

ENTERPRISE-LED OR GOVERNMENT-LED? RESEARCH ON THE CHARACTERISTICS AND MECHANISMS OF RURAL GENTRIFICATION IN METROPOLITAN SUBURBS DRIVEN BY SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS, TAKING LIANMIN VILLAGE IN SHANGHAI AS AN EXAMPLE

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Abstract

Under the combined influence of factors such as the implementation of the rural revitalisation strategy, superior geographical location, and the implementation of significant projects such as Disneyland, the suburban villages of Shanghai's metropolitan area have experienced similar characteristics of rural gentrification in rural revitalisation in Western countries. According to the differences in driving forces, rural gentlemen are divided into two types: enterprise-led and local government-led. There may also be complex interactive relationships between the two kinds of gentrification. Then, this article takes Lianmin Village in the suburbs of Shanghai as an example, organises three panoramic surveys on it, summarises the characteristics of rural gentrification, and then constructs actor networks to explain the formation and interaction mechanisms of the two types of rural gentrification.

Key words

actor network; rural gentrification; interaction; social mechanism

Introduction

In recent years, the construction of super-large cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou has gradually expanded from inner cities to suburbs, and large-scale entertainment projects such as Universal Studios, Chimelong Paradise, and Disney have been put into operation. The strong brand appeal attached to these projects has quickly made them popular tourist destinations, attracting many domestic and foreign tourists^[1]. At the same time, with the successive introduction of strategies such as beautiful countryside and rural revitalisation, a large amount of government counterpart funds continue to flow to the countryside. In addition, due to the pressure of urban life in recent years and the promotion of social media such as Xiaohongshu, Bilibili, and Douyin, the rural "pastoral pastoral" in sharp contrast to the fast pace of the city has gradually become a new ideal lifestyle^[2, 3]. Under the combined effect of the above multiple factors inside and outside the countryside, the spatial pattern and landscape style of the rural areas in the suburbs of metropolitan areas have been profoundly reshaped, similar to the characteristics of rural gentrification in rural revitalisation in Western countries. Based on differences in driving forces, the rural gentry can be divided into enterprise-led and local government-led^[4, 5].

Previous studies on rural gentrification in China often focused only on a single type of rural gentrification. However, gentrification may have various characteristics in China's megacities' suburbs and rural areas. The complex dynamic mechanisms behind them must be further studied using more effective methods. In addition, there may be complex interactions between various types of gentrification, which differ at different stages of development. This article constructs a "conjugate rural gentrification interaction model". Then, this article took Lianmin Village in the suburbs of Shanghai as an example and organised three panoramic

surveys. Based on the survey results, this study summarises the characteristics of rural gentrification and then combines semi-structured interviews and actor networks to explain the formation mechanism of rural gentrification. Finally, this question believes the research results can reference similar rural development around metropolitan areas.

1. Literature review

British urban sociologist Ruth Glass first proposed the concept of "gentrification" in 1964 to explain how the middle class in inner cities replaces the working class and triggers changes in population, society, culture, landscape, and other aspects. Later, "gentrification" was expanded to mean replacing the lower middle class with the upper middle class^[6]. Research on rural gentrification began with the rural revitalisation of Western countries in the 1970s and 1990s. China's rural gentrification did not receive attention until 2010, showing many differences from the West^[7]. First of all, the characteristics of rural gentrification generally include spatial commodification, changes in economic structure, change or replacement of social structure, increase in rural housing prices and housing shortage, relocation and displacement of original residents, etc.^[8-10]. However, in recent years, some studies have found that rural indigenous people are not always victims of gentrification but have become active actors and beneficiaries and can often coexist with indigenous residents^[11, 12]. Secondly, in China, the state's will and the government's decisive intervention in rural development are apparent, and much money has been invested in transforming rural space. The government also plays a role in maintaining and promoting rural gentrification. We call it "organised rural gentrification," in which the government plays a leading role.

Rural gentrification in China is still in the initial stage of development, and the phenomenon of "spontaneous rural gentrification" led by enterprises and individual gentlemen is still growing. There is currently an increasing number of studies on the two types of rural gentrification in China. However, they may coexist in the same rural area, especially in rural areas surrounding metropolitan areas with abundant funds and substantial potential markets.

