

Exploring Chiang Mai through gentrification lens: drawing linkage between tourism and social class changes of residents in the old city

มองเมืองใหม่ผ่านเลนส์:
การโยงถึงกันระหว่างการท่องเที่ยวกับการเปลี่ยนแปลง
ชนชั้นทางสังคมในกลุ่มผู้อยู่อาศัยในเขตเมืองเก่า

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Abstract

After discussion about the concept of gentrification and tourism gentrification, this article holds the objectives to (1) explore the extent of the tourist space in forms of accommodations in the past decade focusing on the area of the historic city of Chiang Mai, (2) analyze the situation under the conceptual framework of gentrification, (3) discuss some possible institutional and socioeconomic driving forces of gentrification in this case, and (4) discuss further research recommendations. By means of spatial analysis and qualitative analysis, findings and analysis show the existing rapid speed of social class replacement in the old city in the form of hotels and guesthouses and very mild impact from youth hostels and Airbnb properties. Future projections based on the recent Building Codes and value gap analysis shades a probable continuation of large sized hotels penetration in the area, which would affect

number of existing affordable shared accommodation of which new construction has become prohibited. However, it is found that many of current landowners are not keen on online informal accommodation platform and some communities yield land attachment that resist gentrification.

Keywords: Tourism, Gentrification, Chiang Mai City, Airbnb

บทคัดย่อ

หลังจากที่มีการถกเถียงกับนิยามของเจนตริฟิเคชันและเจนตริฟิเคชันเชิงท่องเที่ยวแล้ว บทความนี้แสดงผลการวิจัยที่ประกอบไปด้วยวัตถุประสงค์ที่จะ (1) สำรวจระดับการเกิดขึ้นของพื้นที่สำหรับนักท่องเที่ยวในรูปแบบของที่พักอาศัยในช่วงเวลาสิบปีที่ผ่านมา (2) วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลที่ได้โดยใช้กรอบแนวคิดของเจนตริฟิเคชัน ว่าสถานการณ์ดังกล่าวถือเป็นเจนตริฟิเคชันอย่างไร (3) อภิปรายข้อค้นพบร่วมกับแรงขับเคลื่อนเชิงสถาบัน และเชิงเศรษฐกิจสังคมที่ทำให้การเกิดเจนตริฟิเคชันอาจรุนแรงมากยิ่งขึ้น จากการวิเคราะห์เชิงพื้นที่และเชิงคุณภาพพบว่าคนในชุมชนในเมืองเก่าเชียงใหม่มีการเปลี่ยนชนชั้นทางสังคมจากคนท้องถิ่นไปสู่นักท่องเที่ยวในอัตราที่ค่อนข้างเร็ว และส่วนมากเกิดจากการสร้างโรงแรมและเกสต์เฮาส์ ในขณะที่โฮสเทลและห้องพักของ Airbnb ยังไม่สร้างผลกระทบที่นับว่าเป็นเจนตริฟิเคชันได้ชัดเจนในขณะนี้ แนวโน้มในอนาคตนั้นเป็นไปได้มากกว่าจะมีโรงแรมขนาดใหญ่เกิดขึ้น ในขณะที่ที่พักอาศัยรวมราคาถูกเช่นหอพักไม่สามารถสร้างเพิ่มขึ้นได้ด้วยข้อจำกัดของกฎหมายเทศบัญญัติ ซึ่งอาจทำให้ที่อยู่อาศัยของชนชั้นแรงงานได้รับผลกระทบและเกิเจนตริฟิเคชันในระดับที่รุนแรงมากยิ่งขึ้น อย่างไรก็ตาม มีข้อค้นพบว่าพฤติกรรมของผู้ถือครองที่พักอาศัยรวมนั้นยังไม่มีแนวโน้มที่จะเปลี่ยนกิจการไปเพื่อสนองอุตสาหกรรมท่องเที่ยว และพบอีกว่าชาวบ้านในหลายชุมชนมีความยึดติดกับถิ่นที่อยู่ซึ่งอาจเป็นแรงยับยั้งการขยายตัวของเจนตริฟิเคชันได้

คำสำคัญ: การท่องเที่ยว, เจนตริฟิเคชัน, เมืองเชียงใหม่, แอร์บีเอนด์บี

1. When tourists take over urban space, is it gentrification in Chiang Mai City?

Recently ranked third on the World's Top 15 Cities 2017 by Travel and Leisure Magazine, based on travel experiences of the readers, Chiang Mai City is recognized to be a major global tourist destination and is likely to be for many years to come. Tourism contributes to the largest share of the economy of this historical and culturally outstanding city of approximately 200,000 inhabitants, as well expressed its significance in the urban physical space. Walking around the inner city, tourists might feel that they 'belong' while the locals would feel somewhat otherwise – from signboards about tourist attractions to hotels built in distinguished Lanna architectural style, the surroundings seem to be crafted by and for the tourism industry.

A certain aspect has consequently become a more and more apparent transformation of the city landscape in the past ten years is that the number of hotels in the city is increasing at an incredible speed, following a growing trend in the number of tourists, and these new or renovated property are 'beautiful', especially hotels. It is then implied that the inner city itself in general is being improved in aesthetic aspect and perhaps in economic value too. However, the question that follows here is: what could possibly be the trade-off to this physical transformation the city is facing?

