Studying Global Gentrifications

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Why research global gentrifications?

It has been more than half a century since Ruth Glass's (1964) seminal essay that coined the term 'gentrification'. At the time, gentrification was about inner city residential neighbourhoods that saw the incremental dwelling-by-dwelling upgrading of individual properties, which resulted in the replacement of original working class families with middle classes. It was indeed a critical enquiry into class re-make of urban space, while the urban context of north London determined the actual speed and form of how this class remake of urban space was carried out. Since then, gentrification studies has seen the proliferation of a large body of literature whose geographical coverage has gone global. Increasingly, we hear stories from non-usual suspects of gentrification about heritage conservation, transnational cityscape, mega-projects and redevelopment of substandard and dilapidated neighbourhoods, and how these urban processes exacerbate place-specific socio-spatial injustice that accompany displacement of original land users. Despite some reservations among sceptics of the gentrification framework, as

Ley and Teo (2014: 1296) assert, gentrification remains to offer 'a critical edge and some theoretical coherence to physical and social change incorporating eviction, displacement, demolition and redevelopment'.

Contemporary urban policies increasingly promote accumulation through the reorganization of the built environment (Cochrane, 2007; Harvey, 1989). This shifting attention has significant implications for the rise of gentrification, as real estate becomes a main source of not only public finance and business profits but also asset accumulation for individuals. Nowadays, we hear frequent reference to how gentrification has gone global (Smith, 2002), but instead of seeing the rise of gentrification as only having resulted from the dissemination of mobile capital and urbanism from the core to the peripheries of the world economy, it is important to see how the dependence on the secondary circuit of the built environment (real estate in particular) (Harvey, 1978; Lefebvre, 1970 [2003]) has become a general characteristic of capital accumulation and preconditioned the rise of gentrification as an endogenous (rather than imported) urban process, thus producing 'multiple gentrifications in a pluralistic sense rather than "Gentrification" with a capital "G"' (Lees et al., 2015: 442). It is in this regard that gentrification has become a planetary phenomenon (see Lees et al., 2016 for more discussions on planetary gentrification; also Sigler and Wachsmuth, 2016; Slater, 2017; Wyly, 2015).

In this chapter, I discuss some of the salient issues that are at the centre of planetary thinking of gentrification, examining how the inclusion of the urbanization experiences of non-usual suspects in the Global South helps us expand our horizon of gentrification research and reinterpret what has been learnt from the Global North. First, the chapter discusses how our understanding of displacement needs to actively take into consideration the temporality, spatial relations and subjectivity. Second, the chapter ascertains the importance of locating gentrification in broader urban processes and also in the context of uneven development. Third, the chapter argues that gentrification is to be treated as a political and ideological project of the state

and the ruling class in addition to it being an economic project. The concluding section sums up the arguments and provides some reflections on what it means to do comparative research on global gentrifications from a planetary perspective.

Challenges of doing global gentrification research: Complicating displacement

At the heart of gentrification research is the attention to displacement. Any gentrification study that does not take displacement seriously can be regarded as an incomplete enquiry (see Slater, 2006). Nevertheless, despite the long history of gentrification research and enquiries into displacement from various disciplines, our understanding of displacement still remains limited. If we take into consideration the experience of the urbanising world outside the Global North, then the pictures get even more complicated, but the complexity would provide us with greater opportunities to advance our contemporary understanding of displacement.

Studies on displacement often focus on physical displacement concerning last remaining residents only, who become subject to eviction when their properties are taken away by the government, developers, landlords and/or property agents. However, Peter Marcuse's (1985) seminal work provides a rich source of inspiration, for he reminds us that displacement is multi-dimensional and that its study needs to consider temporality, spatial relations and subjectivity. First of all, his reference to 'chain displacement' highlights the importance of processual approaches to the study of displacement, calling for the need to examine what happens to previous residents who decide to leave their neighbourhoods and whose empty dwellings get occupied eventually by last-remaining residents. This effectively asks us to think of displacement as a process that begins long before any official eviction notice is given to occupants.

While 'chain displacement' was involving succession of occupants, Mateja Celestine's (2016) insightful paper reminds us of the temporality of displacement embodied in an individual. Placed in the context of armed conflict and violence in Bolivian rural villages, Celestina (2016: 388) raises a penetrating question of 'when the "clock" of displacement starts'. When people are placed under heavy physical and psychological pressure that threatens their sense of belonging and security in their original place of residence, their perception of displacement already commences, even though their actual physical displacement is yet to arrive.