2. Research objects and methods

2.1 Research objects

The case study selected for this study, Lianmin Village, is located in Chuansha New Town, Pudong New District, Shanghai, only 5 kilometers north of Shanghai Disney International Tourism Resort, and contains 23 natural villages(Figure 1). Lianmin Village covers an area of 4.62 square kilometers, rich in natural resources, and crisscrossed by rivers and water bodies. One thousand seven hundred thirty-seven farmers live by the water. In addition, Lianmin Village has also achieved remarkable results in rural construction. In June 2017, based on obtaining the Shanghai Special Industry B&B License No. 01, Lianmin Village has been engaged in "B&B + Internet," "B&B + Cooperation Base," and "B&B + Agricultural Cooperatives." "Three directions go hand in hand. These measures have made Lianmin Village one of the first pilot villages for characteristic B&Bs in Shanghai and the second batch of demonstration villages for rural revitalisation in Shanghai. Especially up to now, there are more than 20 B&B clusters and other individual brand B&Bs under the unified management of Suyu Group.

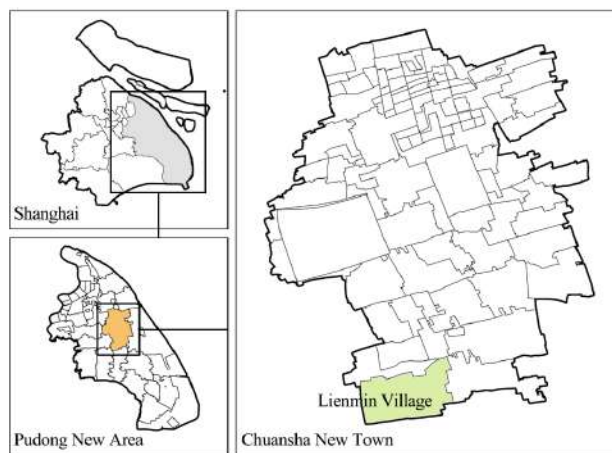


Figure 1 Location analysis of Lianmin Village
Image source: Author's drawing

2.1 Research methods

Actor-network theory (ANT) regards human and non-human factors that can change things by creating differences as broadly equal actors and incorporating them into a unified action explanation framework. The dynamic process in which actors build networks through actions is defined as translation, in which actors' role functions and value positioning change and are redefined. Translation analysis includes five stages: problem presentation, benefit conferment, recruitment, mobilisation, and elimination of objections (Figure 2). Actors form networks through translation, and the essence of the ANT network is a tool to describe the development of things. The countryside is increasingly understood as a complex space where endogenous and external factors interact, and rural revitalisation requires cooperation between actors within and outside the region. The ANT method based on relationship and process thinking can intuitively, systematically, and dynamically display the interactive connections of actors. Therefore, ANT has become an effective methodological and conceptual tool for studying rural gentrification, which is convenient for capturing the activities of actors and the spatial linkage projection of functional elements in the evolutionary process.

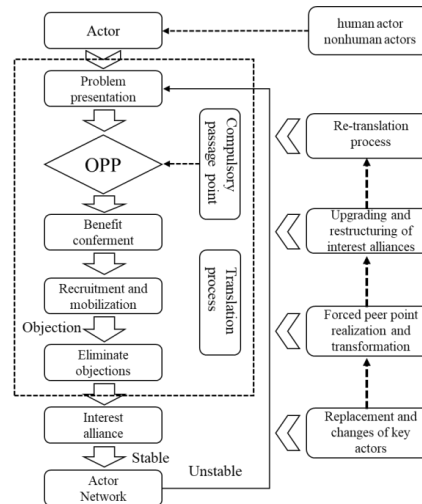


Figure 2 Analytical framework of the evolution of rural gentrification from an ANT perspective
Image source: Reference 11

3. Characteristics of rural gentrification

3.1 The overall pattern continues, but the local texture has been destroyed.

With the rapid development of the tourism service industry driven by homestays as the mainstay, Lianmin Village has continued the overall pattern of "transportation along the road, agglomeration along the line." Most of the natural villages in Lianmin Village are laid out along the river. More than 1/3 of the existing more than 1,000 residential buildings have been built along the water, a typical Jiangnan water town. Residential self-built houses are mainly located on the east side of Liufeng Highway, relegated to the second-line area along the river. The better-looking residential houses and iconic B&Bs are primarily distributed along both sides of Liuzao Port, enjoying the first-line riverside scenery (Figure 3). In addition, most of the B&Bs in the village were mainly renovated based on the original buildings, so they have little impact on the overall living pattern. However, there is still a tiny number of B&Bs that are newly built and mainly distributed on both sides of Wuzao Port. Their top contours differ from traditional houses, so they present new planar features based on continuing and strengthening the conventional residential pattern built along the water (Figure 4).

