

## REVIEW ARTICLE

Spatial and temporal characteristics of urban  
gentrification in mainland China: A systematic  
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## Abstract

Urban gentrification in China, emerging in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, has accelerated over the past decade alongside the country's rapid modernization and urban transformation. Despite its growing prevalence, a systematic understanding of its spatial-temporal patterns, typologies, and socio-economic impacts remains limited. This study aims to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive synthesis of existing scholarship on urban gentrification in mainland China. Employing the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses framework, the review analyzes peer-reviewed studies published over the past two decades to map thematic focuses, temporal trajectories, and spatial distributions, as well as to assess both positive and negative impacts. The findings reveal a scholarly progression from early conceptual adoption (circa 2005) to empirical diversification after 2010, with a marked surge in publications between 2015 and 2016. Empirical research remains geographically concentrated, with case studies in Nanjing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing accounting for nearly half of the literature. Five dominant forms of gentrification—new-build, tourism-led, commercial, studentification, and green—are identified. The Chinese trajectory is characterized by centralized urbanization, a demolition-reconstruction renewal model, and strong state-led governance. While these processes have enhanced land-use efficiency, block connectivity, and spatial openness, they have also intensified socio-spatial inequalities, cultural erosion, and rising living costs. This review not only consolidates fragmented knowledge but also underscores the need for spatially just and context-sensitive governance strategies to balance urban redevelopment with community rights.

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## 1. Introduction

Urban gentrification—first conceptualized by Glass (1964) as the transformation of working-class neighborhoods through an influx of middle-class residents—has since evolved into a multifaceted process involving physical renewal, residential displacement, and shifts in socio-political power relations (Anguelovski *et al.*, 2017; Lu *et al.*, 2023). While Western scholarship has extensively examined its stages, drivers, and

consequences (Hamnett, 2003), the Chinese experience follows a markedly different trajectory, shaped by rapid urbanization, centralized governance, and distinctly state-mediated spatial restructuring.

In stark contrast to the predominantly market-led gentrification processes observed in North America and Europe—where policy responses often include mechanisms such as affordable housing quotas (e.g., London's Section 106 agreements) and anti-displacement programs (e.g., San Francisco's Rent Stabilization Ordinance)—gentrification in China is largely state-engineered. This fundamental divergence is vividly illustrated by landmark redevelopment projects. For instance, Shanghai's Xintiandi transformed a historic *lilong* (里弄) neighborhood into a high-end commercial and leisure enclave under government direction, while Chengdu's Kuanzhai Alley was redeveloped as a state-promoted cultural tourism hub. These initiatives exemplify how government-led strategies deliberately fuse heritage branding with capital-intensive urban renewal. While generating significant economic returns and enhancing cities' international visibility, such projects have also consistently intensified residential displacement and eroded local cultural fabric, raising critical questions about social equity and spatial justice within China's unique context.

Since 2013, supply-side reforms and intensifying land constraints have accelerated a shift in China's urban development model from "incremental expansion" to the "intensification of existing assets" (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2025). This paradigm shift has further positioned state-orchestrated gentrification as a strategic instrument for optimizing urban space in the pursuit of sustainable growth (S. He, 2013). Scholarly attention, which began with theoretical importation in the late 1990s, has diversified into empirical investigations. Research now spans major metropolitan centers such as Shanghai and Guangzhou, exploring phenomena such as new-build enclaves, and extends to rapidly developing provincial cities including Wuhan and Shenzhen, examining diverse forms such as studentification in urban villages and tourism-led transformations.

Nevertheless, three significant research gaps persist, limiting a comprehensive understanding and effective policy response:

- (i) Geographical fragmentation: Studies remain largely city-specific, lacking a coherent nationwide synthesis that identifies overarching patterns and regional variations (F. Liu *et al.*, 2019)
- (ii) Integrative framework deficiency: Systematic frameworks that holistically integrate spatiotemporal patterns, typological variations, and their multifaceted

socio-economic impacts are notably absent

- (iii) Insufficient scrutiny of paradoxes: The inherent contradiction within Chinese gentrification—where gains in spatial efficiency and economic vitality often coincide with heightened social displacement and cultural loss—demands deeper critical analysis.

