced due to the sudden influx of market pressure within the gentrifying neighbourhood.

2.2 Gentrification's Impact on the Social Networks of Hong Kong Original Residents

Under the influences of gentrification, the original group of low-income residents from the gentrifying neighbourhoods has been gradually replaced by the middle-class and upper-class residents (Jacob et al., 2002), this phenomenon may conceivably interrupt or even eradicate the sense of community in the neighbourhood (Shaw and Hagemans, 2015). As aforementioned, gentrification results in displacement issues through rising rents and commodity prices, which

facilitate the occurrence of class segregation by forcing original working-class residents to have relocation, as well as attracting the middle-class and upper-class population to settle in the gentrifying neighbourhood (Wang, 2005), it is considered that it will also narrow down original residents' social networks and progressively changing their sense of community and group cohesion. While the phenomenon of gentrification has been able to significantly alter the socio-demographic composition of a given community through the migration of the working class and the influx of the middle-class and upper-class residents (Marcuse, 1985, Jacob et al., 2002, as cited in He et al., 2021), not only this relatively radical mobility of residents will changes the dynamics of gentrifying areas (Gotham 2007; Gotham & Greenburg 2014; Halle & Tiso 2014, as cited in DiGregorio, 2020), but also weakens the social ties and related social interactions across all social classes within the gentrifying neighbourhood (Jacobs, ([1961]1992), Putnam, 2001, Wellman & Leighton, 1979, as cited in He et al., 2021). In addition, the process of gentrification also change the characteristics of the area (Zukin 2009, as cited in DiGregorio, 2020), including heritage, way of life and cultural environment, thereby reducing original residents' attachment to their local neighbourhood due to gentrification is reducing their common topics and sense of community through replacing the original structures with brand new structures (Low and Altman, 1992, Clark et al., 2017, Corcoran, 2002, as cited in He et al., 2021).

From the Hong Kong perspective, according to the study by Zhao and Zhang (2005), Hong Kong's Gini inequality coefficient has increased since the 1970s as a result of the de-industrialization economy transitioning to a service sector, along with the land premium income, which generates most of the Hong Kong government's revenue, sometimes encourages

developers to prioritise housing demands of lower socioeconomic status populations, thereby leading to class segregation that breakdown original residents' social networks within the gentrifying neighbourhoods in Hong Kong (He et al., 2021).

3. Research Questions

Based on the literature review process regarding the general social impact as well as the issues of social networks aroused by the gentrification towards the residents of aged neighbourhoods, it is markedly that gentrification possesses a considerable influence on residents' interconnection and their way of life negatively. Therefore, the following questions have been formulated as a means to conduct further exploration of gentrification's negative impacts on residents' social networks within the gentrifying neighbourhood from the context of Hong Kong Centre Street:

- (1) In what ways has the phenomenon of gentrification affected residents' social networks, particularly in the context of Hong Kong?

Since most of the studies are focused on the influence of gentrification in a global context, this question aims to conduct an inspection of the gentrification issues from the Hong Kong perspective.

- (2) To what extent has gentrification leads to the conflict of residents within the gentrifying neighbourhood?

The purpose of this question is to explore the cause and effect of the conflicts between original residents and new residents under the phenomenon of gentrification.

4. Research Methodology

In terms of the data collection, a qualitative approach will be adopted to further understand the impact of gentrification on affecting residents' social networks by collecting their insights and responses regarding it. As mentioned by Bray (2014), although quantitative research can gather generalised information for further study, it demands a huge sample size in order to conduct reliable data for in-depth analysis. As qualitative research method can ensure the data collected closely matches what people are exactly doing and thinking by observing their daily lives as well as listening to their ideas (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016), thereby qualitative approach has been employed in the research, particularly by conducting field observation and interviews with the local residents for data analysis and discussions.