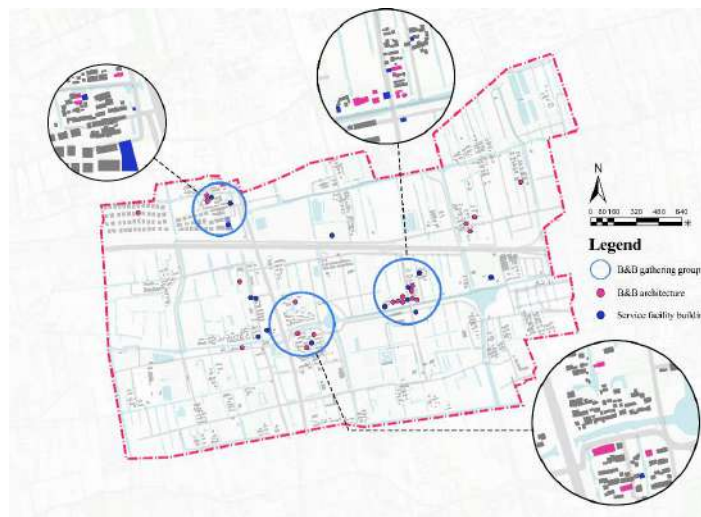


Figure 3 Spatial texture of Lianmin Village
Image source: Author's drawing

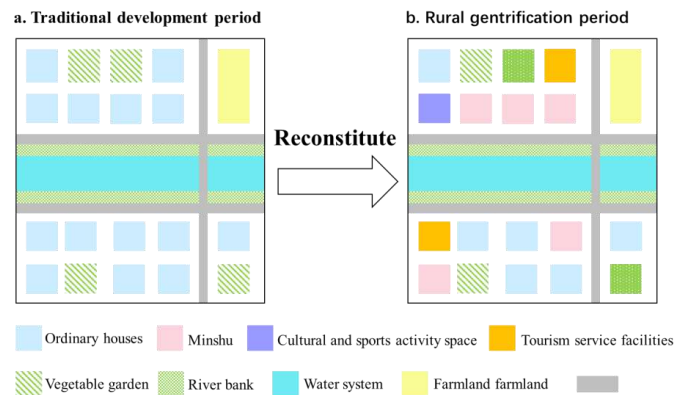


Figure 4 Spatial pattern reconstruction model of Lianmin Village
Image source: Author's drawing

3.2 Architectural diversification and urban aesthetic interest

With the successive intervention of B&B owners and other rural operators, the rural architectural style of Lianmin Village has been diversified, and the urban aesthetics have become more attractive. Diversification is reflected in the current situation of Lianmin Village, which includes not only traditional architectural styles and new rural residential styles but also a certain number of modern architectural styles and collage architectural styles that combine traditional local elements and contemporary elements. White walls and black tiles with strong Jiangnan charm characterise the traditional architectural style. The modern architectural styles in the village are mainly consumer spaces such as B&Bs, cafes, and wedding halls. Their

architectural forms mostly adopt simple and contemporary forms, with pure white paint as the background color and large-area glass windows, and rarely use other complex decorations. On the one hand, this design caters to the cultural aesthetics of urban tourists. In cities, simple style is usually synonymous with high-end. When simple modern buildings suddenly appear among many ordinary houses in the countryside, it is easier to become the visual focus and popular. Second, to meet the needs of tourists for taking pictures, simple and clean buildings are more suitable as background boards for taking photographs, reducing the visual interference of other decorations and highlighting the main image of tourists to a greater extent in the composition (Figure 5).



Figure 5 Modern buildings in Lianmin Village
Image source: Author's own photo

4. Explanation of social mechanisms

There are complex social mechanisms behind the spatial representation of rural gentrification. First of all, multiple subjects are participating in the process, as well as different economic and social attributes and interest demands. Secondly, various subjects gradually form complex social networks in daily interactions and interest games, and development factors such as capital and human resources also flow and make active choices through social networks. Furthermore, multiple actor networks may coexist in rural areas, co-constructing each other to form a more complex actor-network. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct further research on the explanation of social mechanisms of rural gentrification, and actor networks can be used to visualise rural social mechanisms due to their intuitive, systematic, and dynamic characteristics. In the actual investigation of Lianmin Village, it was found that there are two types of actor networks led by enterprises and elites and actor networks led by local governments.