> [...] it is difficult to specify a precise starting point for displacement. Some events, like imprisonment and disappearance, might play a more prominent role than others and are indeed more memorable and have greater consequences. They therefore stand out. But alongside these events, the process of displacement can be traced back to a time when the negotiation of place became increasingly difficult; when witnessing the unmaking of one's place took on sufficient force, velocity and persistence that any attempts at resistance or other efforts to make the place more similar to what it used to be were perceived as futile. (Celestina, 2016: 388)

While the above statement reiterates the significance of a temporal understanding of displacement, it also highlights the importance of paying attention to various types of violence that displacees confront well before their actual moment of vacating their home, something that Marcuse (1985) was also trying to emphasize by coming up with the term 'displacement pressure'. Numerous studies point out that displacees are often placed under recurrent threats of legal and/or extralegal forces (for example, privately hired thugs), which can be immensely stressful and sometimes life-threatening (see for example, Gray and Porter, 2015; Shao, 2013; Shin, 2013). The importance of

taking subjective feeling seriously is also underscored in the recent discussions about phenomenological or symbolic displacement (see Atkinson, 2015; Davidson and Lees, 2010; Shaw and Hagemans, 2015), which understand displacement to be more than physical displacement from a given space and call for the inclusion of psychological and emotional detachment or alienation from original places of residence even though residents stay put. Furthermore, the ordeal of domicide (the deliberate destruction of homes; see Porteous and Smith, 2001) has long-lasting effects on displacees' physical and psychological well-being: in this regard, in addition to the question of when the 'displacement clock' starts, we may also need to ask if the 'displacement clock' *will ever stop ticking*.

Displacement is also highly likely to be inherited across generations within a family, especially in countries of the Global South, where condensed urbanization is manifested (Shin, 2014). For instance, residents who are displaced to urban peripheral neighbourhoods as part of inner-city redevelopment to create a central business district (read gentrification) may become subject to another round of displacement in future, as rapid urban growth opens up opportunities to invite surplus capital for real estate and infrastructure development to urban peripheries. What used to be brand new (re-)developed neighbourhoods may also undergo new-build gentrification long before they reach their design building age, as they face obsolescence and thus widening rent gap (c.f., Weber, 2002). Under these circumstances, displacement becomes a repeated tragedy and disaster within a family, passed on from parents to children generation. The experience of an interviewee that I came across some years ago (in 2002) in Seoul very much testifies to the inheritance of displacement:

> I was in my second year of primary school when
> we were evicted and built a new house here. It's
> been more than 30 years since then, since 1968
> [...] I came home after school, and my house was

gone. I looked for my mom, and on a main road, there were my mom and dad, on a vehicle that resembled one of those garbage trucks. That night, we came here, and the life in Nangok began. (Female in her 40s, interviewed in Seoul; cited from Shin, 2006: 106)

In addition to temporality and subjectivity, Marcuse (1985) puts forward the notion of 'exclusionary displacement', which is concerned with the gentrification of a neighbourhood previously affordable to the poor and the impact of such gentrification on the poor living elsewhere.[1] Marcuse's conceptualization of exclusionary displacement compels us to retain a relational understanding of space, and to zoom out and consider what happens in those areas outside gentrified ones. Building on this perspective allows us to understand 'balloon effects' associated with mega-gentrification and displacement especially in the Global South (see Chapter 7 in Lees et al., 2016).[2] When an entire neighbourhood is subject to mega-gentrification as in a redevelopment project, the resulting displacement calls for a broader understanding about the relationship between the gentrified neighbourhood and the entire city (and beyond). For example, a number of substandard and informal settlements in the Global South are increasingly becoming subject to new-build gentrification, producing hundreds and thousands of displaced families looking for alternative housing.[3] For various reasons such as employment proximity and education of their children, families often end up finding a relocation dwelling in adjacent neighbourhoods, which get densified because of incoming displacees, and experience pressure of rent increase. In short, there is a 'balloon effect' created by mega-displacement. We need to understand what social and psychological impacts are experienced by those neighbourhoods that act as hosts to displacees, how the displacees adjust to the post-displacement lives and built environment, and if there is any embryonic signs of housing problems displaced to destination neighbourhoods.