Addressing these critical gaps, the present study adopts a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA)-guided systematic review with three primary objectives: (i) To map the thematic and spatiotemporal evolution of gentrification research in mainland China; (ii) To rigorously assess its multifaceted impacts on both urban morphology and social equity; and crucially, (iii) To identify and propose context-specific, innovative urban solutions. These solutions—including the exploration of inclusionary zoning mechanisms adapted to China's Hukou system dynamics, adaptive reuse policies designed to preserve vital neighborhood social networks, and participatory planning models integrating resident co-governance—aim to reconcile the imperatives of urban redevelopment with the fundamental rights and well-being of existing communities. By synthesizing a dispersed and heterogeneous literature, this work offers the first holistic assessment of Chinese gentrification, contributing an empirically grounded knowledge base essential for guiding more equitable and sustainable urban policy formulation in China and offering valuable insights for similar contexts globally.

## 2. Literature search methodology

The PRISMA statement (Page *et al.*, 2021), which is widely used in the field of evidence-based social science, was used in the present study to analyze and synthesize the research on urban gentrification. The PRISMA statement provides a comprehensive framework for systematic reviews, comprising a checklist that rigorously standardizes the review process across six key dimensions: title, abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, and additional relevant information. In addition, the accompanying flow diagram visually represents the screening process, detailing the number of studies included or excluded at each stage (Bryson & Wyckoff, 2010), along with the corresponding reasons, thereby enhancing the transparency and reproducibility of the review process (Jorgensen, 2015). Adhering to the PRISMA statement can minimize publication bias and present reliable evidence and credible conclusions (Jamshed, 2014). It is widely adopted by domestic and foreign journals in the systematic review process specification (Burgess, 1996).

### 2.1. Search strategy

A comprehensive systematic search was conducted across three multidisciplinary databases:

- Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) for international literature,
- China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) for domestically published research.

The search encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles in English published between February 2000 and February 2025. Search strings combined keywords related to gentrification and China using Boolean operators (Table 1), with database-specific syntax adaptations applied.

In the initial step, literature searches were conducted in Scopus and Web of Science. The following query was applied to the title, keywords, and abstract fields: “urban gentrification AND China” OR “city AND gentrification AND China” (Table 1). The search period spanned from February 4, 2000, to February 4, 2025, ensuring comprehensive coverage of relevant studies over the past 25 years. This process retrieved 301 articles from Web of Science and 169 articles from Scopus, all in English.

In the second step, the CNKI retrieval system was used to identify relevant articles with titles, keywords, or abstracts containing terms such as “gentrification of Chinese cities,” “gentrification of domestic cities,” and “urban renewal.” The search period extended to February 2025. A total of 64 English-language articles were retrieved.

In the third step, duplicate empirical studies were removed, resulting in 265 articles from WoS, 146 from Scopus, and 59 from CNKI.

In the fourth step, titles, abstracts, and publication sources were screened. Non-research materials such as newspapers, general magazines, reviews, and other non-academic literature were excluded. Studies not focused on mainland China were also excluded, leaving 286 English-language articles.

**Table 1. Boolean search queries for Web of Science, Scopus, and Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure**

Database	Boolean search query
Web of Science	TS=((((ALL=(city gentrification of China )) AND ALL=(urban gentrification of China)) AND DOP=(2000-03-04/2025-03-04)) AND LA=(English)) AND DT=(Article)
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (( city AND gentrification AND of AND China ) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ( urban AND gentrification AND of AND China ) AND LANGUAGE ( English )) AND (LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , “soci” ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , “envi” ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , “arts” ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , “eart” )) AND (LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , “ar” ))
Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure	SU=(urban gentrification+urban renewal+urban gentrification) AND SU=(China+domestic)

In the fifth step, inaccessible articles were excluded, yielding a total of 247 English-language articles.

In the sixth step, full-text screening was conducted to eliminate non-empirical studies and those that mentioned gentrification only in passing without substantive analysis. This process resulted in a final set of 192 English-language articles (Figure 1).