Having lived in the city center myself, I have witnessed a major neighborhood change. Each new tourist accommodation being constructed obviously means we will have, seasonally or inconstantly, a considerable more number of residents in the area whose daily activities, as well as expense patterns, are different from the original dwellers. If focused on spending patterns, many would agree that activities and consumption by tourists is

more active compared to locals. Therefore, locals generally perceive tourists as a wealthy group of people. Mostly, only tourists are customers to over-priced commodities and services, and it is one of reasons why tourism business and industry are so robust for the economy. In short, locals offer urban space dedicated to tourism expecting that (1) faces of the neighborhoods would become of wealthier social class, and (2) local properties converted to serve tourism would increase in property value.

I once thought such social change and urban transformation were only natural due to the real estate market mechanism at play when mass tourism takes root. What is the problem, anyway, if the locals in my neighborhood sold their property and left on their own? I did not consider it a problem until a firm observation concerning the ladies dormitories being converted to hotels on Arak and Rajavitee streets, both in the inner city. It is observed that the affected group of people are not the locals but the tenants who need affordable accommodations in the city. The assumption of demographic change in this case is that the middle class tourists are replacing local working class citizens, which brings up a hypothesis whether the city is expressing ‘gentrification’ driven by tourism. If so, this is perhaps the ‘trade-off’ speculated previously.

This article holds the objectives to: firstly, explore the extent of the tourist space in forms of accommodations in the past decade focusing on the historical area of Chiang Mai inside the city moat (referred as ‘the old city’ in this article) (Figure 1); secondly, analyze the situation under the conceptual framework of gentrification; thirdly, discuss some possible drivers of gentrification in this case; and finally, discuss further research recommendation.



Figure 1: Site map of Chiang Mai City and the study area framed inside the black rectangular

2. Gentrification and Tourism Gentrification

Gentrification is one of the urban phenomena involveing social and physical changes in an urban setting, which urban scholars have addressed and actively discussed recently. The major characteristics of gentrification are (1) poor residents in the inner city are being replaced by middle class residents moving in from the suburb, (2) the buildings and facilities are gentrified or renovated either by the new residents or the investors; and, (3) the neighborhood becomes wealthy, land value and price in the area increases,

which subsequently becomes incentive for the poor to emigrate. Many scholars recognize gentrification as an urban crisis rather than merely an interesting change in dynamic systems such as cities themselves. That is because, while the concentration of economic activities (businesses and employments) are mostly located in the central business district, gentrification pushes the poor further away from their source of income, leaving burden the commuting cost on people who are already economically vulnerable. Besides, disappearance of the long-standing communities that are rich of history counts as losing priceless urban traditions and cultures.

In regards to how gentrification occurs, Moskowitz (2017) has compiled different causes of gentrification in American cities in different periods of time. The early gentrification (early 1970s) was understood as a positive for the urban economy and thus the 'revitalization' was enforced by public policies, both by conducting the act by themselves or providing incentives for private sector to invest in renovation. Then, in late 1970s, the origin of gentrification became 'individual gentrifier,' in other words, one new resident could cause gentrification. The scenario starts from a pioneer occupation and house renovation in previously poor neighborhood would induce, through words of mouth, more gentrifiers who are alike in characteristics (mostly active, educated, upper-middle class young adults to move it in the area too, which would subsequently transform the neighborhood and move the properties to the up-scale real estate market. The third cause of gentrification is property developers. Having made profit from suburbanization, when land in the outskirts of the city were developed and portrayed to be desirable for those who could afford, capitalists see opportunity to make profit from reinvesting in the abandoned city core that used to be prosperous – a form of 'seesaw' effect. Consumer taste for gentrified spaces is created and marketed, and it depends on the alternatives offered by powerful capitalists who are primarily interested

in producing the built environment from which they can extract the highest profit. Today, especially in global cities such as London and New York City, the scale of the cause of gentrification is moreover extended globally to foreign investors. Loretta Lees coined the term, “super-gentrification” in 2003 to explain the phenomenon of developing fancy housing estates, only affordable to the global elite, in already gentrified neighborhoods.

While the mutual definition is agreed, local poor are naturally replaced by well-off active citizens, resulting in more vibrant up-scaled neighborhoods, over time, the concept has been expanded to include other forms of gentrification, such as rural gentrification (shift in class structure and capital accumulation in rural areas), commercial gentrification (preexisting population being displaced by commercial premises or commercial areas), and, definitely, tourism gentrification. (Lees *et al.*, 2008)

Tourism Gentrification, according to Gothem (in Lees *et al.*, 2008), refers to the “transformation of a neighborhood into a relatively affluent and exclusive enclave in which corporate entertainment and tourism venues have proliferated.” He also argued that displacement of former residents in this context was encouraged by consumption around tourism, and can be viewed as both commercial (retails, restaurants, tour agencies, etc.) and residential (hotels). Moreover, it was pointed out that the connections between the local institutions, the real estate industry and the global economy then expressed via tourism gentrification.

On the other side, academic studies about gentrification in Thailand up to year 2017 are quite limited. As for commercial and tourism gentrification, there was only one case study on Banglamphu neighborhood in Bangkok Metropolitan by Pokharatsiri (2003 and 2013), which is considered one of a very few academic works dedicated to gentrification research in the country.