The above discussions produce a set of huge policy implications as well. Governments often focus on last-remaining residents when estimating the costs of urban regeneration, and they often do this by limiting the enumeration to those residents eligible for compensation only in a project neighbourhood. In mainland China, for example, official publications usually omit migrant tenants from their estimation of the number of citizens affected by urban (re)development projects (see Shin, 2013), which result in huge under-estimation of the real scale of displacement. If we include all dimensions of displacement such as chain and exclusionary displacement, the scale of displacement by any given urban regeneration programme would be much higher. Furthermore, the consideration of symbolic or phenomenological displacement means that any effort to rehouse original residents needs to go beyond simple rehousing and include the set-up of inclusionary measures that would allow rehoused original residents to feel at home and not alienated by the changed environment. Any discussions regarding the rehousing of original residents after redevelopment will need to be made with reference to (i) how much the original residents would retain a sense of belonging after regeneration; (ii) how much the original residents were in control of changes, meaning that original residents' views are to be taken onboard from the early stage of designing a regeneration programme.

A more nuanced understanding of displacement is therefore an urgent task, especially in a rapidly urbanising context such as that found in East Asia, where one may often come across with viewpoints that exhibit a degree of positive understanding of neighbourhood changes, even if such changes incur wholesale clearance of existing dwellings and displacement of original residents: The justification is that original residents' poor dwelling conditions are improved by the redevelopment. For instance, Li and Song (2012: 1104) in their examination of changes to dwelling conditions among displacees in Shanghai conclude that displacees 'enjoy comparatively good housing' and 'are generally satisfied with their dwelling, if less so with their neighbourhood'. Because mainland China's redevelopment projects in major

cities from the 1990s onward were focusing on those neighbourhoods that were deemed too dilapidated and structurally precarious to be subject to privatization (see Shin, 2007), and because of the socialist legacy built in the compensation system, most displacees are less likely to encounter worse housing conditions after displacement. Taking improved housing conditions as a reference point for evaluating displacees' satisfaction can therefore be limiting. More importantly, the focus on changed physical conditions of living overlooks the subjective feeling and various bodily threats that might imprint life-long scars in each displacee's mind and body. Here, Davidson and Lees (2010: 403) provide a helpful reminder: 'A phenomenological reading of dis*place*ment is a powerful critique of the positivistic tendencies in theses on replacement; it means analysing not the spatial fact or moment of displacement, rather the "structures of feeling" and "loss of sense of place" associated with dis*place*ment' (original emphasis).

Techniques for researching global gentrification

In locating gentrification, the researcher needs to pay attention to other locally embedded urban processes that work in tandem with gentrification (see Shin et al., 2016). In this section, I discuss some of the key approaches to carrying out research on global gentrifications, highlighting the importance of situating gentrification in wider urban processes and discussing how researchers working on the Global South and the Global North can learn from each other. Gentrification has been traditionally perceived as a neighbourhood based urban process. As such, neighbourhood has often served as the main unit of analysis in gentrification research, with researchers zooming in to verify the presence (or absence) of gentrification. To some extent, this inward orientation and thinking of gentrification within a fixed boundary is inevitable, if any enumeration of displacees is to be carried out: it is vital to identify who used to live in a given area before finding out how many of them were displaced. For this reason, regeneration project sites subject to planning

approval often become part of gentrification studies, as they usually provide opportunities to acquire official information on local populations, even if overly simplified. However, restricting one's enquiry into what goes on within a set boundary somewhat assumes that the urban space is a container of activities that unfold therein.

In the Global South in particular, it is necessary for gentrification research to take into consideration the particular contingent factors that produce 'mutated' forms of gentrification, deviating from more conventional forms of gentrification found in the Global North. Due to the ways in which contemporary urbanization produces city forms that co-exist or come into conflicts with historic forms of human settlements, it is more likely for gentrification in the Global South to play out in a more complex legal, social, and physical environments than can be found in the Global North. For instance, it is probable to see the presence of a diverse range of extra-legal tenure and informal property rights that determine the outcome of (speculative) property transactions in the Global South (Desai and Loftus, 2013). Informal building practices are often endorsed with the state turning a blind eyes if such practices are deemed to be in the interests of influential private actors (Roy, 2005; Shatkin, 2008). The attention to such informality in the Global South can also feed into the study of gentrification in the Global North, shedding light on the extent to which cities in the Global North are not immune to informal building and tenure practices. As Bahar Sakızlioğlu (2014) has noted on her comparative study of state-led gentrification and displacement in both Dutch and Turkish neighbourhoods, researchers fail to study informality in Western cities in the same way as they do in non-Western cities.