## 2.2. Literature inclusion and exclusion criteria

Based on the research questions and objectives, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this study were defined as follows:

(i) Inclusion criteria:

- Studies that explicitly focus on urban gentrification in China as the primary research subject
- Articles that examine the sources, types, characteristics, manifestations, or impacts of urban gentrification within the Chinese context.

(ii) Exclusion criteria:

- Studies that mention gentrification only in passing, without making it the central focus of analysis
- Non-empirical studies, general reviews, or articles based on foreign case studies
- Non-research content such as abstracts, conference posters, editorials, corrections, and similar materials.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Qualitative theme: Key research topics

Contemporary scholarship on gentrification in China departs markedly from the Western emphasis on incremental, market-driven neighborhood renewal, instead reflecting the transformative effects of rapid urbanization and state-led spatial restructuring. Five dominant typologies have emerged in the literature (Table 2), each shaped by distinct institutional logics and socio-spatial outcomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

First, new-build gentrification—prevalent in major provincial capitals such as Beijing and Shanghai—arises from a hybridized state–market model in which urban planning transitions from direct state control to developer-driven land commodification (S. He, 2010; S. He *et al.*, 2011). This process has generated elite enclaves while displacing existing residents (Song *et al.*, 2017), yet empirical examinations of the long-term social consequences of such displacement remain limited (Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

Second, commercial gentrification is characterized by retail upgrading and the displacement of traditional businesses (Bridge & Dowling, 2001), facilitated by

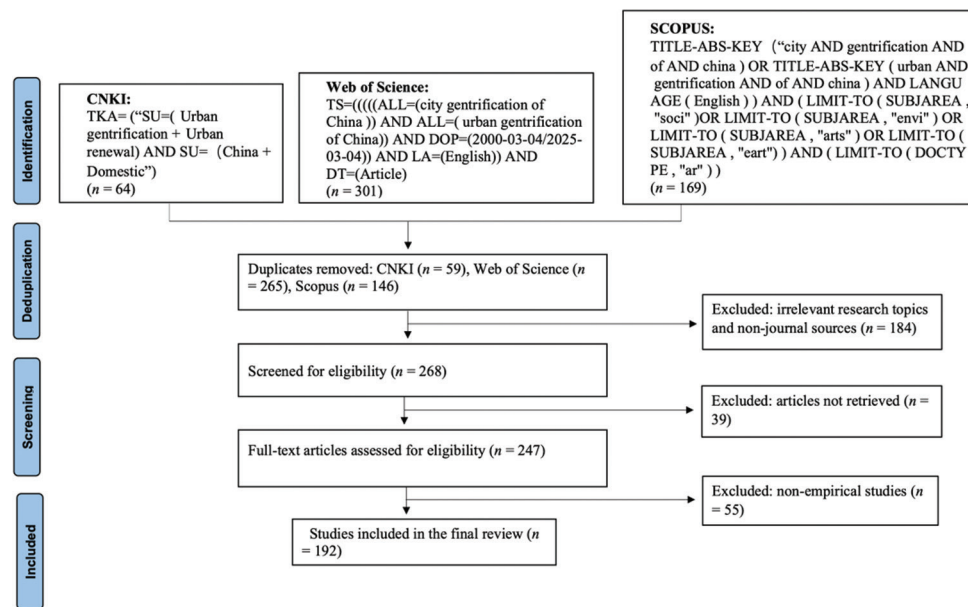


Figure 1. PRISMA research selection process

Source: Diagram by the authors.

Abbreviation: CNKI: Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure.

