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## **Scripting Indian and Chinese urban spatial transformation: adding new narratives to gentrification and suburbanisation research**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the spatial transformation of Indian and Chinese cities with reference to prevailing gentrification and suburbanisation studies. Focusing on urban redevelopment and peripheral extension, the paper highlights how Indian and Chinese urban studies provide extensive analyses of demolition and displacement in urban renewal and redevelopment, peri-urbanisation, and mega urban projects in urban spatial extension. These studies, often developed by paying attention to specific Indian or Chinese urbanisation, add new narratives to gentrification and suburbanisation research and help to enhance our understanding of contemporary urban changes. Thinking about Indian and Chinese urban spatial transformation, these studies highlight that gentrification and suburbanisation are large research fields rather than defined concepts.

Keywords: urban spatial transformation, Indian cities, Chinese cities, gentrification, suburbanisation, demolition, peri-urbanisation

## **Introduction**

Urban India and China have recently seen burgeoning empirical studies. A recent postcolonial turn in urban and regional studies began to see cities in the world through ‘worlding practices’ (Roy and Ong, 2011). Bhan (2019) argues that theory from the South must emerge from a practice as Southern and act as ‘theories of practice’. He identifies some key words or vocabularies in India, such as ‘squat’, ‘repair’, ‘consolidate’ – each has its specific meaning in local practices but at the same time has theoretical implications. In this paper, I try to understand two discrete bodies of literature on Indian and Chinese cities and ask how we might describe their urban spatial transformations. Compared with the vast literature in their own fields, comparisons between them are inadequate and few, albeit with some recent exceptions (e.g. Weinstein and Ren, 2009; Chen et al., 2009; Shatkin, 2014; Kennedy, 2017; Frazier, 2019). Part of the value of this paper is that it brings together these two streams of literature on Indian and Chinese cities, as the communities have rarely interacted.

In response to the appeal for understanding ‘cities beyond compare’ (Peck, 2015), this paper is not confined to the particularities of urban changes in India or China. Rather I strive to understand their similarities and variation through a comparative urbanism methodology (Robinson, 2016). Instead of comparing them directly, I try to think through their relations with some well-established and fast-expanding concepts in urban studies. Concepts such as

gentrification (Lees et al., 2016) and suburbanisation (Keil, 2018), through constant redefinition, are no longer fixed terms but rather an ever-growing research field. Similar to an earlier effort to identify ‘new narratives’ from Chinese urban studies (Wu, 2020), this paper adopts this approach of ‘theorisation from elsewhere’ (Robison, 2016). This represents an effort to pay attention to the context of the Global South (Parnell and Oldfield, 2014) or the East (Yiftachel, 2006; Waley, 2016) but simultaneously revisits some ‘classic’ concepts in urban theories.

This paper examines the spatial transformation of Indian and Chinese cities, focusing on two aspects: the redevelopment of existing built-up areas and the expansion of an existing city into the peripheral area. These two aspects of spatial change are usually framed under gentrification and suburbanisation, although they may not need to be treated as separate processes because gentrification can happen in the suburbs as a process of ‘re-urbanisation’<sup>1</sup>. The two concepts describe, respectively, the reuse of existing land and spatial extension. The direction of query is from specialist studies grounded in these two countries, building upon their historical and geographical contexts but comparable with gentrification and suburbanisation research. Here, we do not impose these concepts on India and China. Specifically, we do not ask whether these spatial transformations are gentrification (or suburbanisation). Instead, we try to see whether the Indian and Chinese urban experiences could extend these topics. The question is, then, given our vocabularies about, for example, urban expansion (or sometimes urban sprawl as a more specifically low density and leapfrogged form), what kinds of descriptions are more pertinent to capture these spatial changes? Finding a vocabulary is not a positivist science. Before we even invent new abstract

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the development of London Docklands simultaneously as a re-urbanisation of suburbs (Butler, 2007).

theories, our task here is more modest. The literature of India and China studies has already developed various descriptions. They are descriptive but allude to a different understanding. Demolition, for example, implies more than a physical action but is often related to the ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2002) or modernisation ideology, state strategies and planning centrality (Wu, 2018). Peri-urbanisation is a very broad term which suggests a process of urbanisation (the rural to urban change) rather than the spatial relocation of urban residents as suburbanisation (Wu and Keil, 2020). More specifically, the form of new towns has been created by the ‘spatial fix’ to maintain capital accumulation rather than in response to changing residential preferences (Shen and Wu 2017; 2020). Regarding the now greatly expanded research on gentrification and suburbanisation at a planetary scale (e.g. Lees et al., 2016; Keil, 2018), we may add more narratives to an already very rich body of literature on gentrification and suburbanisation, and further cross-fertilise so far detached research topics in India and China.

In the remainder of this paper, we first examine urban redevelopment in two countries and their implications for gentrification studies, and then suburbanisation and peripheral development and their implications for suburban research. Finally, we summarise the contributions from thinking about Indian and Chinese urban spatial transformation to gentrification and suburbanisation research.