This research will adopt a case study methodology as a means to conduct an in-depth understanding in terms of the influence of gentrification on neighbourhood residents' lifestyles, living experiences, group cohesion and sense of community. According to Hegan (2006), the case study method is an "in-depth, qualitative study of one or a few illustrative cases", this free-form approach is beneficial for delving into the subtleties and peculiarities of individual cases (Willis, 2014), which can reveal the apparent interplay of noteworthy factors that

characterise a single phenomenon, thereby enabling the capture of patterns, nuances and more underlying elements within the phenomenon (Berg, 2009). Through the implementation of the case study approach in this research, it will be able to formulate a concrete analysis of the causal relationship of gentrification's negative influences on targeted residents' social networks by studying a specific case of an aged neighbourhood from the perspective of Hong Kong, and thus developing an overall conclusion according to the conducted data analysis.

In the context of the case study, He et al. (2021) suggested that in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of a society that is undergoing urban redevelopment, it is essential to emphasise the internal composition of the neighbourhood and the characteristics of the neighbourhood residents, thereby understanding the nature of the shared sentiments from all residents regarding the external dynamics of their particular neighbourhood. Therefore, field observation and interview probes are necessary to be employed as a means to collect first-hand data for gaining up-to-date information and examining the specific nature of the current condition of Centre Street under the phenomenon of gentrification.

Based on He et al. (2021)'s suggestion, the target groups for the interview probes were the original, long-term residents and newcomers in Centre Street, as they are the major affected parties and also possess conflicts within the gentrifying neighbourhood, which will be able to gather information regarding the characteristics of the residents in Centre Street. To examine the internal composition of Centre Street, it is necessary to question the original, long-term residents about their way of life and collective memories in Centre Street before the influence of

gentrification, plus their current experience in Centre Street under the process of gentrification. Due to the ongoing threat of Covid-19, the interview will be conducted by phone call.

Therefore, the primary part of the interview will be inquiring about their own story and experience regarding the changes in Centre Street under the process of gentrification, follow-up questions are expected to serve as a means to guide and maintain their responses within the range of the topics about social networks between them and other involved residents. Particularly, questions regarding their own experience and lifestyles within Centre Street, interactions with other residents, as well as the sense of community and group cohesion are expected to be asked during the interview, thereby gathering information on their expressions and opinions regarding the current situation of gentrification in Centre Street for further analysis and discussion. The remaining parts of the interview will be inquiring about the interviewees' overall impression of the community.

5. Research Findings

5.1 Field Observation

5.1.1 The Situation of Centre Street under Gentrification

After the completion of the Centre Street Escalator in 2013 and the extension of the Island line to Sai Ying Pun in 2015, the process of gentrification in recent years has begun to influence the

livelihood of the original residents and the whole structure of Centre Street. Throughout the observation in recent years, the majority of the areas in Centre Street were being reconstructed into contemporary buildings and amenities. For example, before the commencement of urban redevelopment projects, most of the surrounding areas of Centre Street were tenement buildings and grocery stores. Nonetheless, these buildings were being replaced by a wide range of high-rise residential buildings throughout the “Island Crest” project conducted by the URA in 2011 along with the partnership with private developers. For instance, pictures 1 and 2 demonstrate the differences in Centre Street before (left) and after (right) the influence of gentrification, picture 1 indicates the majority of the buildings in Centre Street were tenement buildings before the appearance of gentrification, however, as demonstrated in picture 2, with the influence of gentrification those buildings were reconstructed into high-rise residential buildings. Following the completion of this major redevelopment project, nearly all of the surrounding areas of Centre Street are occupied by various chain stores and modern facilities that are equivalent to this gentrifying neighbourhood.



Picture 1 & 2: Old Centre Street (left) & current Centre Street (right)

As a result of gentrification, it is observed that there is also a significant increase in the housing prices of residential buildings within Centre Street. Picture 3 shows the housing price and rental price of the high-rise apartment “The Nova”, which possesses a housing price of HKD \$13,500,000 and a rental price of HKD \$31,000. Thus, due to the influence of gentrification that leads to a tremendous influx of market pressure, Centre Street is currently being occupied by numerous market-oriented high-rise residential buildings.