4.1 Composition of actors

A complete actor network generally includes human and non-human actors (Figure 6). The human actors in the actor-network led by enterprises and elites in Lianmin Village and the actor-network led by the local government mainly include the government and village committees, villagers and elites (returning college students, individual entrepreneurs, etc.), and comfortable immigrants (rural pension, taking care of children in the countryside, periodic vacations, etc.), as well as enterprises (collective enterprises, private enterprises, etc.) and tourists. Non-human

actors are mainly environmental resources and stock projects, including land resources, characteristic dwellings, water system networks, farmland, and unique rural features and lifestyles.

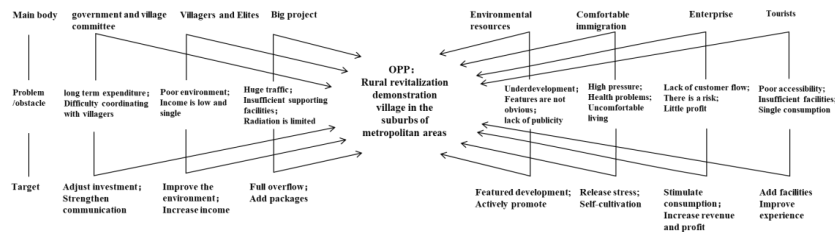


Figure 6 Composition of Lienmin Village activists
Image source: Author's drawing

4.2 Translation, recruitment and mobilisation

Actors will encounter various problems or obstacles. Among them, the actors with the most significant demands for solving their problems are most likely to become the key actors that guide the establishment of actor networks. Key actors also differ between business- and elite-dominated actor networks and local government-dominated actor networks. Among them, urban tourists who are tired of urban work and life and come to the countryside to pursue the poetic life of "pastoral pastoral" are the initiators of rural gentrification led by enterprises and elites in Lienmin Village. The enormous potential of the rural tourism market, which tourists form, attracts companies, villagers, and elites to join it. The critical actors in the actor network led by local governments are local governments, mainly village committees and town governments. As the rural tourism industry in Lienmin Village gradually takes shape and expands, local grassroots governments have also begun to encourage and control rural construction actions through policy means. In the end, the two types of gentrification form the only way to jointly build a demonstration village for rural revitalisation in the suburbs of a metropolitan area (OPP), to give full play to the local high-quality natural environment and cultural resources, creating economic benefits and improving the quality of life.

Recruitment and mobilisation are critical steps in the translation process. Key actors try to respond to and coordinate the interest demands of various actors through the OPP vision. Multiple actors can clarify their roles and assign tasks during the interest negotiation and action connection between recruiting and being recruited. At the same time, they can mobilise resources, implement actions, and respond to tasks. Specifically, rural enterprises and elites sent to the countryside have become the most active promoters and actual implementers of the entire actor network. They coordinate with other actors to strengthen cooperation during the implementation process and, at the same time, avoid friction and conflicts as much as possible to fully utilise the value of the natural and cultural resources of the countryside and form interest connections. These connections are constantly adjusted and strengthened through interaction.

4.3 Actor Network

Various actors establish weak and strong ties through translation, recruitment and mobilisation. The connections between critical actors, as well as between key actors and other

actors, are usually strong ties, which form stable strong ties that fit or evolve strong ties that conflict.

In rural gentrification led by enterprises and elites, enterprises and elite villagers are key actors (Figure 7). There are direct economic connections between tourism companies and tourists, and between village elites and tourists, thus forming solid ties. Since corporate operations have relatively sufficient funds, the consumer products such as homestays they can provide are generally higher in scale and quality than those hosted by elite individuals, thus giving tourists more confidence when making consumption choices. Therefore, forming relatively stable and robust ties between village elites and tourists is easy. However, due to the limited funds of the village elite, the image of homestay decoration and other products is more straightforward, and their appeal to tourists needs to be improved. Moreover, the management and services are also quite different from similar products operated by enterprises, making it difficult to form "repeat customers." Therefore, the solid and unstable ties formed between village elites and tourists are usually unstable. Tourism companies and local elites will also communicate in a long-term relationship, thus establishing social connections.