## **Urban redevelopment**

### *Urban India*

Informal settlements, or ‘slums’<sup>2</sup>, provide an important source of housing for the poor. More than half of the total population live in slums in Mumbai but large-scale redevelopment has largely been impossible in India. Eviction and slum clearance in the 1950s reduced the housing stock and exacerbated housing shortage. In the 1970s, urban redevelopment was slowed down by some protection against tenants and rent ‘regularisation’. In the 2000s, large-scale urban redevelopment accelerated. For example, in Mumbai, the Dharavi Redevelopment Project aimed to redevelop the largest slum through introducing private sector investment and the approach of a mega urban project (Weinstein and Ren, 2009). In 2005, a large-scale redevelopment programme – the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) – was launched nationwide with a budget of \$20 billion (Doshi, 2015), which speeded up the pace of dispossession and displacement alongside urban redevelopment in India.

Influenced by financialisation and state developmentalism, cities such as Mumbai and Delhi aim to develop as world-class cities through urban redevelopment (Goldman, 2011; Ghertner, 2015; Doshi 2015). Doshi (2015) uses the concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey, 2002) to describe the nature of redevelopment. Greater informality has been created, opening up the possibility of dispossessing those who are more vulnerable. She further suggests ethnic, religious and linguistic differences, especially along the division between Hindu and Muslim as well as gender, in addition to class-based division in the Indian context. To her, the issue of displacement caused by the redevelopment of slum neighbourhoods expands a narrow definition of gentrification. She argues,

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<sup>2</sup> However, the term ‘slum’ itself is problematic without considering significant variation in the qualities of slums in the Global South (Gilbert, 2007).

“Examples from scholarship on Indian cities show how post-colonial modalities of urban rule and subjectivity shape capitalist accumulation and displacement. In particular, they reveal how developmentalism, informality and flexible governance, elite power in state apparatuses, subaltern desires and political participation, and xenophobic politics fundamentally contour processes of urban transformation” (p. 114).

Similarly, Ghertner (2014) criticises the application of the gentrification concept to India. He argues that the presumptions made by gentrification theory from the West are problematic in urban India. Lower-class displacement is not driven by reinvestment in spaces. The dynamics are not based upon property transactions in Delhi. Displacement is driven by extra-economic forces, which are not recognised by gentrification theory. The result of redevelopment may not lead to an upgrade to ‘higher and better use.’ He provides an example of slum clearance in Delhi, which has converted residential uses into open spaces. Although the case of Delhi is not universally seen in India, displacement by extra-economic forces co-exists with property-led development<sup>3</sup>. Ghertner (2014) suggests that gentrification relies strongly upon property dynamics and that efforts to extend gentrification to urban India would diminish its analytical specificity. Displacement as seen in India is part of ‘speculative urbanism’ (Goldman, 2011) and ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Ghertner, 2014; Doshi, 2015).

Slum demolition is an enclosure of the commons (the ‘public city’) through extra-economic means (Benjamin, 2008). Urban demolition proceeds with ‘flexible governance’ (Roy, 2005; Gururani, 2013a), ‘remapping’ in Indian cities (Roy 2015), informality and ‘occupancy

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<sup>3</sup> Mumbai, for example, has seen property redevelopment for profit (Weinstein and Ren, 2009), a process closer to property-based gentrification.

urbanism' (Benjamin, 2008), and a national renewal programme (Williams et al., 2019) rather than property transactions (Doshi, 2015; Ghertner, 2014).

The concept of gentrification has now been widely extended. According to this extended definition, politically motivated displacement and redevelopment can be seen as a form of gentrification. Indian urban redevelopment reveals additional dimensions of displacement beyond property transactions, including the lines of ethnic segregation and extra-economic means. Urban redevelopment may even be motivated by exerting the state's authority over governance (Weinstein and Ren 2009), in addition to profit-making property transactions. In short, research on Indian urban redevelopment reveals the complexity and additional dimensions of gentrification. With a notion of 'planetary gentrification' (Lees et al., 2016), the vocabulary of gentrification has been expanded and is almost equivalent to a large field of redevelopment.

### *Urban China*

Chinese urban renewal started in the 1980s. The initial objective was quite straightforward: to improve the living conditions of dilapidated housing (He and Wu, 2009; Shin, 2016). Almost all residents remained after renewal and there were no incoming residents with higher socioeconomic status to replace existing residents. But such urban renewal programmes were expensive for the public finances. In the 1980s municipal governments had no capacity to sustain such programmes. Therefore, urban renewal proceeded on a limited scale.

Large-scale urban renewal occurred in the 1990s when housing and land markets were established. In Shanghai, the government initiated a programme to redevelop 3.65 million

square metres of old housing (He and Wu, 2009) and in Guangzhou redevelopment was integrated with infrastructure such as metro stations (He, 2012; 2019). With the establishment of housing and land markets, the nature of urban renewal changed from improving housing stock to generating revenue from land development (He and Wu, 2009; Hsing, 2010; He, 2019). The transformation of old urban areas has been driven by property-led redevelopment, which has become more salient since the 2000s and has led to frequent contests over urban demolition (Shao, 2013; Shin, 2016). Although living in the central area is preferable due to better public services there than in the periphery, changes in inner urban areas have been driven mainly by supply side initiatives rather than by demand for lifestyles and amenities. Hence, according to He (2012), China's urban redevelopment presents a feature of state-led gentrification.