Table 2. Key topics and literature sources on urban gentrification in China

Hot issues of urban gentrification	Literature sources
New-build gentrification	(W. Cai & Shen, 2024; K. Cao & Deng, 2023; Cao <i>et al.</i> , 2024; C. Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Chung, 2020; S. He, 2010; X. Huang & Liu, 2021; P. Li & Liu, 2024; Y. Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2018; G. Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2019; and G. Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
Commercial gentrification	(Bai <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Liao <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Y. Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Teo, 2024; J. Sun & Song, 2019; Villani <i>et al.</i> , 2021; and J. Xu, 2016)
Studentification	(R. Cai <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Q. He & He, 2024; Hu & Lu, 2023; G. Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2022; W. Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Pan <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Song <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
Tourism gentrification	(Arkaraprasertkul, 2018; K. Cao & Deng, 2023; M. Chen, 2024; Song <i>et al.</i> , 2017; M. Sun & Chen, 2023; J. Xu <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Yang and Xu, 2022)
Green gentrification	(Bonato, 2024; Caprotti <i>et al.</i> , 2017; He <i>et al.</i> , 2012; P. He <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Y. Huang <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Y. Huang & Luo, 2025; Liao <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Lin and Zeng, 2023; Song <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Wang <i>et al.</i> , 2018; and Zhu <i>et al.</i> , 2004)

entrepreneurial governance strategies that integrate state supply-side interventions with consumption-driven demand (Y. Liu *et al.*, 2018). However, this form often produces heritage tensions (Bowlby, 1987), as the commercialization of historic districts undermines cultural authenticity (Song *et al.*, 2023). Methodologically, recent research has advanced through multiscale approaches

that integrate points-of-interest data with analyses of consumption patterns, revealing fine-grained spatial transformations (W. Yu *et al.* 2024).

Third, studentification, concentrated in urban villages adjacent to universities, is driven by students' residential and commercial choices that circumvent institutional dormitory systems (Hu & Lu, 2023). These informal rental markets not only foster the accumulation of cultural and economic capital among student populations (Song *et al.*, 2023) but also catalyze broader community-level socio-economic restructuring, with both positive and disruptive implications (G. Liu *et al.*, 2022).

Fourth, green gentrification, emerging in the wake of eco-urbanization policies post-2004 (Darling, 2005), involves the capitalization of scenic landscapes—such as Nanjing's Xuanwu Lake—into high-value residential environments for elites (Zhu *et al.*, 2004). While enhancing environmental amenities, such projects often privatize green space, reinforcing residential segregation (S. He, 2012; J. Sun & Song, 2019) and producing exclusionary dynamics that, in some contexts, are shaped more strongly by Hukou-based discrimination than by occupational class stratification (Wang *et al.*, 2018).

Finally, tourism gentrification, propelled by dual-track land ownership reforms (Gotham, 2005), enables the creation of state-led tourism enclaves that commodify cultural heritage for domestic and international markets (Y. Xu *et al.*, 2019). This process frequently entails a paradoxical form of



displacement in which residents, through negotiation and speculative investment (Huang *et al.*, 2014), voluntarily vacate their homes in pursuit of financial gain (Yang & Xu, 2022). However, these transformations disproportionately erode the spatial rights of marginalized groups (Jiang *et al.*, 2018), exacerbating their vulnerability to exclusion from revitalized urban cores (Song *et al.*, 2017). Collectively, these research foci illustrate that gentrification in China is neither a simple replication of Western models nor a monolithic process, but rather a multi-scalar, multi-form phenomenon embedded in a uniquely state-mediated urban development regime.

### 3.2. Quantitative theme: Spatial distribution

From the perspective of spatial distribution, an analysis of search results from Web of Science, CNKI, and Scopus reveals a broad geographic scope of empirical studies on gentrification in China, encompassing a wide range of cities. The Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta regions stand out as major focal points, hosting the highest concentration of case studies. Beyond these economic cores, research has also extended to other regions, including Xi'an in northwest China; Shenyang and Changchun in northeast China; Fujian in southeast China; and Chengdu, Yunnan, and Lhasa in southwest China (Figure 2).

The majority of these studies are concentrated in municipalities directly under the central government or

economically advanced provincial capitals, with cities such as Nanjing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing together accounting for nearly half of all empirical cases. This distribution underscores their role as major gentrification hotspots in China. Moreover, eight studies adopt a broader, nationwide perspective, examining gentrification at the macro scale. Notably, in Yunnan and Guangxi, empirical research extends beyond major cities such as Kunming and Nanning to include smaller tourist destinations, highlighting the significance of these provinces as key sites for tourism-driven gentrification. In addition, the inclusion of Lhasa in Tibet signals a growing scholarly interest in the gentrification of ethnic and tourism areas, reflecting the influence of global gentrification research on the evolving Chinese context (Table 3).