The studies used social and economic surveys on the population, which then ultimately yielded impacts of tourism gentrification in the area in focus in terms of neighborhood diversity, social cohesion, and identity. Hence, in a slightly different research methodology, Chiang Mai City could provide an additional case study to this field of urban studies.

3. Tourist Accommodations and Chiang Mai City

Literature suggests that the phenomenon of tourism gentrification does present a challenge to traditional explanations of gentrification that assume demand-side or production-side factors drive the process. Nonetheless, for this initial research to observe social class change over time, necessary data both scale and detailed socioeconomic characteristics of residents and tourists in Chiang Mai has not been available. Yet, it is possible to look into data from the supply side – hotels. So in this research, spatial behavior of tourism accommodations – hotels, guesthouses, hostels, Airbnb – are considered proxies to scale of the movement of the in-moving social class, and the main focal point of the study.

The situation of registered hotels in the city lately has been increasing in number, as shown in figure 2 below. Looking closely, however, while the revenue derived from tourism in Chiang Mai City since 2009 has been growing rapidly, the number of registered hotels (in rooms) has been only aggregated in a much slower pace. The interpretation could be two fold. One is that accommodation business is not a major contribution to the revenue. The other would be that assuming that hotel occupancy is high, there are informal accommodations running under trace. Therefore Airbnb, the renowned informal

tourist accommodation service is going to be discussed especially later in this article.

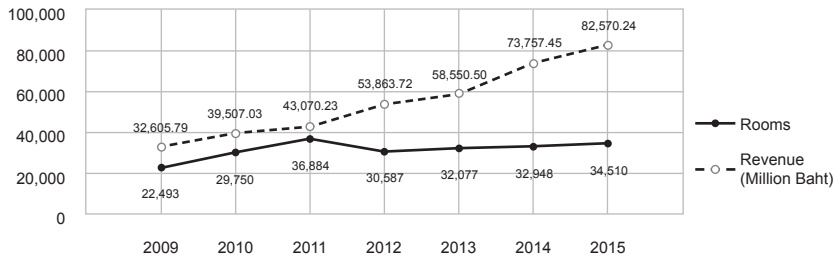


Figure 2: Revenue from tourism industry and number of accommodation for tourists (rooms) in Chiang Mai City from 2009 to 2015

Source: Data from Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2016.

Another point about the current situation is the distribution pattern of hotels. Figure 3 demonstrates that hotels in Chiang Mai City are clustered in the center, where the old city and the other main tourist attractions are, and then scattered around the outer part of the city. The emerging area for tourist accommodations outside the moat is on the Northwestern side of the old city, Nimmanheminn neighborhood, which is a most recent development for tourism with less focus on historical attractions but more of a contemporary lifestyle, considered quite attractive for the young locals and trendy tourists.

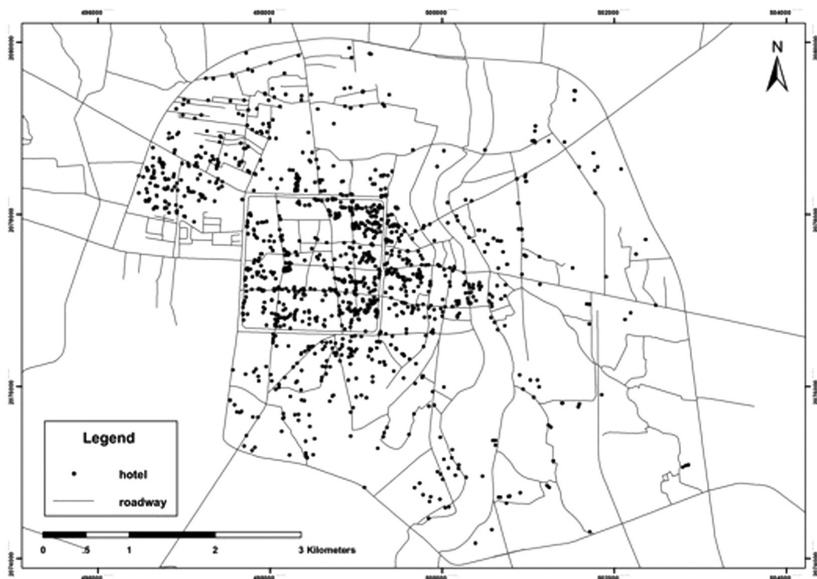


Figure 3: Distribution of 488 tourist accommodations in Chiang Mai City as registered in booking.com as of November 2017.

The area scope of the research is then narrowed down to the old city inside the city moat by a reason that tourist accommodations has been developed in the area consistently, allowing comparative observations between 2008 and 2017. Other reason for choosing this boundary is the significance of the old city, which is considered a historical and cultural heritage of the nation; and it is a highly active mix-used land that reflects the authenticity of Chiang Mai city life today to some extent.

4. Tourist accommodation versus community displacement and affordable housing

In order to reflect demographic change, this section is going to show (1) the distribution pattern of tourist space in terms of tourist accommodations and (2) the illustration of tourist space replacing local residential space using spatial analysis.