Starting in the mid-2000s, urban redevelopment has been driven by ambitious urban upgrading programmes to build world-class cities (He, 2012; Wu, 2016). The state played a significant role in urban renewal, although the market instrument of land development was utilised (Wu, 2016). This redevelopment approach reflects the feature of 'planning centrality, market instruments' under state entrepreneurialism (Wu, 2018). However, since the start of the 2010s, the cost of land acquisition has increased. It is increasingly difficult to relocate residents. The Chinese government began to promote 'incremental redevelopment', initially developed in southern China. The new phase of urban redevelopment focuses on 'old villages, old urban areas, and old factories' (also known as three types of old areas, or *sanjiu*) (Wu, 2018). Shanty town renewal uses new financial tools (He, 2019), along with the broad process of housing financialisation (Wu et al., 2020).



The history of urban redevelopment in China reveals several features: first, the state is heavily involved in the process of redevelopment; second, there are various motivations including dilapidated housing upgrading, profit-making through real estate speculation, promoting post-industrial economies and global cities (Wu, 2016), and creating investment opportunities to sustain economic growth (He, 2019; Wu et al., 2020). Third, displacement has driven peripheral residential development and led to social tensions. But recently with the promotion of ‘incremental redevelopment’ instead of wholesale demolition, urban redevelopment has aimed to retain heritage and promote creative industries.

Chinese urban redevelopment thus shows a broad process of spatial restructuring. Ren (2015) noted the upgrading of courtyard housing in central Beijing, arguing that *hutong* preservation may be due to public pressure and hence a policy of conservation. State-sponsored awards and designations help to promote the commercial value of these districts, leading to renovation and place branding. While gentrification implies residential upgrading, the conversion of land uses in central areas goes beyond residential redevelopment. Thus, she asks, “If urban China researchers do not select ‘gentrification’ as a strategic weapon in the battle over spatial justice, what are the alternatives?” (p. 341). In Shanghai, the recent demolition of urban villages aims to create new green spaces and office spaces. Such an urban regeneration process replaces former high-density neighbourhoods with clusters of office buildings and business and technological parks (Wu, 2016). Urban restructuring and regeneration are pre-conditioned by prevailing urban demolition. The dispossession of original residents in old urban areas prevented them from claiming property rights and hence made urban redevelopment possible, and redevelopment has been achieved through demolition and other means outside the property market (Shin, 2016).

## **Contribution to gentrification research**

The term ‘gentrification’ was first coined by Ruth Glass (1964) who witnessed how the working-class quarters of London had been invaded by the middle class. The process included the upgrading of larger Victorian houses under multiple occupation back to their original expensive residences. Since the invention of the term, the concept has been evolving and has significantly expanded (Lees, 2012), including many different forms such as slum gentrification, new-build gentrification, state-led gentrification, and studentification (Lees et al., 2016). In essence, the changing definition reflects historical and geographical specificities.

The concept of gentrification is flexible enough to accommodate structural explanation. Gentrification originated from and is associated with the process of post-industrial transformation in the West. Urban restructuring can go beyond property transactions. In the history of urbanisation in the West, the capitalist state uses the justification of economic growth to remove derelict industrial uses. Hence, the intervention of the state in urban redevelopment is not unique to India and China. Also, in western economies, the practice of redlining in housing mortgages reduces capital investment in poorer and ethnic minority areas, highlighting the structural forces beyond individual property transactions. As such, ethnic division as the driving force for gentrification is not unique to India. But Indian urban redevelopment does highlight the key dimension beyond consumer preferences.

Perhaps the stage of Indian and Chinese urbanisation determines that urban redevelopment in these two countries presents features of both urbanisation and residential changes. In China, the level of urbanisation has just reached 53 per cent, which includes 18 per cent of rural

migrants who do not have formal urban registration status, while the urbanisation level for India is just over 31 per cent (Nijman, 2012). Therefore, urbanisation is still a major process in India and China. Alongside the process of urbanisation, we also see informal development, that is to say urbanisation outside the formal regulatory regime, and demolition to gain control over land by the state. This redevelopment process, commonly studied as gentrification, reveals salient features of modernisation and state intervention. As a result, if we stick to the spatial transformation of cities, Indian and Chinese redevelopment experiences add a new narrative of new-build and urbanisation to the upgrading of the existing residential environment.

In India, slums are being created alongside urbanisation. Slum clearance is driven by the desire to create world-class cities (Dupont, 2011; Goldman, 2011) and the rising influence of middle-class power in urban governance (Ghertner, 2014). Urban India is politically mobilised but fragmented. The notion of ‘political society’ (Chatterjee, 2004) more accurately describes the nature of politics in India. The politics of deregulated development and postcolonial conditions has created additional informality (Roy, 2005). For example, an informal settlement near Mumbai was disconnected from the new water infrastructure and made illegal (Bjorkman, 2014).