### 3.3. Quantitative theme: Time trend

According to the search results from Web of Science and Scopus, academic research on urban gentrification in China remained sparse before 2007. Between 2008 and 2015, publication output maintained a relatively steady pace, averaging 4–5 articles per year, before experiencing a rapid increase from 2015 to 2016. However, this growth trend decelerated around 2020. Notably, two minor publication peaks were observed in 2022 and 2024, with 67 and 75 articles published, respectively.



**Figure 2.** Spatial distribution of gentrification research cases in Chinese cities  
Source: Map by the authors based on literature data.

In contrast, the CNKI database reveals that early research by Chinese scholars primarily focused on introducing and reviewing Western gentrification concepts. By the late 2000s, this focus expanded to include comparative studies of gentrification in China and the West, alongside initial explorations of emerging local phenomena. Since 2010, there has been a marked shift toward examining various forms of gentrification within the Chinese context, validating Western theories with

Chinese cases, and conducting empirical analyses that integrate China's unique urban-rural dynamics (Figure 3).

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Characteristics of the gentrification mechanism in China

#### 4.1.1. Development course: Centripetal urbanization

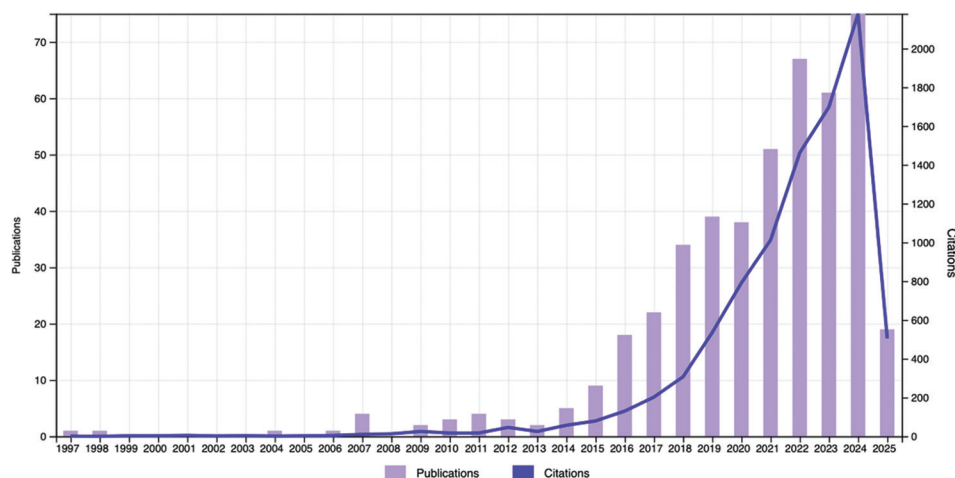
Gentrification in China differs fundamentally from Western models, particularly in its historical trajectory and institutional drivers (Butler & Lees, 2006). Whereas Western gentrification typically emerges during re-urbanization following suburbanization (Bridge, 2003), after middle- and upper-class flight produces urban “hollowing-out”—China has largely bypassed this stage (X. Chen *et al.*, 2023; X. Huang & Liu, 2021). Instead, its development combines concurrent suburbanization, urbanization, and industrial/post-industrial transitions (L. Chen & Li, 2023). This has generated a centripetal dynamic expressed through two interlinked spatial processes: (i) Elite clustering, evident in the proliferation of high-end residential enclaves in central cities such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu, which elevate land values and embed middle-class cultural aesthetics in urban cores; and (ii) commercial restructuring, whereby rising consumer demand drives “Chinese-style commercial gentrification” (Song *et al.*, 2017), displacing traditional retail with new formats and reshaping local socio-spatial structures.