Picture 3: Housing prices and rent prices of The Nova property

5.2 Interview

1 original, long-term resident and 1 new resident, who are all experiencing the phenomena of gentrification in Centre Street, were selected for the interview. The following table shows their social classes, living conditions and length of living:

Name	Social class	Living condition	Length of living
S (Original, long-term resident)	Middle-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently living in a private housing estate “Western Garden” in Centre Street 	27 years
L (New resident)	Upper middle-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lived in Tsim Sha Tsui Currently living in a luxury apartment “Island Crest” in Centre Street 	8 years

5.2.1 Transformation of Hong Kong Centre Street under Gentrification

Interviewee S and Interviewee L both believed that Centre Street is under a tremendous change due to the completion of the Sai Ying Pun MTR station have driven a wide range of newcomers into this community, thus generating the phenomenon of gentrification within this neighbourhood that is progressively replacing the old structures built for an extended period , as S mentioned:

“Yes, when talking about the notable change of Centre Street, I think in recent years, there has been a lot of new faces among this community, such as mainlanders and foreigners... which makes this community flooded with a complicated business atmosphere... it is most likely because of the Sai Ying Pun MTR station, I mean after this incident, lots of the shops that I familiarised with were being replaced by the so-called ‘Fine dining restaurants’ and ‘Chain stores’, such as the road that is across from our home was used to be full of stationery shops and hardware stores, but now they are being replaced by chain stores like ‘Wellcome’ and some bars like ‘Zion’.”

Interviewee L also possesses a similar statement to S, as L said:

“Sai Ying Pun MTR station is one of the major reasons that I decided to move here. With the convenience of transportation, I will be able to take care of my elderly more frequently... I remembered that Centre Street was a classic area in Sai Ying Pun, lots of time-honoured brands were here back in the 2000s, and even the Sai Ying Pun MTR station was a small park before its actual construction.”

Both interviewees agreed that Centre Street is transforming into a middle-class or even upper-class area under the influence of gentrification. Particularly, both interviewees mentioned that numerous old structures, including hardware stores, stationery shops, as well as other time-honoured brands, were closed and replaced by various chain stores and fine dining restaurants after the completion of the Sai Ying Pun MTR station.

5.2.2 The Impact of Centre Street Transformation on Residents' Social Networks

5.2.2.1 Lifestyles

Interviewee S believed that the changes in Centre Street have disarrayed her usual routine due to the disappearance of familiar places and the influx of new residents. As interviewee S elaborated:

“Because of these changes, I think it indeed has impacted my own lifestyle, since these new buildings have replaced some of my gathering spots, like a newsstand and a temple near Kau Yan School with a bar... I used to be visiting these two places once or twice a week, but now they are all closed, and it all changed into a bar that is full of foreigners... seems like Sai Ying Pun has been operated by the westerners (‘Sai Ying’) again, which makes me feel uncomfortable about it.”

Interviewee L considered that the changes in Centre Street did not possess a large impact on his overall lifestyle in this neighbourhood. As Interviewee L mentioned:

“...In terms of my lifestyle in Centre Street, since I am new to this community compared to the other aged residents here, I haven't experienced a huge change that will possibly affect my daily

routine. Apparently, most of the surroundings and people are still the same since we moved here, so my lifestyle in this neighbourhood remains the same.”

5.2.2.2 Frictions between Original Residents and New Residents

Along with the follow-up questions that aimed to inquire about their own living experiences, it can be concluded that interviewee S and Interviewee L both believed the phenomenon of gentrification within Centre Street can also create certain friction between the original, long-term residents and the new residents. Interviewee S remembered:

“There is a lot I want to express... as far as I remember, this area has been crowded with foreigners for about six to nine years, even though it is nice to see some new faces within this community, I am not quite satisfied with their behaviours and living styles... like those foreigners who always love to hold a little concert on the rooftop of their living apartments during holidays, even at night they won’t end their little concert until around 11:00 PM, it is very annoying... as there are numerous bars that keep opening until midnight, we always hear people screaming on the street during our sleep period too.”