In China, 280 million rural migrants lived in cities in 2016. Migrant workers are forming a new working class. This new migrant working class has transformed former rural villages and turned them into rental housing areas and the villagers into small landlords. The ‘villagerisation’ of the city is built upon the legacies of urban and rural dualism. In response to the wide spread of urban villages, demolition and redevelopment have become a top priority in the policy agenda. Chinese urban governance has seen a profound shift towards

state entrepreneurialism (Wu and Phelps, 2011; Wu, 2018). Urban renewal and demolition rely on the discourse of growth, as growth is regarded as imperative for social and political stability (Wu, 2015). Middle-class contestation is limited to the preservation of green space and the quality of life. The discourse of growth, however, is also related to the financialisation of land development, through which state-led and land-centred urban renewal aims to balance public finances through increasing tax and land income (Hsing, 2010).

Smith (2002) foresaw a different type of urban restructuring, claiming that gentrification changed from the return of the middle class to the city to becoming a ‘global urban strategy’. Different from earlier waves, which were related to individual consumption preferences, the global urban strategy is state-led, aiming to use the transformation of central space to foster economic competitiveness. Smith even suggests that the frontier of gentrification is now in emerging markets, because “as globalization bespeaks a rescaling of the global, the scale of the urban is recast. The true global cities may be the rapidly growing metropolitan economies of Asia, Latin America, and (to a lesser extent) Africa, as much as the command centers of Europe, North America and Japan” (p. 427). We are witnessing such a strategy in India and China. This reminds us of the structural and contextual forces in gentrification studies.

According to Lees (2012), a series of processes eventually gave birth to gentrification in post-war Britain and North America: suburbanisation, disinvestment in the inner city, the concentration of ethnic groups and economic restructuring, together with a rising appreciation of urbanity and a preference for central city living.

Reading the criticism about gentrification theory in India (Ghertner, 2014), this paper does not advocate the replacement of gentrification with other political economic concepts such as accumulation by dispossession. This is because the theory of gentrification in its origin also

contains a political economic description of class-based displacement (Smith, 1996). Indian and Chinese redevelopment experiences concur with recent efforts. For example, Lees et al. (2016) suggest that we should “retain the class remaking of urban space and the resulting (in)direct displacement of urban inhabitants (both users and occupants) as the core characteristic of gentrification” (p. 31).

Urban redevelopment, demolition and displacement in India occurred along complex ethnic and religious divisions and gender differences (Ghertner, 2014). In China, urban demolition is a response to the prevalent process of informal development. The prelude to gentrification is ‘villagerisation’ in both India (Gururani, 2013a) and China where rural villages are turned into informal rental places for rural migrants (Wu, 2016) and landholding families become property developers in India (Gururani, 2020). The development of special economic zones (Jenkins et al., 2014) and greenfield development in India (Kennedy and Sood, 2016) and large-scale new town development in China (Shen and Wu, 2017; Wu, 2018) are driven by the strategy of making world-class cities (Goldman, 2011; Roy and Ong, 2011). Urban demolition is subject to complex local politics in India, showing dispossession through extra-economic measures (Doshi, 2015; Ghertner, 2014). In China, demolition is incentivised by specific fiscal arrangements where municipal finance relies on land development as a revenue source (He and Wu, 2009; Wu et al., 2020). In both countries, the removal of low-quality informal areas or ‘slums’ has been used to justify urban demolition and redevelopment. Nevertheless, the demolition process itself has seen continuing and even expanded informality (Roy, 2009; Shatkin, 2014) and social protests (Weinstein and Ren, 2009; Shao, 2013). Indian and Chinese urban redevelopment (Ghertner, 2014; Wu, 2016) add new narratives of demolition, redevelopment and mega-urban projects and strategies to the already well-expanded gentrification research.

## **Suburbanisation and peripheral development**

### *Peri-urban India*

Peri-urban India like other peripheral areas in developing countries has long been regarded as the ‘pariah edge’ – undergoverned and underdeveloped places (Davis, 2006). But today peri-urban landscapes are no longer characterised by slums and shanty towns, which have increasingly shown great complexity of land uses and governance. Peri-urban development in India is characterised by its salient informality (Roy, 2005; 2009) together with the approach of mega urban projects such as new towns and smart cities (Datta, 2015; Follmann, 2015; Kennedy and Sood, 2016). The combination of both informal and mega projects sounds rather strange as the latter often stand for a formal neoliberal development in the West (Orueta and Fainstein, 2008). In India, the adoption of flexible planning is noted (Gururani, 2013a). Spatial fragmentation has been exacerbated by new planning strategies for making ‘world-class cities’ in India (Goldman, 2011; Dupont, 2011), which aim to clear slums through peri-urban redevelopment (Benjamin, 2008; Weinstein and Ren, 2009). Master planning strategies have “resulted in a conflation of the urban–rural interface into a more complex peri-urban condition, marked by heterogeneity and fragmentation” (Arabindoo 2009, p. 879).

In post-liberalisation India new towns have been developed to attract foreign investment and real estate development (Chen et al., 2009; Gururani, 2013a; Gururani and Kose, 2015; Searle, 2016). The development often presents a high degree of informality. Gururani (2013a) examined the new town of Gurgaon near Delhi and found that although the area was

incorporated into the metropolitan region long ago, its development has been neglected. However, this peri-urban area has become a new city itself. Searle (2016) describes the transformation of agricultural land in Gurgaon into construction sites for an imaginary of the Indian middle class and shows the financialisation of the Indian real estate sector in this peri-urban area. Gururani (2013a) proposes a concept of ‘flexible planning’ to describe the complex manoeuvring of power by local politicians and elites. She even suggests that the whole development of Gurgaon is illegal from the planning point of view. Many villages in this place are now embedded into urban property development and have been transformed into the new town of Gurgaon (Gururani, 2020). She argues that Delhi is in fact a ‘world of villages’. The influence of landholding in the colonial period does not disappear, and the politics of caste and class continue to be salient.