#### 4.1.2. Renewal methods: Demolition and reconstruction as the dominant approach

Unlike the renovation- and restoration-oriented gentrification prevalent in many Western contexts

**Table 3. Number of urban gentrification research cases in China**

City	Number of documents
Shanghai	40
Beijing	39
Nanjing	17
Xi'an	5
Guangzhou	12
Hangzhou	7
Wuhan	4
Shenzhen	17
Chengdu	10
Harbin	1
Ningbo	4
Suzhou	9
Chongqing	10
Shenyang	1
Changchun	12
Lhasa	1
Nationwide	8
Other	5



**Figure 3.** Number of articles on urban gentrification in China indexed in Web of Science (1997–2025)

Source: Graph by the authors based on literature data.

(Cameron, 2003), Chinese gentrification is dominated by large-scale demolition and reconstruction. Between 2016 and 2019, 21.57 million units of shantytown housing were redeveloped nationwide, with approximately 800 billion Chinese yuan in central government subsidies allocated during the 13<sup>th</sup> 5-Year Plan period (L. Chen & Li, 2023). Local governments have invested heavily in such projects, positioning gentrification as a strategy to stimulate economic growth and manage urban land resources. In China's inner cities—where much housing stock comprises collectively owned units requiring unanimous owner consent—this process aligns more closely with “new gentrification” (P. Li & Liu, 2024) than with the Western model, in which private gentrifiers independently renovate properties. The influx of real estate capital into redevelopment projects such as urban villages and shantytowns has triggered pronounced socio-spatial restructuring, with post-1990s urban renewal dominated by real estate-led demolition and reconstruction (X. Chen *et al.*, 2023).

#### **4.1.3. Driving mechanism: State-led and state-dominated processes**

The dominant role of the state reflects China's socialist political-economic context. Local governments regard urban renewal as a tool for land management, economic stimulus, and political achievement (X. Chen *et al.*, 2023). State intervention can be direct, as in Guangzhou's investment of nearly 7 million Chinese yuan to compensate for the demolition of the “Korean Style Street” on Jingwang road, accompanied by sustained public service spending throughout its redevelopment (Huang *et al.*, 2024). Observations from Shanghai's renewal projects prompted S. He (2010) to describe China's approach as “state-sponsored gentrification,” while Wu (2020) emphasized its plan-centered strategy implemented through market mechanisms. Subsequent studies (P. Li & Liu, 2024) link Chinese gentrification to government-led actions during market transition that often neglect the needs of low-income residents. L. Chen and Li (2023) further note that although investors, financial institutions, and middle-class consumers participate, these processes resemble gradual “invasion-succession” patterns rather than abrupt transformations of the built environment and community culture (He & Liu, 2010). Overall, the consensus is that gentrification in China is primarily government-driven (S. He, 2012). While bottom-up cases—such as Nanchang road in Shanghai—do exist, they remain rare and are typically confined to highly modernized neighborhoods. More commonly, as in Chengdu's Kuanzhai alley, traditional communities are redeveloped into high-consumption cultural-tourism spaces, with indigenous residents replaced by new middle-class and tourist populations.

#### **4.2. Policy drivers and spatial justice tensions**

China's gentrification processes can be understood as a state-spatial project in which policy instruments systematically privilege capital accumulation over redistribution (Chari & Gidwani, 2005), thereby producing pronounced tensions with the principles of spatial justice (S. He, 2012; Soja, 2010).

First, displacement emerges as an embedded policy outcome (Jiang *et al.*, 2011). State-sanctioned renewal mechanisms institutionalize exclusion through compensation-inflation gaps—where monetized resettlement payments, such as those in Shanghai's shantytown reform, average 23 percent below the cost of replacement housing (Xia & Zhu, 2014)—and through Hukou-based restrictions that deny migrant tenants compensation despite decades of residence (Y. Liu *et al.*, 2018). Such practices commodify residency rights and undermine Lefebvre's (1968/1996) notion of the “right to the city.”

Second, entrepreneurial governance frequently subordinates community rights to fiscal imperatives. Municipal growth coalitions advance land-finance-driven redevelopment that fuels service privatization, as seen in the creation of gated enclaves in Nanjing's Yueya Lake area (Song *et al.*, 2023). They also promote tourism-oriented branding that appropriates local cultures, exemplified by the commercialization of Naxi heritage in Lijiang (Y. Xu *et al.*, 2019), and pursue aesthetic governance strategies that erase informal economies, such as in the sanitization of Beijing's *hutongs* (胡同) (S. Yu, 2017).