Sceptics of gentrification usually assume that gentrification is largely associated with individualized tenure and involves transaction of formal private properties. Based on this understanding, they would argue that gentrification as a concept has a limited scope when transplanted to the

Global South (see for example, Ghertner, 2015; Maloutas, 2011). However, this is the same error as saying that the Western world sees capitalism as the only mode of production. It is not, and cannot be: different modes survive, albeit waning in varying degrees, and it is the prevalence of the capitalist mode of production, not the complete replacement of pre-capitalist mode, that warrants our attention for analysing the capitalist society and economy.[4] Researchers working on gentrification in the Global North need to take into consideration how informality and non-market(etized) components of the economy and society influence the working of gentrification, and how multiple processes work together to determine the socio-spatial outcome that researchers come to observe. As Matthias Bernt (2016: 643) has ascertained, '[t]he commodification of housing and its decommodification are thus closely connected and need to be studied together, and this is true for both "northern" and "southern" experiences'.

I have tried to address some of the above concerns elsewhere (Shin, 2016), discussing how mainland China's particular land ownership structure produces a place-specific process of dispossession to create a pathway to gentrification. The argument was that in mainland China, both economic (land market) and extra-economic forces (the use of state apparatus and collective relations to coerce individual agreement to top-down redevelopment decision) are at play simultaneously. This perspective, however, is not to be taken to indicate that the coercive use of state apparatus nor extra-economic force is unique to mainland China or the Global South more broadly speaking, since the use of extra-economic force 'is a regular companion of gentrification, not only in the South, but everywhere' (Bernt, 2016: 642).

Additionally, there is a need to take political and cultural dimensions of urban change more seriously when discussing the reasons behind the rise of gentrification. When adhering to a critical political economic perspective (Lees et al., 2016), it is crucial to understand the extent to which material

conditions mature, thus the need to examine the widening of rent gap and the circulations of (real estate) capital (see López-Morales, 2011, 2016 and Shin, 2009 for some of the examples of rent gap in non-Western cities; see Slater, 2017 for rent gap at planetary scale). However, this is not to prioritize the economics of gentrification (rent gap, exploitation of land rents, etc.) with no recourse for politics and culture to explain the rise of (or the absence of) gentrification in a given place. Even Neil Smith, who was frequently wrongly accused of being an advocate of an economically deterministic perspective, stresses that enlarged rent gaps do not act as a determinant of gentrification, but are simply indicating a greater possibility of gentrification to occur in that location:

> The whole point of the rent gap theory is not that gentrification occurs in some deterministic fashion where housing costs are lowest [...] but that it is most likely to occur in areas experiencing a sufficiently large gap between actual and potential land values. This is a fundamental distinction. Areas such as the central and inner city where the rent gap may be greatest may also experience very high land values and housing costs despite disinvestment from the built environment and the consequent rent gap. (Smith, 1987: 464)

Essentially, political struggles to turn material potentials into reality do matter. A neighbourhood experiencing gentrification would be a reflection of the imbalance of power relations skewed towards the rich and powerful. This is the conclusion also reached in my analysis (Shin, 2009) of how a substandard and informal neighbourhood in Seoul's periphery was redeveloped into an upscale housing estate that saw the displacement of the absolute majority of local tenants and owner-occupiers. Conversely, the importance of political struggles suggests that even if material conditions of

gentrification mature, gentrification can be resisted if enough support for anti-gentrification can be mobilized.

