‘Tourism gentrification’: the case of Dayan (the old Town) in Lijiang, China

Highlights

- Looking at the relationship between tourism and gentrification in post socialist China
- Investigating to what extent tourism gentrification is affecting the authenticity of the old town of Lijiang
- Finding out if conservation policies and tourism management strategies have led to the in/direct displacement of low income groups

Overview

‘Tourism gentrification’ is an emerging subfield of gentrification studies asserting that uncontrolled and non-inclusive tourism development policies can have detrimental effects on the livelihoods of local communities and threaten the authenticity of historic areas. Yet ‘a conceptualization of how this phenomenon occurs has not been fully considered’ (Cocola-Gant, 2018:281). The proposed PhD seeks to address this gap by conceptualizing ‘tourism gentrification’ in Lijiang Old Town, in Yunnan, China, a renowned World Heritage Site.

China has been chosen because a. there have been no studies of tourism gentrification there to date, b. Chinese cities came to the gentrification game late and tended to demolish old buildings and replace them with new-build ‘mega-gentrification’, it is only in recent years that historic preservation and heritage have become part of Chinese gentrification practices (Lees, et al, 2016), c. following this recent shift in urban conservation practices in China, historic cities have become popular attractions for Chinese tourists (Xie & Heath, 2017). Although there have been no academic studies of gentrification in Lijiang to date, trip advisor calls it ‘a major tourist attraction in China, bringing with it modernisation and gentrification’. Of course as Lees et al. (2016) have argued it is this complexity of modernisation and gentrification (crucially gentrification in the West has been seen as anti-modern/ist) that makes Chinese gentrification contextually different. Lijiang is a post-socialist city and there is also an emerging literature looking at how gentrification plays out differently in a post socialist context. The transition from state ownership to market forces, the ensuing rapid modernization and urbanization, and the construction of a middle class as a national project, are all important factors.
Chinese gentrification scholar He (2012) talks about the demise of thriving authentic Chinese old towns and the rise of an ostentatious middle-class/elite town ‘whitewashed by historical and cultural icons’. She discusses how low income residents’ rights to live and work in the central city are overridden by the claims of a growth seeking state and emerging middle class. This PhD will investigate both the displacement of authenticity due to tourism gentrification and the displacement of low income groups.

Methodology
This mixed methods project will collate both primary and secondary, quantitative and qualitative data. **Quantitative**: demographic data on population changes in Dayan plus Lijiang more generally, post socialism, to identify displacement and change; tourism data on the numbers and types of tourists visiting Dayan. **Qualitative**: textual analysis of policy documents on Dayan (UNESCO, national and local government) and archival data (media coverage etc) looking at the social construction of heritage in a modernizing context; in-depth semi-structured interviews (n=10) with policymakers and government elites (aiming to conceptualise tourism gentrification in China and Dayan in particular); focus groups (n=10) with long term residents in Dayan to investigate opinions on heritage, cultural value and authenticity regarding the old town and how locals have experienced the changes brought by tourism. In addition ethnographic research will be undertaken in the old town, recording over a period of time the lived experience of tourism and gentrification.

Further Reading

Funding
This research project is one of a number of projects in the Department. It is in competition for funding with one or more of these projects. Usually the project which receives the best applicant will be awarded the funding.

Home/EU Applicants
This project is eligible for a fully funded College of Science and Engineering studentship which includes :

- A full UK/EU fee waiver for 3.5 years
- An annual tax free stipend of £14,777 (2018/19)
- Research Training Support Grant (RTSG)

International Applicants
This project is eligible for a fully funded College of Science and Engineering studentship which includes :
Application Instructions

The online application and supporting documents are due by Monday 21st January 2019.

Any applications submitted after the deadline will not be accepted for the studentship scheme.

References should arrive no later than Monday 28th January 2019.

Applicants are advised to apply well in advance of the deadline, so that we can let you know if anything is missing from your application.

Required Materials

1. Online application form
2. Two academic references
3. Transcripts
4. Degree certificate/s (if awarded)
5. Curriculum Vitae
6. CSE Studentship Form
7. English language qualification

Applications which are not complete by the deadline will not be considered for the studentship scheme. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the application form and documents are received by the relevant deadlines.

All applications must be submitted online, along with the supporting documents as per the instructions on the website.

Please ensure that all email addresses, for yourself and your referees, are correct on the application form.

For more information, please visit our website at:
https://www2.le.ac.uk/colleges/scieng/research/postgraduate-opportunities/cse-2019/instructions