



Residential satisfaction in traditional and redeveloped inner city neighborhood: A tale of two neighborhoods in Beijing [☆]



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ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, China has experienced a resurgence of urban redevelopment in inner-city neighborhoods. Some redevelopment projects have sought to preserve elements of classical Chinese neighborhoods by “repairing the old to look old.” In Beijing, the Ju’er Hutong Project exemplified this movement by using the *New Siheyuan*-style of redevelopment, which was believed to preserve a traditional communal lifestyle and to improve living conditions in existing neighborhoods. This study compares dwelling conditions, daily activities, and individual satisfaction in traditional neighborhoods and in the redeveloped *New Siheyuan* areas by analyzing the results of a questionnaire and in-depth interviews with residents. This study suggests that, although the built environment is improved after redevelopment, residents in the redeveloped Ju’er neighborhood exhibit less developed social networks and participate in fewer neighborhood activities than residents in traditional, non-redeveloped neighborhoods. In the Ju’er Hutong Project, residents’ overall satisfaction is significantly lower, and residents reported a lower level of satisfaction in almost all areas, including with the built environment, neighborhood facilities, and with the social environment. These results suggest that the façade-style approach to redevelopment with traditional architectural elements may improve the built environment but also may not preserve neighborhood social networks and therefore sustain residential satisfaction. Further research on urban redevelopment in Chinese inner-city neighborhoods should consider including neighborhood satisfaction as a measure for evaluating the outcomes of projects.

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1. Introduction

Urban redevelopment has been a global issue since the second half of 20th century. After the end of World War II, many Western cities faced the challenge of both economic activities and residential development shifting from inner-city areas to the suburbs, and thus began to renew their inner-city neighborhoods. Since the 1960s, large-scale, bulldozer-style redevelopment has been widely criticized for inducing a variety of social problems, such as forcing low-income residents to move away (Jacobs, 1961; Caldiera, 2000; Tibaijuka, 2006), ruining cities’ sense of place (Montgomery, 1966), breaking social networks (Hartman, 1964; Putnam, 2000) and intensifying social conflicts (Smith, 1996).

Currently in most developed countries, urban redevelopment has moved beyond this large-scale and bulldozer style, and is increasingly focused on local residents’ needs, social networks, neighborhood participation, and community interest (Rohe, 2009; Cameron, 2003; Butler and Robson, 2001; Lees, 2008; Wilson and Grammenos, 2014). However, in developing countries such as in East Asia and South America, the primary model of urban redevelopment can be very different. Sometimes, local governments use urban redevelopment as a tool to “sweep the poor away” (Tibaijuka, 2006). Researchers are increasingly focusing on urban redevelopment issues in China, such as land and property rights (Zhang, 2002; Zhu, 2004; Wu, 2009), residential relocation (Li and Song, 2009; Yang and Chang, 2007), social-spatial impact (Ma and Wu, 2004; Fang, 2006; He and Wu, 2007), and social networks (Zhai and Ng, 2013; Li and Wu, 2013).

Although urban redevelopment has received wide attention in the United States since the 1960s (Jacobs, 1961; Hartman, 1964), it was not until the 1990s that literature in English began to focus on urban redevelopment in Chinese cities (Dowall, 1994; Leaf, 1995; Zhu, 1999). These studies approach the redevelopment issue

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from a framework of the “growth machine,” suggesting that urban redevelopment in China accelerated in the 1990s when the establishment of the land and housing markets coincided with a movement toward fiscal decentralization. Literature emphasizes the coalition between local governments and developers in large developments, which seize land and housing and deprive local residents of benefits (Zhang, 2002; Zhu, 2004; Zhang and Fang, 2004). Researchers have increasingly focused on the outcomes of redevelopment at both the city and neighborhood levels. At the city level, research shows that urban redevelopment reshaped post-socialism Chinese cities in many ways, resembling the redevelopment of Western cities. For example, much like the gentrification process in Western cities, some sections of the inner-city transitioned into elite communities and induced social segregation; other sections transitioned from residential to commercial uses, creating central business districts and shopping malls (Ma and Wu, 2004; Li and Song, 2009). Inversely, residents who relocated from the inner city to remote suburban areas suffer from limited access to jobs and adequate public facilities, which studies suggest may make disadvantaged groups even worse after relocation (Acharya, 2005; He and Wu, 2005). At the neighborhood level, the urban redevelopment process and its impact on local residents have manifested themselves in different ways across three types of neighborhoods: traditional neighborhoods, work-unit compounds, and urban villages (Cheng, 2012).