Post-liberalisation India started a process of economic devolution and market development, accompanied by state developmentalism (Gururani and Kose, 2015). Governance under economic decentralisation means that large developers and political elites can contravene the rules and gain exemption from regulation. Informalities are also derived from the postcolonial conditions of governance. Land development driven by real estate amplifies class and caste inequalities in novel ways (Levien, 2012; Gururani, 2020). The perspective of informality allows us to understand peri-urban areas and slums in the central city in a unified framework. Slum clearance seems to eliminate informality, but at the same time new informality has been created in newer peri-urban areas with under-regulated property development projects. The development of new towns can be seen in a similar way to the endeavour of developing special economic zones (SEZs) (Jenkins et al., 2014), during which land grabs have triggered mass protests in recent years (Chen et al., 2009; Levien, 2012). Peri-urban development in India reflects the attempt of the state government at a regional

scale to facilitate foreign investment (Gururani, 2013a). This high level of heterogeneity is associated with the government's desire to build world-class cities (Goldman, 2011) and is promoted by various scales of the state (Roy, 2009; Kennedy and Sood, 2019).

### *Peri-urban China*

A ubiquitous feature of suburban China is the landscape of new towns (Chen et al., 2009; Shen and Wu, 2017). New towns are built according to a master plan in the midst of underdeveloped and underserviced rural areas. They are in essence mega urban projects (Wu, 2018). Similarly, residential developments in China present a degree of informality. New residential developments have increased the density of peri-urban areas, along with a growing suburban economy. For example, the new town of Yizhuang was built on the basis of the Beijing Economic and Technological Development Zone (ETDZ) and evolved from a residential development into a comprehensive new city in the metropolitan region of Beijing (Wu and Phelps, 2011). The development has also seen clusters of office buildings and hotels together with high density residential areas. A transit link with central Beijing has been built, creating the new town as an employment centre. Chinese new towns are mega urban projects initially driven by manufacturing industries which later may be further developed into the high-tech and service sectors, such as 'university towns'. The informality is also due to the development of migrant housing. The consequence of developing manufacturing industries in a new town is the influx of rural migrant workers into the suburbs, increasing the complexity of suburban land uses. While housing development for sale in the market is incorporated into the master plan of a new town, housing for migrant workers is not considered and mainly takes place through informal development in nearby villages. Rural migrants have to rely on accommodation provided by their employers or mostly informal private rentals in the



remaining nearby villages. In addition, some migrants have become ‘entrepreneurs’ themselves and built extensive social networks linking to their hometowns to develop workshops and businesses in the city (Liu et al., 2015). The demand for informal housing increases along with the growth of the suburban economy and a new working population in the peri-urban areas. New towns offer gated enclave living to a growing middle class in both Chinese and Indian megacities (Chen et al., 2009, p. 463), leading to sharp contrasts between more affluent middle-class development and poorer settlements.

Peri-urban development in China has seen the seemingly contradictory coexistence of informal development together with formal mega urban projects in which the government plays an important role. Li et al. (2020) describe the peri-urban area of Guangzhou as an assemblage, mainly consisting of three types: new gated enclaves, new towns and remaining villages that are becoming urban villages. They found that each type responded to a different actor: the new town evolving out of a former development zone, gated communities developed by real estate projects, and urban villages formed by entrepreneurial farmers and their collective enterprises. This complexity is an outcome of China’s development strategy as the ‘world factory’ and its associated model, which is centred upon using land to attract investment. Such a model leads to the dominance of investors, large developers, and mega urban projects in new town development. For industrial projects, the government tends to give land more generously with heavily discounted land prices. This is viable only because the state has the power to assemble the land due to the local government’s ability to capture land from relatively powerless farmers (Hsing, 2010). In contrast to the relatively invisible town hall in the edge city in the US (Peck, 2011), the Chinese local government is at the forefront of the new town project and plays a significant role in land development and service

provision (Wu, 2018; Shen and Wu, 2020; Li et al., 2020). As a result, Chinese peri-urban areas see both formal and informal development.