4.1 Hotels

Maps of hotel locations in 2008, 2012, and 2017 (buildings in 2017 as base map) are created to analyze the social movement. Furthermore, a layer of residential areas in 2008 are to be added in the said 3 maps to observe the extent of social class shift. Data of hotel coordinates and year established are collected from TripAdvisor, an online accommodation booking platform. Although with slight reliability issues, years that hotels registered with the website are used as year of business founding. Residential area in 2008 is referred to land-use map by Dhanasin (2009). Outcomes are as shown in figure 4 and 5 below.

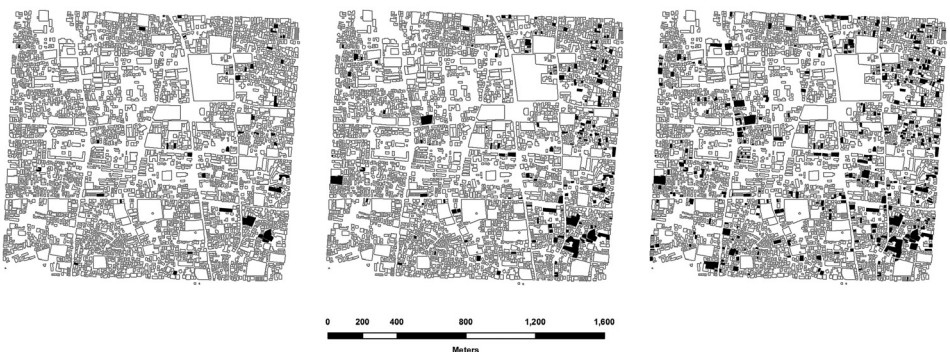


Figure 4: Distribution of tourist accommodation (in black) within Chiang Mai old city registered in Tripadvisor in 2002 (left), 2008 (middle) and 2017 (right)

Generally, the disperse of hotels started from Eastern side of the old city to the rest of the area¹. Interestingly, in year 2008, the concentration was still rather high in the East where many hotel businesses were already in place, subsequently penetration to the Northwest and finally the Southwest started to show in the most recent years.

To better clarify whether the hotel establishments are actually executed within former residential buildings and this likely caused displacement of old communities, figure 5 is made to show a clearer picture of spatial penetration, the overlay of hotels coordinates in 2008, 2012 and 2017 respectively with residential area in 2008. It is seen that many new hotels, if located by the main roads, tend to be replacement of other kinds of retails or commercial buildings. Almost all hotels set in the inner area from main roads, which was entirely residential area, were most likely renovated from local houses. Moreover, as derived from distribution pattern on the Eastern side of the old city, tourist accommodations broke the physical continuity of the residential morphology while inserting themselves frequently within residential communities. Nonetheless, some communities in the West and South areas seem to have withheld penetration of investments and renovations driven by tourism, for which an explanation will be mentioned in a later section of this article.