As a new resident of Centre Street, interviewee L was slightly dissatisfied with the behaviours of the local Centre Street residents and the environment of this community, however, these frictions have not affected his overall social networks in Centre Street. Interviewee L explained:

“Honestly speaking, I was quite unaccustomed to some of the areas and nature of Centre Street when we first moved here, especially the Centre Street Market that is near our home. Since it is mainly a wet market... it makes the surroundings on the street a bit dirty and smelly... Also, most of the aged residents here lack hygiene awareness, sometimes they will spit on the street, even if it is crowded with people... but I think these elements won't affect my social networks with other residents in Centre Street since the hygiene condition of Centre Street Market has improved since a few years ago... and our living environment is getting a lot better thanks to the ongoing urban development in recent years.”

5.2.2.3 Social Cohesion and Sense of Community

Interviewee S and interviewee L both responded that Centre Street residents possess a low level of social cohesion, plus they also possess a low sense of community towards their social networks in this community. Interviewee S elaborated:

“As I lived here since the 90s, I think the social cohesion of this community is gradually diminishing, probably due to the fact that the whole community has changed a lot... numerous old places that we were familiar with were gradually being replaced and became the noble places that causing a wide range of foreigners starting to get in touch with this community... and this is why I also have a low sense of community towards Centre Street... I used to always visit the owner of that newsstand every day, and that temple once a week to meet my old friends, which was the usual routine of me during the old days, so I strongly believe that I have a deep sense of

community during that period of time... but in recent years, the huge changes in this community are progressively changing our usual routine, we also lost contact with some of our old friends due to this incident.”

Interviewees L believed that the separate lifestyles between original, long-term residents and newcomers are the major factor that contributed to the decline of social cohesion in Centre Street. As interviewee L said:

“Since this community is filled with the new residents like us, who are probably wealthier than the original residents that are living here, I believe that most of our lifestyle will be a lot different from them... For example, we love to travel by our own cars, and my wife always loves to buy groceries from ‘Market Place by Jasons’ instead of Centre Street Market, just like our previous routine in Tsim Sha Tsui. Therefore, I believe the social cohesion in this community is low because some of our lifestyles are far more different from the original residents... To put it another way, this community is now mixed with the people that originally lived outside of this community. Thus, original residents have their own routine, newcomers also have their own lifestyles.”

Interviewee L added that his possession of a low sense of community was also due to the differentiation of lifestyle between original, long-term residents and newcomers. Interviewee L elaborated:

“... It is the same reason for me for having a low sense of community towards Centre Street... This community is now mixed with new residents with different social backgrounds, we lack experience and perception of what the original residents favour, and thus lack the understanding of their common topics and heritage. It is difficult to say that we have a strong sense of community as we are not living here originally.”

5.2.3 Overall Interview Findings

Based on the responses of interviewee S and interviewee L in chapters 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, it can be concluded that the process of gentrification possesses a higher impact on the original, long-term residents than the new residents in terms of the aspects of lifestyles and daily routines. Additionally, both interviewees possess low levels of social cohesion and sense of community due to the separation of social networks caused by the phenomenon of gentrification within the recent urban development of Centre Street.

6. Discussion

Based on the research findings and the process of literature review, the following chapters will be divided into two parts to further discuss the common socio-cultural condition of aged neighbourhoods that are under the influence of gentrification, plus attempt to answer the established research questions and develop an overall conclusion regarding the research topic.

6.1 Cultural Aspect

6.1.1 Separation of Primitive Geographical Culture

With reference to the findings in chapter 5.2, it is noted that the effects of gentrification will result in the separation of aboriginal culture within the gentrifying neighbourhood. As mentioned in chapter 2.1, with the consequence of the influx of middle-class and upper-class residents, the process of gentrification will lead to an old neighbourhood being overwhelmed by a variety of middle-class structures at the expense of progressively replacing the primitive structures that were established for an extended period. Thus, this phenomenon will result in the consequence of separating or even stifling the primitive geographical culture within the aged neighbourhoods. According to a study by Lee, Slater and Wyly (2008), the gentrifying neighbourhood, which is a middle-class-dominated urban area, it generated an overemphasis on ostentation display and exhibition to establish a remarkable and aesthetic space through emphasising the cultural characteristic of the buildings, plus they demonstrate a tendency towards flaunty consumption spaces, including nostalgic stores as well as the spaces of culture and art. Accordingly, the influx of middle-class and upper-class residents will lead to an appearance of new culture and spaces in an aged neighbourhood that only correlate with the taste of these populations. Specifically, under the phenomenon of gentrification that is spreading a whole new middle-class culture and spaces that includes the reconstructions of buildings with contemporary structural elements within the gentrifying neighbourhood, such as buildings with westernised culture and buildings that are market-oriented, these elements are in conflict with the primitive geographical culture of an old