Finally, gentrification researchers need to zoom out of neighbourhoods and be inclusive of wider processes of uneven development. As much as the global circuits of capital produce uneven development across the world, the ways in which surplus capital flows into cities and regions within a national territory and into different districts and neighbourhoods within a city are inevitably uneven. Therefore, it is highly possible that the prominence of gentrification in a city may come at the expense of urban decline elsewhere within and/or outside the city. For instance, in the UK, what does London's super gentrification mean for the rest of the country? What does the domination of new-build gentrification in Seoul mean for other regional cities in South Korea? How does the inner-city gentrification of Beijing resulting from redevelopment projects reconcile with the concurrent processes of area-based conservation of the city's heritage sites and the suburbanization of new estate construction? What is the implication of 'splintering urbanism' for gentrification of cities in India? What does the construction of new 'urban utopias' (such as smart cities, eco-cities) for the middle- and upper-classes in urban peripheries, a practice that is high on many governments in the Global South, mean for the future of historic urban cores? Reflecting diverse urban development trajectories in and outside cities around the world, there are endless questions that can be raised to help understand what kind of relationship gentrification of a given urban space establishes vis-à-vis other spatial processes at work. Here, a helpful reminder comes from Doreen Massey (1999: 281) who in her discussion of the space of politics points out that: '[a]n understanding of spatiality [...] entails the recognition that there is more than one story going on in the world and that these stories have, at least, a relative autonomy'. In addition to this perspective, Massey (1984) also highlights the persistent challenge every geographer would have to face, that is, the need to analyse the uniqueness of a place without losing grips of the general cause. For gentrification researchers and other urban scholars, it is

essential to acknowledge the presence of multiple processes working simultaneously in a given space, and to discuss how these multiple processes - one of which may be gentrification - interact, and what kind of compounding relationship they produce.

Rethinking gentrification as amalgamation of economic, political and ideological projects: An illustrated case study of Beijing

Gentrification as an economic project is a well-known argument (see Lees et al., 2008). The transformation of the demographic structure of a gentrified neighbourhood accompanied by upgrading or redevelopment of dilapidated dwellings is a welcoming change from the perspective of local government officials who equate the change with higher tax revenues, and of developers, financiers and property agents who welcome the new business opportunities (Betancur, 2002; Lang, 1986). In a place where land revenues are collected directly by local governments to be put into public finance for further development of infrastructure, etc., gentrification is more than the beautification of the city-scape. This is the case of mainland China where under state ownership of urban construction land, land use rights are transferred from the state to developers in return for land use premium and other administrative charges (Hsing, 2010; Lin, 2015): Revenues collected in this way are known to account for a substantial share of municipal finance, sometimes exceeding the amount of other tax revenues (known as budgetary income as opposed to extra-budgetary income that land accounts belong to) (Hsing, 2010; Lin, 2015).

In addition to understanding gentrification as an economic project, gentrification is often part and parcel of political and ideological projects of the state and the ruling elites. Gentrification facilitates social cleansing, driving those deemed socially undesirable away from the urban space earmarked for those sought-after by the state. The retention of social order under the terms and conditions imposed by the ruling elites is an argument

that Neil Smith was ascertaining in his discussion of 'revanchist urbanism' (1996). With the growing economic and political power of major cities in the Global South, there is an increasing trend of urban policies aiming to convert an entire urban district into an exclusive space of development to cater for the needs of domestic and transnational elites and to showcase the power of the state and its legitimacy. The example of China is presented below as an illustration of this, particularly introducing the experience of Beijing, where the municipal government strives to transform Beijing into a world city, following the hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games.

Both urbanization itself and gentrification in a major city like Beijing have been the Chinese state's political, economic and ideological project (see Shin, 2014). In Beijing, one of the inner city districts called Dongcheng District announced in 2011 that the district would aim to reduce its population size substantially during the next 20 years so that the district population is to reach 650,000 people by 2030, which is 269,000 people less than the figure in 2011 (Dongcheng District Government, 2011). This was in line with the Beijing municipal government's effort to promote Beijing as world city, and was to help the Dongcheng District enhance its characteristic as a cultural, political and business centre of Beijing. The reduction of the district population was to be achieved by displacing those less desirable low-end services and industries (for example printing, garbage collection) and controlling the inflow of low-skilled migrant workers, while inviting highly talented professionals. The expected result is the production of an exclusive space that is earmarked for the consumption by domestic and transnational elites at the expense of the displacement of those workers deemed less desirable to fulfil the government's ambition. This is in fact mega-gentrification at city scale, driven by the municipal government (or the municipal branch of the Party State) to fulfil their political ambition. Obviously, from the perspective of displacees, such transformation represented urban injustice, as they were driven away from the city they contributed heavily to construct.