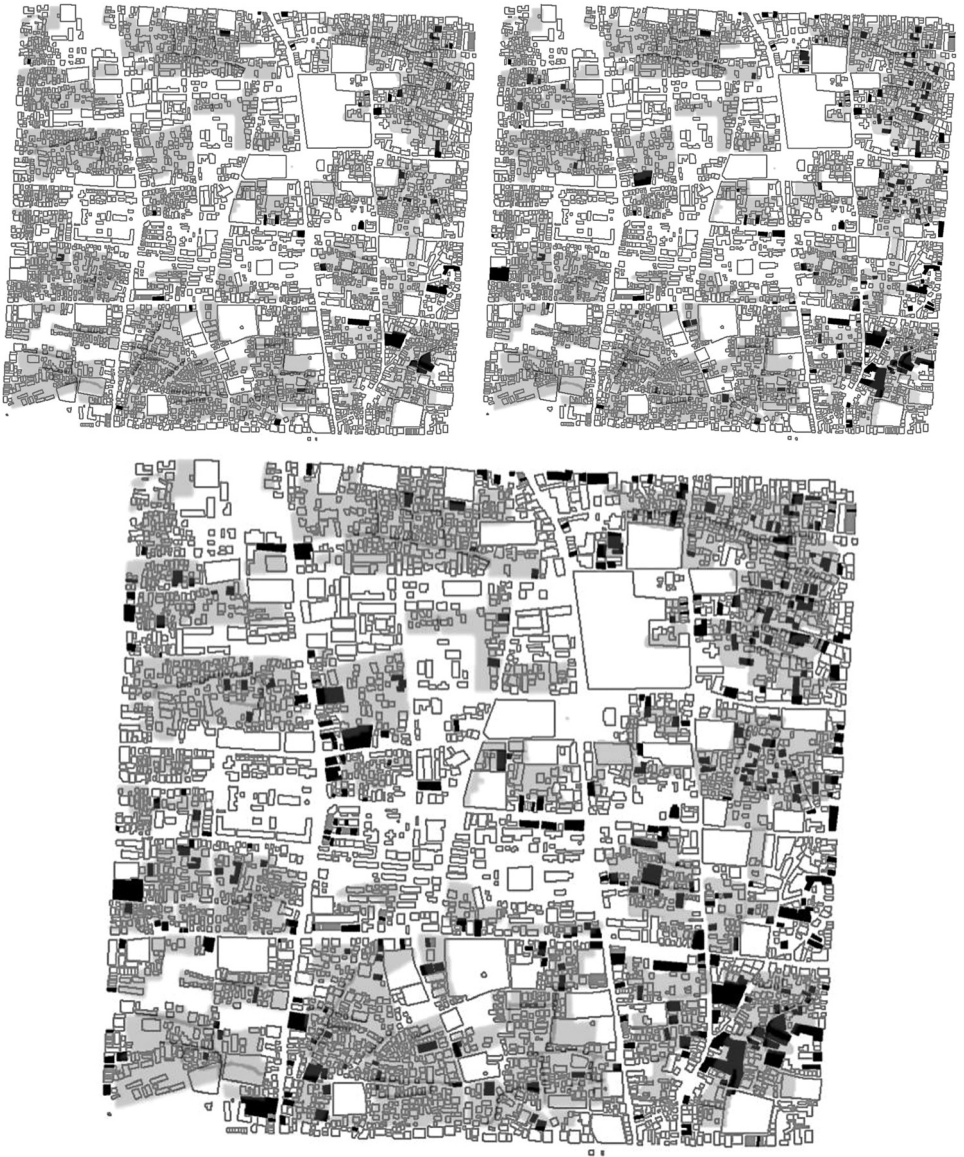


Figure 5: Tourist accommodations (black) in 2008 (top left), 2012 (top right), and 2017 (bottom) overlaid with residential land (grey) in 2008 showing the scale of tourism penetration that displace local households in 10 years.

4.2 Youth hostels

Among the mapped accommodation, it is also interesting to see the behavior of space dedicated to young tourists such as youth hostels. Young tourists have smaller budget and normally look for different experiences to mingle with locals and other young tourists. City centers, like the old city of Chiang Mai, is the space that is diverse, compact, convenient, and vibrant, and these qualities indeed attract youngsters, inducing youth hostels to open in the area more and more. These hostels bring a certain mood into the neighborhood. The “beautiful,” affordable, contemporary, artistic architectural designs, assessed from the façades at least, reveal themselves clearly that it is the group of young adults that the places are designated for, and the infer that they are the sort of people you would encounter in this area. We started to witness this situation more and more in Chiang Mai old city. My argument is that when the neighborhoods are constantly occupied by middle classed young tourists, it changes, positively or negatively, the urban physics and traditional life style in the area. This is another concept of demographic change often associated with gentrification – youthification.

The term generally refers an increasing presence of young adults within a neighborhood. Revington (2015) is one of many scholars who affirmed that gentrification, especially in the American and European cities, are connected. Youthification leads or follows gentrification by the entrance of young new comers that then dominate the areas. (Moos, 2015; Coceci and Mitrea, 2018; Revington; 2018) In accordance with the paradigm, figure 6 affirmed growth in number and distribution of youth hostels during 2014-2017 in Chiang Mai old city. The locations of the hostels within the moat in 4 years do not yield clear agglomeration, but are rather scattered, and about two third are located by the main roads that were formerly commercial areas. Compared to hotels

and guesthouse, at this point, the potential impact on community displacement caused by youth hostels is much lower, both by their quantity and locations.



Figure 6: Distribution of youth hostels (black) within Chiang Mai old city registered in Tripadvisor in 2014 (left) and 2017 (right)

In regards to youthification outside the tourism framework, the city is aware of the cumulative number of digital nomads, obviously the group dominated by young adults, in the city center. They are drawn to the city due to her “exotic surroundings, the low cost of living, great food, warm weather, the dream of getting healthy on yoga and coconut water.” (Hart, 2015) Encounters with the nomads are mostly within the city center by the aforementioned reasons and they are considered long-term residents. The trend is officially supported by the government launching knowledge-based economy such as “Chiang Mai Creative City” or “Smart City Chiang Mai” that welcomes the human resources of “creative class” into the city. The expats and nomads fit properly in the category. Therefore, we could expect such trend compliments youthification and social class shifting as gentrification subsequently. This is the subject to be investigated further in the future.

4.3 Airbnb

Lastly, it is about informal tourist accommodation represented in this case by Airbnb properties. Airbnb is an online platform for homeowners to rent out their vacant rooms or the whole property for a short duration of time starting from 1 night. In other words, it facilitates a traditional housing to act as a hotel. Airbnb performs as a middleman between customers and owners, providing *inter alia* convenient booking system, safe payment methods, as well as advertising. On one hand, it definitely helps increase income, or at least options to income generating channel, to local people. Yet, from a different angle, it was also perceived as an “informal peer-to-peer accommodation”, and an “illegal short-term renting without permit” that brings rather negative consequences to the hosting community. (Guttentag, 2015)

The impacts of Airbnb on local community have been studied and published quite recently, around 2013 to 2015, and it is suggested that further research should be conducted in other cities with different contexts. Guttentag’s study about Airbnb (2015) focuses on the disruptive innovation and the informal economy aspect impacted by a growing market for Airbnb by two means: (1) investigating how occupancy level of traditional accommodation is reduced and (2) change in level of awareness and concern regarding the occupancy rate. Studies by Gurran and Phibbs (2017) later pointed out neighborhood impacts by Airbnb, namely: noise, congestion, and parking. By far, arguably, the housing issue caused by Airbnb, particularly via the framework of tourism gentrification has not been officially conducted.