neighbourhood that commonly emphasises the historical culture of the Chinese population and the characteristics of plebification, thereby having a significant impact on the original residents' way of life as it is taking over the primitive culture that they are accustomed to. For instance, as stated by interviewee S in chapter 5.2.2.1, under the process of gentrification, the influx of newcomers and the replacement of contemporary structures over the original areas has disarranged her own lifestyle in Centre Street, which indicates that as a result of gentrification, a new middle-class culture has started to arouse within the old neighbourhood and gradually substituting the long-existing culture and gathering spots that the original residents were accustomed to, plus ultimately, as pointed out by DiGregorio (2020), changes the overall dynamics and characteristic of the gentrifying areas. Therefore, it is noted that the process of gentrification will generate a brand new culture that separates the original residents' social networks by demolishing their own long-existing culture and familiar places through replacing them with certain luxury buildings and residential properties, which will considerably impact their daily routines and general interactions towards the other residents since it separates the primitive geographical culture that is habitually shared by the original, long-term residents in the neighbourhood. Particularly, as mentioned in chapter 5.2.2.3, interviewee S also responded that her social interactions within the neighbourhood are diminishing, mainly due to her usual routine to meet her friends was being disarranged by the construction of new contemporary buildings that took over her familiar places, which shows that the phenomenon of gentrification is narrowing down the original residents' primitive social networks through reconstructions and replacements that indirectly spread the new middle-class atmosphere into the neighbourhood and progressively replacing the primitive geographical culture, thereby damaging the original,

long-term residents' ordinary social routines and demolishing their overall original social networks within the neighbourhood.

6.1.2 Friction between Residents under the Impact of New Culture

As aforementioned, an analysis conducted by He et al. (2021) has highlighted that throughout the phenomenon of gentrification, it is inevitable that there will be an influx of middle-class and upper-class residents that puts pressure on the market economy within the gentrifying neighbourhood, it is noted that it will also establish a new contradiction between the original residents and the newcomers due to the cultural differences. As mentioned in chapter 6.1.1, under the influence of gentrification, the atmosphere of new middle-class culture that emphasises westernised culture has started to develop through the reconstructions within the aged neighbourhood, it is evident that not only this kind of culture will separate the primitive geographical culture by establishing new structures throughout the area, but also in conflict with it while trying to occupy the whole neighbourhood.

According to chapter 5.2.2.2 and 5.2.2.3, interviewee S and L is unsatisfied with the current living environment of Centre Street because of those newcomers and original residents' misbehaviours that interferes with their daily routines, particularly regarding their noise nuisance and hygiene awareness, interviewee L also added that as a new resident to Centre Street, he also possesses his own lifestyle that is far more different from the original residents. To elaborate on the responses of S and L, since the majority of the newcomers are from western countries,