### **Contribution to suburbanisation research**

The history of American suburbanisation was associated with ‘white flight’, through which residents tried to escape problematic inner urban areas (Keil, 2000). In the UK, the move to suburban areas away from inner council housing estates was a process of residential relocation in the 1960s and 1970s (Butler, 2007). The picture of residential suburbanisation has changed dramatically along with the rise of the post-Fordist economy, the development of edge cities and mixed development through multiple ‘modalities of governance’ (Ekers et al., 2012; Hamel and Keil, 2015). Keil (2018) argues that suburbanisation is a global process and part of the extended urbanisation of the planet. This view opens suburbanisation research to a range of possibilities, including variegated forms of elite gated communities, in-between places and squatter settlements in peri-urban areas. Indeed, Harris (2010) argues that we need to identify ‘meaningful types’ of suburbs in a world of suburbs and uses Toronto as an example to show how it is quite different from the stereotypes (Harris 2015). Comparing Canada and France, Charmes and Keil (2015) describe densification and urbanity introduced into the periphery urban areas. Keil and Addie (2015) demonstrate an urban feature of suburban Toronto and Chicago. Nüssli and Schmid (2016) examined the former urban periphery of Zurich North and found that the development of a tramline “led to a more densely woven and connected urban fabric primarily providing spaces for the headquarter economy and middle-class housing” (p. 679). In this context, studies of peri-urbanisation in India and China are not isolated cases (see also a recent special issue in *Urban Geography*, Wu and Keil, 2020) and can contribute to suburbanisation research in the following ways.

First, it must be stressed that peri-urbanisation in India and China is a historical process of residential changes connected to specific socio-economic landscapes. Peri-urban development in India and China is not associated with 'suburban utopias' (Fishman, 1987), due to the fact that rural India and China have a much higher population density than their Western counterparts and the countryside is traditionally considered an underdeveloped and undesirable place. In China, industrial satellite towns built in the 1950s were not attractive due to the poor quality of services (Wu, 2015). Chinese urban residents had a strong centripetal preference for the city centre. Chinese cities remained compact until the 1990s when large-scale land development began to dramatically expand cities. Relocation to peri-urban areas is often due to considerations of affordability. Low-income and marginal social groups were pushed out to the suburbs. Inner city public housing tenants were relocated to peripheral locations due to urban renewal in the central areas, while privileged residents affiliated to state workplaces and government institutions managed to stay in the central areas. Their staff quarters were renovated. For them, the urban redevelopment programme has had little impact because their workplaces had a powerful bargaining capacity. The decision to move may not be made by the family. Residential relocation is less consumption oriented and may not originate from individual preference and choice. As a massive peripheral development, the high-rise in peri-urban areas is a norm rather than an exception in China. In India, in the 1970s rural migrants were driven away from rural areas due to famines and floods and moved into the cities. In this period, large tracts of land in the peripheries changed to industrial uses (Gururani, 2013b; Weinstein and Ren, 2009). Peri-urban areas are characterised by informalities and high levels of heterogeneity and crime (Arabindoo, 2009; Roy 2009; Shaw, 2018; Gururani, 2020).

Second, peri-urbanisation in India and China represents a continuation of governance form in their political economic systems (Gururani, 2020). They do not represent a form of ‘self-governance’ as seen in the ‘association-governed residential communities’ in the US (McKenzie, 1994; Nijman and Clery, 2015). In India, constitutional reform has created a critical moment for developing the responsibilities of urban local bodies (ULBs). There is a greater emphasis on participation, empowerment and accountability (Chatterjee, 2004; Gururani and Kose, 2015; Jenkins et al., 2014; Kennedy, 2017), as shown at the national level in the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and the emergence of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). But in reality, these RWAs have not developed into powerful self-governance bodies, because the regional state still retains significant resources and influence. In China, residential development in peri-urban areas offered a better living environment than public housing. Residents move into suburban locations ‘in search of paradise’ (Zhang, 2010). However, they are mainly attracted by improved space and services rather than the scenario of governing their communities by themselves (Lu et al., 2019). Quasi-state organisations such as Residents’ Committees are funded by the government and play a more important role in neighbourhood governance. Neither India nor China, despite the notion of a rising middle class, has seen a mode of substantial self-governance or private governance. In India, Condominium Associations collect fees from property owners, provide services in the community and make arrangements for internal security, the supply of electricity and water, and sometimes sewerage services. A number of usually public services like health, education and neighbourhood park maintenance are provided privately. In these aspects, the private provision of services is more developed in India than in China. In China, homeowners’ associations are set up to supervise property management companies. The latter also collect property management fees for neighbourhood services such as security, landscaping and rubbish collection. But at the same

time, government-funded agencies such as Residents' Committees lead the management of residential areas (Lu et al., 2019). Suburban infrastructures are funded by the government, or more specifically, state-owned development corporations (Wu and Phelps, 2011; Wu, 2018).

Third, peri-urban developments in both India and China are associated with state rescaling (Kennedy and Sood, 2016; 2019; Kennedy, 2017; Wu and Phelps, 2011; Wu, 2018; Williams et al., 2019), flexible governance and informality (Gururani, 2013a; Roy, 2009) and mega urban projects (Follmann, 2015; Kennedy, 2017; Shen and Wu, 2017; 2020). The development of new towns, businesses and high-tech parks needs to be understood in their local contexts. Although the development of the land market matters, peri-urban development involves complex governance approaches. Chen et al. (2009) find that in urban India “the state exercises its power of ‘eminent domain’ to forcibly acquire large swathes of land on these fringes” (p. 463). The emergence of new towns should be understood through changing power relations as an emerging ‘gentrified state’ (Ghertner, 2011) in India in response to a rising middle class and the desire for making world-class cities. In urban China, state entrepreneurialism is underpinned by public finance that is dependent upon land revenue (Shatkin, 2014; Shen and Wu, 2017; 2020; Wu, 2018). Peri-urban development is embedded in the institutions of an imperative for growth, and city planning relies on a discourse of growth (Wu, 2015). The role of the state in urban spatial transformations is prominent. In China, the municipal government adjusts its jurisdictional area to find new space in the periphery for future urban development, converting rural areas that were controlled by the state but outside the formalised state administrative system into areas under direct state control. In other words, the rural and urban areas were separated under different management approaches but are now being ‘integrated’ through the same urbanisation process (Wu and Keil, 2020). In India, peri-urban development is associated with the transformation of scale

and subnational policies (Kennedy, 2017) and the development of special economic zones (Jenkins et al., 2014) and the remapping of the cities (Roy 2015).