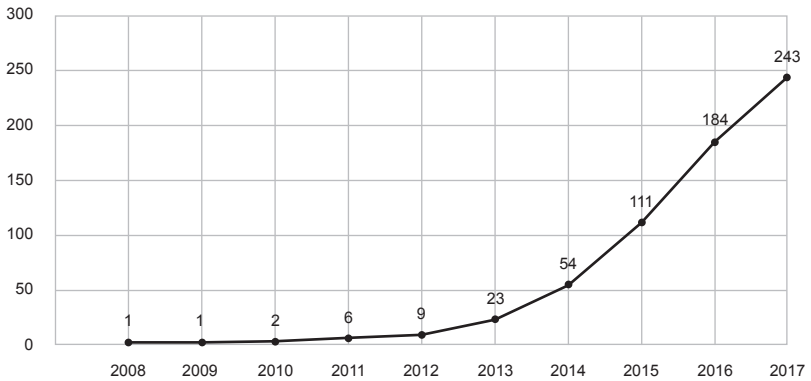


Figure 7: Number of property registered with Airbnb in Chiang Mai old city from 2008 to 2017

The accelerating rate of registrations to Airbnb in Chiang Mai old city is striking. As shown in figure 6 above, data derived from Airbnb official website in May 2017 (rooms in hotels, guesthouses, and hostels included), Airbnb properties claim 243 rooms by 85 property owners within 10 years, where 140 rooms, more than half, are operating under only Airbnb's system.

Figure 8, languages used for property description on Airbnb's website, signify international tourist as a major customer target as the dominant language is English, following by Chinese. There is description in Thai only, but it only constitutes 8 percent.

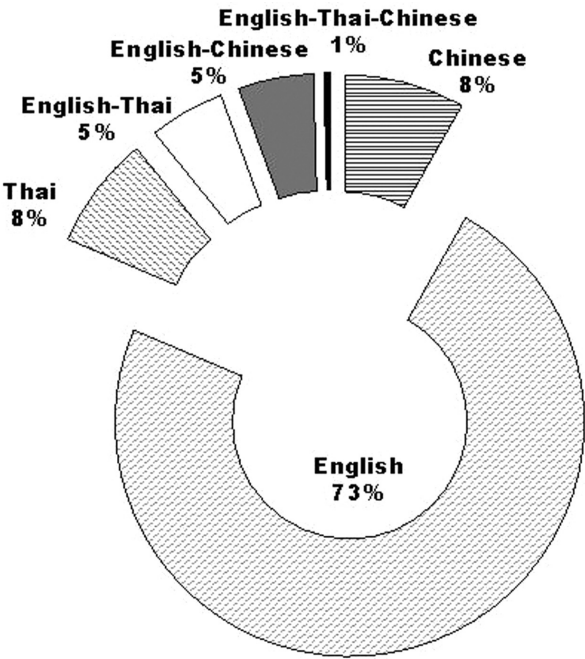


Figure 8: Percentage of languages used for room description by 85 Airbnb property owners, Chiang Mai old city, 2017.

Unfortunately, the coordinates of Airbnb property are only available for actual customers, so it is impossible to make property distribution maps. However, information about city district of each property allow somewhat of spatial analysis. Taken all properties into account, both Sirphum (Northern half of the old city) and Phrasing districts (Southern half) hold about equal share of rooms. However, if taking the apartment type of property only, the number drops to only 16 rooms-3 rooms in Sripnum (3 owners), and 12 rooms in Phrasing (4 owners) registered with Airbnb between 2014 and 2017. Also the price of per night stay of rooms in Phrasing is in higher range, from

THB 700 to THB 3,235, while it is THB 397-862 in Sripum. But with such small number of owners, it is difficult to complete a comparative analysis. The price may vary based on individual owner at this point.

A conclusion about informal tourist accommodations, therefore, would be that the magnitude of community displacement by Airbnb at the present time is relatively insignificant. Even if the registration number is increasing, it is perceived to be an alternative marketing and sale channels largely to formal tourist accommodation. Following future data is highly recommended for future research in accordance with technology and knowledge acceptance model as well as gentrification's rent/value gap theory, especially. Rationality of why Airbnb should still be observed closely is going to be explained as an economic gentrification driver in the next section of the article.

5. Discussion: driving forces of tourism gentrification and potential existing stoppers

5.1 Institutional driver of tourism gentrification – Building Codes

Although not every new establishment of hotels or youth hostels and other kinds of accommodation for tourists would refer to a local household moving out, it definitely means a loss of potential space for affordable housing for those who are in need. An apparent reason is the limit to housing expansion caused by a high concentration of buildings and very few vacant or inactive spaces. Even if it is possible to grow vertically, new construction within the old city cannot go beyond 4 stories according to the city's Building Codes.

Speaking of legislation, although Chiang Mai City Municipality has enacted an ordinance and enforced on land within the city walls that prohibits construction of “large-size” hotels since 2015, it is legally permissible to build any new hotels as long as the total floor area is below 2,000 square meters. Therefore, the number of small to medium sized hotels might continue to increase. Furthermore, new establishment of residential and commercial “shared accommodations,” applied to dormitories, mansions, apartments, townhomes, townhouses, and also single houses with total floor area over 1,000 square meters are prohibited. The said types of buildings are typical options of housing for the local citizen, mostly of lower income group, and they are now not allowed to flourish. Under the same Ordinance, for the existing buildings within the moat, there are further rules that create difficulty for modification and enlargement. As a result, the capacity for residential buildings in the neighborhoods have been completely capped, at least until the ordinance is amended otherwise.