compared to Chinese culture, they possess a different culture and lifestyles that could possibly create friction within the neighbourhood. An analysis conducted by Lim (2016) has highlighted that cross-cultural differences have been discovered in the arousal level of actual and ideal emotions, a state of intensified physiological activity that includes strong emotions such as anger and excitement. Particularly, from the Western or individualist culture, high arousal emotions are more valued and facilitated than low arousal emotions. Furthermore, Westerners experience higher arousal emotions more than low arousal emotions. On the other hand, in the Eastern or collectivist culture, low arousal emotions are more valued than high arousal emotions. Accordingly, it is noted that the enthusiasm of the Westerners is much higher than the Chinese people, thereby their behaviours and lifestyles will be conflict with the common lifestyles of the original residents within the aged neighbourhood since most of the newcomers are accustomed to a lively environment that could possibly produce a certain degree of noise nuisance that interference original residents' daily routine. As a result of cultural differences, the ordinary social networks of the original residents in the neighbourhood will be influenced indirectly due to them being unaccustomed to or even dissatisfied with the nuisance that the newcomers have brought into their community, thus weakening the overall social ties of the gentrifying neighbourhoods through the constant influence of the new middle-class culture that creates friction between the original residents and new residents, which will significantly demolish the social cohesion of the overall neighbourhood (Jacobs, ([1961]1992), Putnam, 2001, Wellman & Leighton, 1979, as cited in He et al., 2021).

6.1.3 Disappearance of Primitive Geographical Culture

Following the disappearance of the long-existing primitive culture due to the occupation of the new culture that is replacing the original geographical culture of an old neighbourhood, it is evident that the heritage of a particular neighbourhood, the common topics of the original, long-term residents, as well as their original way of life, will be demolished immensely. With the disappearance of these historical and cultural elements that mosaiced throughout the overall structures of the aged neighbourhood, the interpersonal connections between the original residents will be greatly demolished due to the loss of gathering spots and altered social routines, thereby breaking down the primitive social networks that were previously established progressively by all of the original, long-term residents, plus weaken their overall sense of community towards their own neighbourhood.

6.1.4 Cultural Situation of Hong Kong Centre Street

From the context of Centre Street, consistent with most of the other Hong Kong old neighbourhoods, the majority of the residential buildings in Centre Street are tenement buildings, which are being mixed primarily for commercial and residential use. Particularly, these buildings are 4-5 storeys high and the ground floor was typically used for small-scale local stores, such as hardware store, grocery store and stationery store. Accordingly, as time passes, these buildings progressively became an ideal gathering spot for the local residents to meet with each other because of their convenience and popularisation in their community, and thus they will utilise these places as an agent for building relationships with each other. Therefore, along with the

residents' habitual social routines in Centre Street, it established a common geographical culture within the neighbourhood that the local residents were accustomed to in their daily routines. Nevertheless, as mentioned by the research findings, after the appearance of gentrification, the primitive geographical culture of Centre Street has been greatly separated due to the occupation of the new middle-class culture that is replacing it. Therefore, the current geographic culture of Centre Street is being mixed with the primitive culture and new middle-class culture, which can be observed particularly in the current structure of the buildings and housing prices as mentioned in chapter 5.1. For instance, even though Centre Street still possesses several amounts of tenement buildings during the private residential development that aims to construct high-rise residential buildings through replacing the worn-out buildings, the majority of the nostalgic stores on the ground floor of the tenement building were replaced by contemporary stores, such as coffee shops, bars and other chain stores.

6.1.5 Gentrification's Overall Cultural Impacts on the Social Networks in Aged Neighbourhoods

On the whole, the process of gentrification possesses a substantial cultural impact on the social networks of the aged neighbourhoods in Hong Kong negatively. As a result of gentrification, it is inevitable that the neighbourhoods' primitive geographical culture will be in conflict with the new middle-class culture and gradually be replaced by it since the influx of middle-class and upper-class residents will progressively generate a unique culture that only correlates with the taste of these populations (Lee, Slater and Wyly, 2008). Therefore, along with the disappearance of primitive geographical culture within the aged neighbourhoods, the cultural connection

between the original, long-term residents will be demolished significantly, thereby causing the destruction of the social networks that were being established by the original, long-term residents initially.