Fourth, peri-urbanisation has triggered conflicts and social contests in both India and China. The politics of land is more complicated than the division line between the state and society. It involves cultural, social and ethnic divisions in India and inter-government competition in China. Suburban politics in China is more concerned with the dynamics of the municipality, district government, development corporations and investors rather than that driven by the politics of self-governance, while in India politics cuts across different religious and identity divisions, captured by the notion of ‘political society’ (Chatterjee, 2004) as well as multiple layers of government (Weinstein and Ren, 2009; Kennedy and Sood, 2017), including state development authorities (Kennedy, 2017) and local development agencies (Kennedy and Sood, 2019). Gururani (2013a) observed that the DDA (Delhi Development Authority) is responsible for master plan implementation and controlled land sale and development in Delhi. The strong role of the state development authority has pushed out private developers like Delhi Land and Finance. ‘Flexible governance’ in India has been made according to the rule of law, to maximise revenue from land development (Gururani, 2013a). Gururani (2013b) noted that,

“There consequently is a great deal of diversity in the social and spatial dynamics of periurban areas. But, periurban areas are typically marked by high-density growth and mixed land use and often include urban villages nested with high-rise housing enclaves, shopping malls, golf clubs, biodiversity parks, IT and biotechnology sites, and factories” (p. 187).

This high level of heterogeneity is associated with the nation's desire to build world-class cities and is promoted by various scales of the state (Williams et al., 2019). Roy (2011) observed that,

“Different levers of the state have deployed three socio-spatial technologies to implement the world-class city: slum evictions, Special Economic Zones, and peri-urban new towns. These do not constitute a unified and homogenous urban strategy imposed by a central government on the cities of India. Instead, they are undertaken in discrete and disparate ways by various scales of the state, including municipal and metropolitan authorities” (p. 261).

In short, land politics in Indian and Chinese peri-urbanisation adds narratives of state-driven suburban growth and contested governance across social strata to the modalities of suburban governance (Ekers et al., 2012; Hamel and Keil, 2015), in which the shift towards ‘neoliberal suburbanism’ is a specific deregulated market form (Peck, 2011). In India and China, peri-urban fragmentation shows similar morphologies. Nevertheless, the development of new towns in peri-urban China is a metropolitan development strategy and administrative annexation through which the municipality opens up new growth spaces (Shen and Wu, 2017) rather than deregulation and secession and generates funding for large-scale transport infrastructure through transit-oriented development (Shen and Wu, 2020), while in India peri-urban new towns are made possible by elite governance (Dupont, 2011; Ghertner, 2011), flexible planning (Gururani, 2013a), and ‘worlding practice’ (Roy and Ong, 2011). In Indian and Chinese peri-urbanisation, the transformation of peripheral areas is an intertwined process of urbanisation and suburbanisation (as residential relocation to the suburbs is mixed with the arrival of migrants) (Li et al., 2020). As shown in India and China, the peri-urban area is a dynamic and complex area and the frontier of urbanisation and globalisation, leading

to a highly mixed nature of land uses. It is a place where globally linked industries carry out processes of production and where indigenous residential spaces are restructured to meet the practical needs of migrant populations and the aspirations of a rising middle class. In this sense, peri-urban development in China and India is less associated with splintering suburban governance as an outcome of a suburban utopian of ideal living.

## **Conclusion**

The recent postcolonial turn in urban and regional studies strives to see cities in the Global South through their own ‘worlding practices’ rather than imposing a global city paradigm on them and benchmarking their globalness (Roy and Ong, 2011). The postcolonial approach emphasises their particularity rather than aligning them with an established theory. This paper tries to understand urban spatial transformations in India and China and identify the narratives that describe their urban spatial change. With reference to well-developed gentrification and suburbanisation research, this paper identifies the characteristics of urban redevelopment and peripheral expansion in India and China, which can add new descriptions, vocabularies, and narratives to the evolving fields of gentrification and suburbanisation which are themselves becoming planetary.

While this paper is not a direct comparison of India and China, it still requires some understanding of their particularities. India was fully colonised, while China has a history of state socialism. This means that China has seen the full development of state apparatus while India since independence has been subject to more democratic rules. China has a larger capacity of political mobilisation and a stronger state, although there is also a complex scalar issue of the state itself (Kennedy, 2017), as shown in China’s economic devolution. In



contrast, Indian society is more complex in terms of social divisions, religion and ethnic confrontations (Chatterjee, 2004). Both India and China now consciously adopt market reform strategies. However, the introduction of global capitalism into these countries has not led to the prevalence of the global process in them. Capitalism and its variegated forms do not dictate the urban spatial transformations there, as illustrated by this paper. Within the central areas, urban demolition has been accelerated in the name of building ‘world-class’ cities in India (Weinstein and Ren, 2009; Goldman, 2011), and in China, the revenue gained from land sales and state capacities in land development organisations and industrial upgrading are important reasons (He and Wu, 2009; Wu, 2016; 2018).