Third, renewal governance is characterized by a persistent participatory deficit. Although statutory frameworks like the Urban Renewal Ordinance (Art. 21) mandate public consultation, participation is often ritualistic: resident assemblies are convened only after blueprint finalization (S. He & Wu, 2016), feedback incorporation rates in state-led projects remain below 12 percent (L. Chen, & Li, 2023), and gender disparities persist, with female heads of household comprising <18 percent of negotiation delegates.

Collectively, these dynamics reveal how state-led gentrification entrenches structural inequalities while marginalizing vulnerable groups in the urban redevelopment process.

#### **4.3. The dualistic impacts of urban gentrification in China**

Gentrification in China manifests as a double-edged sword, generating spatially and socially contested outcomes. This section synthesizes empirical evidence on its multifaceted

impacts, structured along spatial-economic and socio-cultural dimensions.

### 4.3.1. Positive impacts: Efficiency gains and spatial restructuring

#### (a) Urban morphology optimization

Gentrification-driven redevelopment has substantially optimized urban form by promoting more intensive and efficient land use. In particular, the transformation of derelict industrial zones and dilapidated shantytowns—such as the West Bund in Shanghai—has increased average plot ratios by approximately 1.2–1.8 times, thereby markedly enhancing land-use efficiency (X. Chen *et al.*, 2023; G. Liu *et al.*, 2022).

Parallel to land-use intensification, infrastructure modernization has emerged as a defining feature of these renewal processes (Li & Yeh, 2004). Approximately 92 percent of documented cases report significant improvements in public service provision, including expanded green spaces, upgraded transportation networks, and increased metro accessibility. For instance, in Nanjing's Yueya Lake district, green gentrification initiatives were associated with a 40 percent increase in pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, fostering more walkable neighborhoods (Song *et al.*, 2023).

Moreover, functional hybridization—exemplified by the mixed-use blocks in Shanghai's Hongkou district—has achieved balanced residential-to-commercial ratios (0.8–1.2), reducing dependence on private vehicles and supporting sustainable mobility patterns (Cheng & Wang, 2021).

#### (b) Economic revitalization

From an economic perspective, gentrification has generated substantial fiscal and commercial benefits. The capitalization of “rent gaps” in prime urban locations, as observed in Guangzhou's Zhujiang New Town, has driven land value increases of 150–300 percent, thereby augmenting municipal revenue streams (S. He, 2012). Concurrently, tourism-oriented gentrification, such as that in Chengdu's Kuanzhai alley, has stimulated retail productivity growth by 35–60 percent, catalyzed by the development of artisanal clusters and experiential consumption models (Y. Xu *et al.*, 2019). In addition, new-build gentrification in Shenzhen's Nanshan district has attracted high-tech firms, resulting in a 22 percent rise in patent applications and illustrating the innovation spillover effects of urban renewal (W. Liu *et al.*, 2022).

#### (c) Environmental enhancement

Environmental improvements have also been notable outcomes of gentrification. Large-scale green

infrastructure projects, including Beijing's Olympic Park, have expanded per capita green space by an average of 4.6 sqm, contributing to urban heat island mitigation and improving environmental quality (Y. Huang *et al.*, 2024; Zhu *et al.*, 2004). In addition, the remediation of brownfield sites has yielded tangible ecological benefits; approximately 78 percent of regenerated industrial sites have successfully met soil and water pollution reduction targets, thereby aligning environmental restoration with urban development objectives (Lin & Zeng, 2023).