In other empirical studies, large-scale, top-down, and bulldozer-style urban renewal policies are generally criticized. Many scholars suggest that small-scale projects that are sensitive to the local context, social capital, and neighborhood networks are important elements in the redevelopment process (Zhai and Ng, 2013; Li and Wu, 2013). However, most research indicates that urban renewal policies in China still focus on physical planning and property-led regeneration (Leaf, 1995; Zhang and Fang, 2004; He and Wu, 2005; Li and Wu, 2013), while research on the social impact of redevelopment at the neighborhood level, especially from local residents’ subjective perspectives, is still insufficient. Also, the impact of changes to the built environment on the social environment in neighborhoods under urban redevelopment in China is still unclear. Even if the physical planning process for improving the built environment incorporates traditional architectural elements that are appropriate in the local context and are implemented in a gradual, large-scale approach (Wu, 1994; Acharya, 2005), is it certain that residents will be better-off and their residential satisfaction will improve?

Considering the aforementioned question, this paper explores the impact of urban redevelopment policy on neighborhood social changes in inner-city neighborhoods in China by comparing the residential satisfaction in a traditional neighborhood and in a neighborhood redeveloped in the “repairing the old to look old (*Xiu Jiu Ru Jiu*)” method. This study aims to address the gap of measuring social outcomes from changes to the built environment in the context of inner-city neighborhood redevelopment by examining residential satisfaction from subjective points of view, and offering insights to improve neighborhood social environments during future redevelopment projects in China. Finally, this study adds to the diversity of literature on global urban redevelopment issues by exploring the factors that are unique to redevelopment in post-socialist cities during this time of rapid transition in China.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: The second part reviews the literature on inner-city neighborhood redevelopment and residential satisfaction. The third part describes the background of the two neighborhoods included in this study, and the fourth part introduces project data and methodology. The fifth part discusses the results and findings of research. The final part summarizes the findings and provides conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2. Inner-city neighborhood redevelopment and residential satisfaction

Since the late 1990s, urban redevelopment has dramatically changed inner-city neighborhoods in China. Recent research sheds light on the dark side of large-scale, top-down urban renewal policy that focuses on the built environment. Unfortunately, research on micro-level, socially-oriented urban renewal policy at the neighborhood level is still insufficient. In order to connect neighborhood built and social environments, residential satisfaction has been selected to evaluate feedback on urban redevelopment projects from the subjective perspective of residents.

2.1. Inner-city redevelopment and growth machine in China

In many countries, large-scale inner-city redevelopment began with rapid post-war urbanization and the outward migration of the middle class (Rohe, 2009). City governments undertook the first large-scale “bulldozer” redevelopments in order to combat the unemployment and crime that came after the departure of the middle class (Rhyne, 1960; Strobel, 2003). Large-scale urban redevelopment was common in American cities during the 1960s to 1970s and took place concurrently with the slum clearance movement in the United Kingdom (Butler and Robson, 2001).

Urban redevelopment policies largely fall into two trends: façade redevelopment, which emphasizes the built environment, and urban renaissance, which emphasizes disadvantaged groups and social networks (Cameron, 2003). Currently, most Western cities have passed the façade redevelopment stage and instead focus on the social environment in inner-city neighborhoods. However, in post-socialist cities and developing regions, governments and developers often seek profit from urban redevelopment as a way of speculation (Brade et al., 2009; Kovács et al., 2012). It is not surprising that, though this style of redevelopment improves the built environment, it also induces additional societal problems like social exclusion and social segregation in post-socialist cities (Ladányi, 2002).

Large-scale façade renewal policies are still the dominant style of inner-city redevelopment in China. Although some pilot projects since the 1980s have proved to be successful in providing a better living environment through significant government subsidies (Zhang and Fang, 2004), they also bring about social problems at both the city and neighborhood levels.

For example, with the establishment of the real estate market and during the period of fiscal decentralization, local governments quickly took advantage of redevelopment programs to power a “growth machine” (Wu, 2009; Zhang, 2002; Zhang and Fang, 2004; Zhu, 2000, 2004). The growth machine theory was first developed to explain changes in the United States during the 1960s (Molotch, 1976). According to this theory, urban renewal can be explained by a coalition of local governments and real estate developers that increased the cities’ fiscal revenue through demolition and redevelopment (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Later, many scholars used the growth machine framework to explain the mechanism of land transition (Zhu, 2000, 2004), housing commodification (Zhou and Logan, 1996) and urban demolition projects (Wu, 2009).

Zhang and Fang (2004) argue that the comparison between inner-city redevelopment in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s and China since the 1980s is not fully appropriate. While they might share some similarities such as the coalition of land-based elites, the reality in China is more like a “growth machine in the making.” Likewise, Zhang (2002) points out the uniqueness in decision-making systems during urban development, which contains quasi-participatory decision-making structures and a bottom-up approach led by street offices empowered

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