6.2 Social Aspect

6.2.1 Residential Displacement and Replacement of Aged Buildings

As mentioned in chapter 2.2, throughout the process of gentrification, the consequence generated by residential displacement, as well as the replacements of the long-term local stores and gathering spots, has led to the class segregation as mentioned by Wang (2005) that demolish the original, long-term residents' social routines through cohesion and other buyout behaviours by the landlords and developers. Accordingly, gentrification possesses a tremendous impact in terms of causing primitive social networks that interconnect each resident within the specific area to collapse indirectly (Freeman, 2009), since it alters the internal structure of a neighbourhood by reducing and replacing the aged buildings that are affordable for the disadvantaged groups of the original, long-term residents in order to maintain their livelihood within the gentrifying neighbourhood, leading to a consequence of residential displacement that forces certain original residents to relocate in other areas. Therefore, it is noted that this phenomenon not only weakens the social interactions between the residents within the neighbourhood as it alters the overall dynamics of the aged neighbourhood (DiGregorio, 2020) but also possesses influences towards the population that has been forced to leave the original

neighbourhood due to the cohesion and other buyout behaviours conducted by the landlords that create the rising rent issues.

In a study conducted by Holland (2016), the phenomenon of gentrification has also generated a dilemma for the disadvantaged groups within the gentrifying neighbourhood because of the common phenomenon of gentrification that leads to a tremendous increase in housing prices and rent prices in Hong Kong. Despite the fact that it creates a wide range of unaffordable burdens for the disadvantaged low-income residents, such as the problems of increased commodity prices for them to continue their own daily routine, the issues of rising rents have also made it more arduous for the disadvantaged groups to decide whether they have to stay or leave. With limited housing options in the gentrifying neighbourhoods due to the process of gentrification, those disadvantaged low-income residents may be forced to stay in their property and required to seek possible ways to pay and afford their rising rents or commodity prices. Hence, problems arose for those disadvantaged groups to maintain their normal social networks within the gentrifying neighbourhood since their major goal at the moment is to tackle the problems aroused regarding the rising rent and commodity price issues that influence their own living conditions considerably. Apart from those disadvantaged low-income residents will need to relocate to other areas, which the mutual contact between them and the residents from their original neighbourhood may be lost and fell into oblivion, the other disadvantaged groups who decided to stay in their original neighbourhood will be suffering from the situation of the rising rent and commodity price issues, which possess a significant impact on their social networks since they have to undertake their utmost efforts for settling these kinds of issues, in which it would possibly disarranging their normal daily routine and thus narrowing down their overall social

interaction within the community because of the rising rent and commodity price issues that causing them to struggle about their living condition, which possesses a huge pressure on them mentally.

Based on the studies mentioned in chapter 2.2, it is evident that the process of gentrification will lead to the results in residential displacement and the replacement of old structures. Along with these kinds of consequences, the primitive social networks that were being established by the original, long-term residents for an extended period will be demolished significantly since the whole community network becomes fragmented with the loss of original residents, disarranged social routines and replaced gathering spots.

7. Conclusion

The influences of gentrification regarding the social networks within the old neighbourhoods of Hong Kong were examined through exploring the specific case of the environmental characteristics of Centre Street, as well as interviewing 1 original, long-term resident and 1 new resident of Centre Street as a means to discuss their lifestyles, social cohesion, sense of community and possible friction that impact their social routine. This research has discovered three major factors that are causing the disintegration of primitive social networks, which are the disappearance of primitive geographic culture, residential displacement, and replacement of worn-out buildings. Particularly, based on the findings, this research supports the statement that the process of gentrification generates a great negative influence on the primitive geographic

culture that shapes the common social networks within every aged neighbourhood. Under the process of gentrification that leads to an influx of middle-class and upper-class populations into the old neighbourhood, it established a phenomenon that gradually covers the primitive geographic culture by spreading the whole new middle-class culture into the involved old neighbourhoods, thereby progressively altering the dynamics of the areas and changes the overall social networks that were originally established in each neighbourhood. Additionally, as a result of the market pressure generated by the influx of middle-class and upper-class residents to the gentrifying neighbourhood, the appearance of rising rent and commodity price issues that leads to the consequence of residential displacement and replacement of the aged buildings are also the major factors that causes the breakdown of primitive social networks through demolishing original, long-term resident's social routines. Therefore, the phenomenon caused by the process of gentrification possesses a considerable negative influence on the separation of primitive geographic culture and social ties, thus causing the disintegration of the original, long-term resident's collaborative social networks within the gentrifying neighbourhoods.

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