This paper shows that Indian and Chinese urban spatial transformations reflect their historical and social conditions and present some new narratives such as demolition, dispossession, redevelopment, and peri-urbanisation and peripheral mega urban developments during spatial changes. Understanding these characteristics helps to enrich the vocabularies of gentrification and suburbanisation, for example, state-sponsored gentrification, slum-gentrification, mega-gentrification (He, 2012; Desai and Loftus, 2013; Lees et al., 2016), and peri-urbanisation combining urbanisation and mixed development (Arabindoo, 2009; Wu and Phelps, 2011; Kennedy and Sood, 2016; Shen and Wu, 2017; 2020; Gururani, 2020; Li et al., 2020) for a proliferating suburbanisation and post-suburbia research (Charmes and Keil, 2015, Keil, 2018; Wu and Keil, 2020). For example, in China the state maintains control and planning centrality while new market instruments are used (Wu, 2018). The processes of spatial restructuring in India and China reveal that they are growth-oriented and that extra-economic factors, particularly the state, play a role. This understanding helps us to rethink the role of the state in urban spatial transformation. This is not to suggest that the state is not present in spatial restructuring in the West. In the United States, the state can use its power, endorsed by

judicial decisions, to condemn private properties based on the rationale of economic development and 'blight' in order to transfer them to new private owners. Although the actual enforcement of the power might be qualitatively different, the similarities between these cases may suggest the need to understand the role of the state in spatial restructuring more than housing consumption. Further, the nature of suburban high-density development in China and mega urban projects in Chinese and Indian peri-urban areas echo similar processes of densification in the suburbs which have now seen more urbanities and 'post-suburbia' or 'after suburbia' (Butler, 2007; Keil and Addie, 2015; Keil, 2018). As Harris (2015) shows, even in the context of North American cities, the 'suburban ideal' does not apply universally and does not fit well with peripheral changes in Toronto. He argues that "Toronto has never fitted comfortably into any of the three suburban stereotypes" (p. 43). Shaw (2018) explains that in India, "geographers and planners, studying more contemporary times, have preferred the terminology 'rural-urban fringe' or 'peri-urban area' to 'suburbs', highlighting some intrinsic differences between the way these regions outside the central city are formed and governed as compared to the United States" (p. 100).

Following Robinson's (2016) call for 'thinking cities through elsewhere', this paper uses Indian and Chinese cities as examples to think about contemporary urban spatial transformations. Focusing on spatial manifestations of the '21<sup>st</sup>-century metropolis' (Roy, 2009), the proliferating studies in these two countries are re-examined. Although area specialists know the body of literature in their countries fairly well, cross-referencing between them is rare, except for a few cases (Weinstein and Ren, 2009; Kennedy, 2017; Shatkin, 2014; Frazier, 2019). For example, studies on Indian cities have paid very little attention to urban China research. They could benefit from an understanding of the multiple scales of the state (Kennedy, 2017). Similarly, Chinese studies on urban villages would

benefit more from an understanding of slums and informality (Wu et al., 2013). Indian and Chinese cities as well as other cities in the Global South are often benchmarked with cities in the West. Researchers in the latter tend to see spatial manifestations in the Global South as an extension derived from a more general urban process of global capitalism and have paid inadequate attention to their contextual differences. Seeing Indian and Chinese cities as an extension of known theories is partially due to the fact that Chinese and Indian Urban Studies are themselves presented as individual and specific cases. China scholarship, even when produced in the West, tends to recycle knowledge within the area specialities, reinforcing the ‘Anglo-American hegemony’ (Kong and Qian, 2019). As shown in this study, thinking about the specificities of Indian and Chinese cities does not necessarily mean that we should abandon some common concerns (here urban spatial transformations). Rather, it is appropriate to suggest that these particular studies can contribute new vocabularies and narratives towards understanding urban transformations. Schmid et al. (2018) criticise the approach of stretching concepts and stress the importance of developing new vocabularies because,

“A concept might originate in a specific experience linked to one place, and is then applied to more and more seemingly similar examples in other places. Through this tactic of conceptual stretching the original definition is relaxed to encompass more and more cases until it becomes almost a generic label” (p. 25).

While maintaining attention to the general process of urban transformation, namely restructuring and expansion, the studies of Indian and Chinese cities, even without a more *direct* comparison between them, may contribute vocabularies and narratives to planetary gentrification and suburbanisation. Returning now to Peck’s (2015) appeal for “a constructive dialogue across theoretical traditions, notably at the interface between political economy and postcolonialism” (p. 160), as illustrated in this paper, despite their historical and geographical

specificities, Indian and Chinese urban spatial transformations can enrich the concepts that are already commonly used in describing a reasonably well understood historical process in the West which is now increasingly becoming planetary.

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