The rationalization for the new regulation is likely to be about the city tax revenue from tourism-oriented business. Customarily, there have been a fair number, if not all, of medium to small-sized hotels within Chiang Mai old city that registered as shared accommodations instead of properly registered as commercial buildings. From the business owners’ perspective, that is obviously to avoid paying property tax at the hotel rate, which is apparently higher and more complicated in process. After the Ordinance’s enforcement, the city had become sterner with tax compliance; consequently, there are more non-registered hotels that submitted themselves within a few years, and the common practice in the past has been now prevented, or at least that was what the municipality thought. But in capitalist system, the market usually works its way out. In response to tourist demand, or other economic reason,

Airbnb has emerged and might allow the “informal” tourist accommodation to continue, as well as the pressure on affordable housing.

5.2 Economic driver of tourism gentrification – Airbnb and rent/value gap

If available vacant rooms within the old city are opting to serve tourists more and more, a sensible reason behind this situation is likely to be economic - room owners could make more profit with tourists than with the locals.

I have then gathered information I could find on the Internet to examine the price gap between Airbnb room and the conventional room, and the outcome is as shown in table 1. Compared to conventional apartment, the difference between the lowest and the highest per night rate of Airbnb registered room is large, regardless of which type of property it is, subject to ranges of quality and services. The key findings are; firstly, assuming room occupancy to be full all year round, the conventional apartment’s landlord would make at least 2 times higher of revenue from daily rent rate. Secondly, the daily income that a conventional apartment derived from the highest monthly rent is THB² 200 that is no greater than the lower daily income from the lowest day rate. These findings provide sufficient incentive for a landlord to opt their business toward short-term accommodation. Thirdly, if a landlord would register one of their rooms, at the current market price, he could make at least THB 100 surplus (lowest daily rate of an Airbnb guesthouse room and isolate room are THB 300 and 333, respectively. More convenience, Airbnb would be responsible for marketing and administration system that is accessible in many languages in reaching global customers (the system even translates property owner’s message into customer’s language and vice versa.) Furthermore, the so-called “informal economy” is exempted from income tax,

and circumvents inspection in that regard by the officials, the website also hides the property’s exact location until agreement is made between customer and room-owner. All circumstances mentioned, including extending market penetration of Airbnb, provide sufficient incentive for landlords to join Airbnb and perform like hotels while paying tax at the shared accommodation rate. If all local landlords are profit-oriented, I would feel quite alarmed about the future, and the city must take housing pathways of lower-income group in the area very seriously.

Accommodations advertised online		Price/room/night (THB)	
		Lowest	Highest
Airbnb registered property (243)	Hostel	302	2,515
	Guesthouse	300	3,433
	Hotel	498	3,096
	Isolate room	333	2,197
Apartment (5)	Monthly rate	50	200
	Day rate	200	700

Table 1: The lowest and highest per-night rate comparing Airbnb property to local shared accommodation in Chiang Mai old city, 2017.

Subsequently, in October 2017, I have interviewed N., owner of a family-run guesthouse sitting in the Northeastern part of the old city, regarding her struggle finding a room within walking distance to the hotel for her employee (housekeeper) who is originally from a faraway district. At the moment, she was looking for a dormitory with monthly rent at approximately THB 2,000, which was considered in a reasonable range for employee housing in the area. “It is not that hard to find a place, but a vacant room, that is.” She

finally found the first vacant room after having spent 2 weeks searching. “They [the landlords] asked for one month deposit right away, even if it is only next week that my employee would move in, otherwise they would give the room away to the tourist.” The second place that N. found also applied the same rule about deposit.

Besides, two key informants who are renting a dormitory room in the old city, however, did not express frustration when talking about room searching. “My partner and I rode our motorbike for the room hunting. There were plenty in the range that we could afford, with some inconvenience though. Our room is not air-conditioned, it can get quite terrible during summer.” The other informant said it was not difficult for her to find a room either as it was by means of personal connection. Their monthly room rates are THB 3,500 and THB 2,000 respectively; and both rooms are shared with two tenants.

Interesting and key data arose when I asked N. whether she felt that the landlords preferred tourists to long-term tenants, and N. refused. She affirmed that at least one-year contract was in the landlords’ preference. But at the same time, the impression that the demand for a cheaper room by tourist exists and the local landlords are prompt to respond, since it is apparently better than having an inactive property. “I think short-term accommodation needs more effort. It is also perceived as illegal now if they are registered as shared-accommodation, actually.” The statement thenceforth leads to next discussion, gentrification stopper.

Anyway, the demand for accommodation by tourist would continue to rise as the industry is growing, and it is the same story for working class residents who are employed by the tourism businesses. While it appears that Airbnb has not reached a considerable amount of registration by former shared

accommodations' owners, as the data also displays that the majority of Airbnb rooms inside the old city are of hotels and guesthouses, it is fairly prospective that affordable housing will only decrease from this point on without suitable policy intervention.

5.3 Social capital that potentially withstands tourism gentrification

As figure 5 reveals a number of communities in the Eastern and Southern part of the old city that remain as a residential area, a literature review and a one day field visit were conducted in Puak Tam Samaggi community in the bottom of the old city with the hypothesis that the community must possess some social quality that other parts of the old city do not.