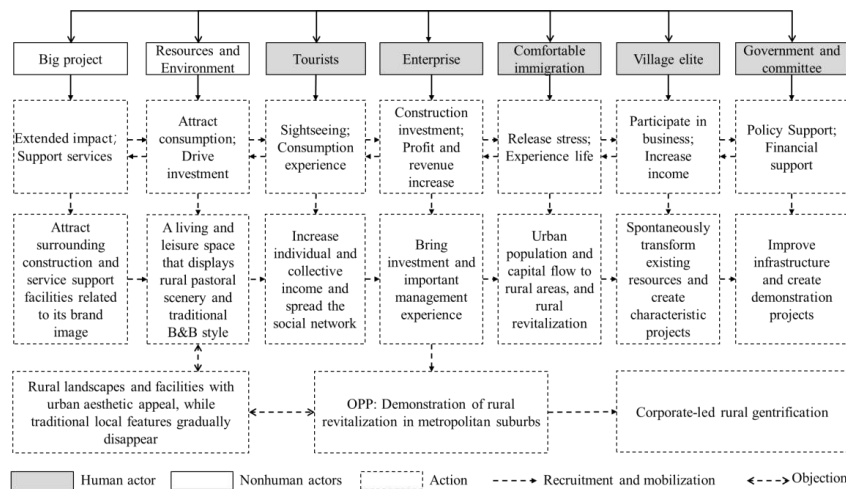


Figure 7 Actor network behind corporate- and elite-led rural gentrification
 Image source: Author's drawing

In government-led rural gentrification, local grassroots governance represented by village committees and town governments are vital actors (Figure 8). Although they did not provide direct financial subsidies to village enterprises and individual elites for order management and promoting prosperity, they supported their industrial development by constructing basic service facilities such as roads and environmental governance. In addition, grassroots governments are also responsible for attracting investment and mediating conflicts, acting as an "intermediary" for housing rentals and labor hiring, and coordinating and promoting win-win cooperation between new and old residents. If the government aligns with the original villagers, it will support new villagers who carry out new business activities. This overall macro control combined with practical problem mediation leaves much room for rural development and allows the market to choose suitable industries independently. In addition, the local government

of Lianmin Village has also taken the initiative to negotiate brand cooperation with Shanghai Shendi Group, the developer of Shanghai Disney.

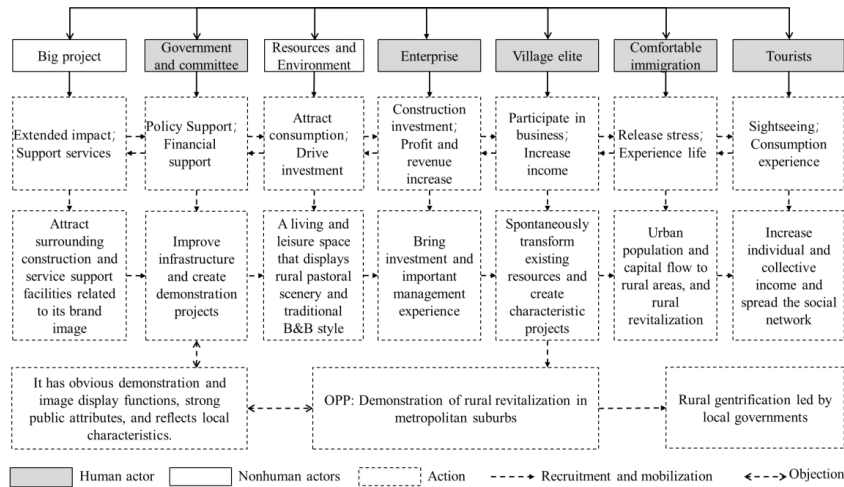


Figure 8 Actor network behind government-led rural gentrification
Image source: Author's drawing

5. Conclusion and discussion

This article uses the case of Lianmin Village. It uses the actor network analysis method to explore the characteristics and mechanisms of rural gentrification: rural gentrification led by enterprises and elites and rural gentrification led by the government. The research found many things. Firstly, Lianmin Village has the characteristics of enterprise-led rural gentry and local government-led rural gentrification in terms of rural population structure, industrial structure, and landscape style. The former has higher flexibility and reflects more urban aesthetic interest. Organised rural gentrification, with local government investment and construction as the primary mode of participation, focuses on public actions such as road widening, blackening of basic service facilities, and river ecological improvement, showing obvious public attributes and local characteristics preferences. Second, the mechanism behind the above characteristics may differ from local enterprises and governments' independent driving roles in their respective fields. Instead, the above two main actors are interconnected through other actors such as village elites, comfortable immigrants, tourists, etc., forming a complex joint action network. Market resources and government resources are efficiently allocated and reorganised through the actor-network.

In the context of China's rural revitalisation policy, rural gentrification has become the only path for developing most rural areas in our country. It is also helpful under our country's urban-rural dual-land system. However, most rural gentrification in China is still in the brewing or initial stages, and its subsequent development results and sustainability remain to be further observed and demonstrated. This article only selects a typical case in the suburbs of Shanghai, a megacity, for in-depth comparative discussion, but China also has vast underdeveloped and underdeveloped areas. Whether the two rural gentrification development models are applicable in their rural revitalisation process still requires in-depth research by multiple parties.

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