Reflections on doing global gentrification research

Despite various attempts by pro-business interests that try to depict gentrification as a positive urban process, gentrification remains a concept that highlights the looting and destruction of homes and neighbourhoods in order to advance the interests of the rich and powerful. As an urban process, gentrification is the class remake of urban space, entailing the exacerbation of urban socio-spatial injustice by the speculative desire to exploit the land rent gap and create an exclusive space that bars the poor and the marginalized from claiming their right to the city (Wachsmuth, see Chapter 11 in this volume). Doing global gentrification research is to understand the dialectical relationship between the particularity and the generality of gentrification processes (see Shin et al., 2016), and how this relationship is embodied in an individual case that gentrification as well as non-gentrification researchers study.

Is gentrification a useful concept for critically examining urban processes in both the Global North and the Global South? The conclusion of this chapter is an explicit yes, as long as both gentrification and non-gentrification researchers remain open-minded about multiple possibilities or combinations of urban processes that may work in tandem, and employ a relational perspective on space so that inquiries do not get confined to a single case or process under observation. Here, Doreen Massey's (1984: 9) remark is a helpful reminder of this relationship between particularity and generality:

> The fundamental methodological question is how to keep a grip on the generality of events, the wider processes lying behind them, without losing sight of the individuality of the form of their occurrence. Pointing to general processes does not adequately explain what is happening at particular moments or in particular places. Yet any explanation must include such general

processes. The question is how [...]. 'General processes' never work themselves out in pure form. There are always specific circumstances, a particular history, a particular place or location. What is at issue - and to put it in geographical terms - is the articulation of the general with the local (the particular) to produce qualitatively different outcomes in different localities. (Massey, 1984: 9)

Doing global gentrification research is not to rule out cities in the Global South as if they possess distinctive urban processes that make them completely immune to gentrification. In so much as the cities in the Global South see the rising importance of the real estate industry and the secondary circuit of capital accumulation in the built environment, they are prone to gentrification pressure. Borrowing from the words of Doreen Massey (1999: 281) again, doing global gentrification research is then to shed light on 'the possibility of the existence of a multiplicity of narratives' by acknowledging '[a] spatial (rather than a temporal) recognition of difference'. In this way, the urban processes in the Global South are not understood simply as part of urbanizing Global South catching up with the Global North. This is what lies at the heart of a planetary perspective on studying global gentrifications.

Finally, it is important for researchers to think of why they carry out gentrification studies. Thinking about the purpose of one's research is closely related with the question of 'how to' do global gentrification research. On the one hand, there is the urgency of situating our understanding of gentrification in the concrete web of urban life, to give meaning to the struggles of displacees, and to think of the generality based on our own observations and review of empirical studies. With displacement of existing land users at its heart, gentrification research is essentially bound with the question of social injustice (Lees, 2014; Smith, 1996). Devising local action plans to realize social justice and progressive urbanism requires the identification of place-

specificities that produce injustice, while having a longer-term perspective on what cities after capitalism would look like. Gentrification research means to learn from the real struggles of displacees who open up new avenues of innovative anti-gentrification measures (Derickson and Routledge, 2015). This process of learning is what constitutes knowledge co-production in gentrification research, which would bring gentrification studies out of the entanglements about definitional disputes (Slater, 2006). Only then can we begin to think of place-specific strategies to fight urban injustice which is in part generated by gentrification. Global gentrification research, in this regard, is to inform locally embedded endogenous struggles against displacement in order for wider cross-regional alliances and solidarity to be formed so that social justice and cities after capitalism can be imagined collectively at planetary scale.

Notes

[1] This type of displacement may result in the scarcity of remaining affordable housing units, preventing people from moving out of their current neighbourhoods even if their neighbourhoods experience rent hikes. Area-based poverty concentration may be one of the outcomes of exclusionary displacement.

[2] Mega-gentrification is also increasingly popular in the Global North with the rise of mega-displacement, for example see Lees (2014) for the gentrification of council housing estates in London.

[3] For example, in Seoul, about 720,000 people were known to have been affected by urban redevelopment projects between 1983 and 1988. Similar situations could be found in Beijing where 1.5 million people were estimated to have been affected by redevelopment projects between 2001 and 2008 (see ACHR, 1989; COHRE, 2007).

[4] After all, the first line of Capital Volume 1 says: 'The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an "immense collection of commodities"' (Marx, 1867 [1990: 125]). This is also similar to the ways in which we are to understand the rise of capitalism in a transitional economy, where socialist legacies create various frictions while colliding with capitalist development (Golubchikov et al., 2005; Hsing, 2010; Ma and Wu, 2005).

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