Puak Tam Samaggi is a long-standing community of nearly 200 years old, founded in 1820. 150 buildings in the community are almost all residential; very few were partly modified into commercial. Dhanasin (2009) have mentioned in her studies on this community that the social tie among the residents including Puak Tam temple is quite strong. Cultural events are often organized among themselves in the temple. There are a considerable number of dormitories in the neighborhood, but the tenants do not participate in social events. Many tenants are working class from Myanmar, as the location of the neighborhood is close to work vicinity, inexpensive, and convenient.

I visited the community and had two interviews with the residents. I immediately could feel the different vibe the area gives out compared to the North and the Eastern part of the old city, the allies are very narrow and a bit dirty; houses are in fairly higher density but mostly small and only up to 2 stories, very few new ones though are 3 stories. The Puak Tam temple's abbot assigned one of his relatives, P., to guide me around the neighborhood, but she also shared with me many relevant personal stories. "We are all

relatives here,” P. said with pride while she paid respect to the gate of the temple as we walked through, “only this gate we need to greet this way, there are spirits.” She took me to her aunt’s house, which appeared to be the family’s house that has been inherited “Baan Gao” (บ้านเก๊า).

Baan Gao is better known as Santayai (ศาลตายาย), literally translated as house of grandparents. Literatures mentioned such artifact, a imitation of a house but in a small size, is associated to Lanna belief and culture since before Buddhism inflenced Lanna kingdom. It is a representation of the deceased ancestors of the family who are believed to still be around to look after the family members. If they are well respected and taken care of, the family’s prosperity is guaranteed, and catastrophe or sickness might be the case if the successors fail to do so. Traditionally the female successors are the ones who stay behind in the house to be in charge of such duty, before passing on to their daughters. Every year or every 4 years (the varies from one place to another) the family gathering must be organized to pay respect to Baan Gao, every single member of the family must participate regardless where they are living. And it is quite obvious that the Baan Gao belief and tradition has a strong presence in Puak Tam Samaggi even today, while it might have faded in many other communities in the city, at least in community scale like this.

The house figure I have observed is in traditional Lanna architectural style, sized approximately 1.5 square meter, placed to the front left corner of home vicinity. I was refrained to take a photograph. In accordance with literatures, P. explained that each family had one spirit that they needed to provide the “house” and “care”, and they hold a formal event to pay respect to these Baan Gaos at neighborhood level. “A man from outside [neighborhood] married to my family, if to this main house, must move in. Someone of the

family must remain here with Baan Gao to continue the practice.” I argue that such land attachment could arguably put a stopper to tourism gentrification to penetrate this community. However, a well-designed research project must be conducted in order to make connection between the belief, land attachment, and gentrification.

6. Conclusion and future research recommendations

The article is written based on initial research to explore possible tourism gentrification in Chiang Mai old city under 10 years timeframe. Although gentrification is considered social change, the research uses spacial data of tourists – tourist accommodations – and conducted spatial analysis to answer the extent and pattern of new-comers’ penetration into the residential areas. Findings are that (1) Hotels and guesthouses are the sort of tourist accommodation that increasingly disperse and break the residential fabric in the old city, especially in the Eastern part of the area in focus. Most of youth hostels are found renovated upon former commercial properties, thus they cause a lower level of community displacement. Yet the number of youth hostels is increasing. Airbnb registration in the old city is growing in incredible speed, but only 6 percent are rooms in local apartments. (2) The new building codes by the local government will result in more large scale hotels and freeze the number of affordable shared accommodation. In case that landlords wish to avoid hotel tax, Airbnb provides informal alternative channel that encourages short-term tourist tenants as the property would yield higher value with tourists. But at the present time, Airbnb is only popular among formal registered tourist accommodations. Field survey shows considerable abundance of affordable housing in the old town at the present time, and the owners feel more

comfortable with their conventional practice than shifting to Airbnb. (3) Land attachment was spotted in some old communities and it is likely to be relevant to the absence of tourist accommodations in their neighborhoods.

As stated, the research is at the very beginning stage. Gentrification is a social issue thus detailed information related to people – tourists and local residents – shall be collect continuously for at least 10 years for temporal analysis. Other proxies or complimenting data that could be used for gentrification, recommended for future research, are land ownership, land tenure, land price, property tax, architectural design of the old and renovated buildings, etc. Moreover, the scale of research should be extended to cover the entire Chiang Mai City.

There are a number of points mentioned in the article that I intend to study further in my next research on this same issue mentioned earlier in Chiang Mai City. Among others, I would suggest observation of youthification and gentrification in various cities in the country together with the creative economy that drives the urban development policy at the moment. But the most prominent point is that the local cultures and belief in connections to land attachment and gentrification, which might contribute to urban studies and policy making in the future.

Endnotes

- 1 Important remark, Tripadvisor was founded in 2000 in the USA, therefore the 2-year-gap of technology transfer is rather too small to make 2002 map able to represent the actual distribution of tourist accommodation in the old city. But, being a part of hotel business myself, I would subjectively argue that 2008 and 2017 are reliable representation, almost all hotels in the city have Tripadvisor accounts.
- 2 USD 1 was equivalent to approximately THB 32 in 2017.

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