### 4.3.2. Negative impacts: Socio-spatial polarization and cultural displacement

#### (a) Housing and livelihood disruption

Despite these positive transformations, gentrification has often exacerbated housing insecurity and disrupted livelihoods, particularly among vulnerable populations (Curran W, 2004). In Shanghai's *lilong* neighborhoods and Beijing's *hutong* areas, between 70 and 85 percent of low-income tenants have been relocated to sites located at least 10 km from their original communities, largely due to compensation mechanisms that failed to match post-redevelopment housing costs (Xia & Zhu, 2014). This has intensified affordability crises, with post-renewal housing prices rising at rates far outpacing local income growth—by a factor of 3.1 in some cases. For example, in Nanjing, housing costs increased by 210 percent compared to a 68 rise in incomes, effectively excluding essential service workers from gentrified areas (Bao *et al.*, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the decline of informal economic activities, such as street vending, has eliminated more than 120,000 migrant worker jobs in Guangzhou, eroding critical livelihood sources (S. He & Wu, 2016).

#### (b) Social inequality intensification

Gentrification processes have deepened socio-economic disparities and spatial inequality. “School district gentrification” has raised barriers to educational access, with Hukou-less migrant families facing tuition fees 2 to 5 times higher than those paid by local residents (R. Cai *et al.*, 2022; H. Liu, 2020). Gender- and age-related vulnerabilities are also pronounced: female-headed households—constituting <18 percent of relocation negotiation delegates—and elderly residents experience post-relocation unemployment rates 3 times higher than other groups (L. Chen & Li, 2023). Spatial segregation is further entrenched through the proliferation of gated communities in green and tourism-oriented redevelopment zones, which have reduced cross-class



social interactions by approximately 60 percent (W. Song *et al.*, 2023; Yang & Xu, 2022).

(c) Cultural and psychological costs

Cultural displacement is another notable consequence. In heritage-rich areas such as Lijiang's Naxi quarter, tourism-led renewal has commodified cultural assets, resulting in a decline in resident satisfaction from 81 percent to 34 percent after redevelopment (Y. Xu *et al.*, 2019). The demolition of *danwei* (单位) compounds has fragmented long-standing community networks, with social capital indices declining by 45 percent. These disruptions have also taken a psychological toll: displaced residents report anxiety levels 2.3 times higher than those of non-displaced populations (Hu & Lu, 2023).

(d) Governance paradoxes

Finally, governance-related shortcomings have undermined equitable urban transformation. In many state-led projects, resident participation remains minimal, with fewer than 12 percent of community feedback points incorporated into planning processes—fueling public distrust in redevelopment initiatives (S. He & Wu, 2016). Furthermore, policy contradictions persist: eco-urbanization mandates have, in some cases (Ma *et al.*, 2019), accelerated green gentrification while neglecting the provision of affordable housing, highlighting the tensions between environmental goals and social equity imperatives (Bonato, 2024).

## 5. Conclusion

This systematic review has examined the evolution, prevailing patterns, and multifaceted impacts of urban gentrification research in China. The analysis reveals that scholarly attention has shifted from the initial adoption of conceptual frameworks to a more diversified body of empirical studies, with particular emphasis on new-build, tourism-led, commercial, student-oriented, and green gentrification. China's gentrification trajectory is characterized by three distinctive features: strong state-led governance, a demolition–reconstruction development model, and centripetal urbanization processes. The impacts of these transformations are inherently dual: on the one hand, they enhance spatial efficiency and stimulate economic vitality; on the other, they intensify socio-spatial inequalities through the displacement of original residents and the erosion of cultural heritage. Two unresolved tensions emerge as critical avenues for further inquiry. The first concerns the risk of homogenization, whereby standardized renewal strategies, especially in tourism gentrification, threaten local distinctiveness and intangible cultural assets. The second relates to the persistent policy–practice gap, in which recognition of gentrification's

marginalizing effects has yet to translate into effective (Lees L, 2009), evidence-based interventions for vulnerable groups. Future research should develop spatial frameworks that reconcile the imperatives of urban redevelopment with the protection of community rights, thereby fostering more inclusive and equitable urban futures.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

## Author contributions

*Conceptualization:* Congying Li

*Visualization:* Congying Li

*Writing—original draft:* Congying Li

*Writing—review & editing:* Congying Li, Firuza Begham Mustafa

## Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

## Consent for publication

Not applicable.

## Availability of data

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the present study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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