Gentrifying rural community development: A case study of Bama Panyang River Basin in Guangxi, China

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Abstract: Rural gentrification is deeply characterized by institutional context and spatiotemporal heterogeneity. Based on a diachronic field investigation, this paper constructs an analytical framework for gentrifying rural community development (GRCD) with a “community” theoretical perspective and analytical approach, defines the concept of GRCD, and analyzes the main characteristics, formation mechanism and regulation path of a typical gentrifying rural community in the Panyang River Basin of Bama County, Guangxi. Driven by factors such as the complex flow and heterogeneous living space practices of the host-guest community, the longevity “myth” led by commercial capital and consumption demand, and multiple action logics and desertification community governance, great changes have occurred in the social space and material landscape of the rural longevity community. Such changes include comprehensive reconstruction of the resident population, surface interaction and social separation of the host-guest community, residential structure change and settlement landscape renewal, and delocalization of the healing landscape and lifestyle changes. We propose policy insights in three areas: public and localization institutional arrangements, shared and comfortable gentrifying rural community making, and inclusive and synergistic gentrifying rural community governance. Through these aspects, we provide insights from the Chinese case for the gentrification and community development of rural areas in the Global South.

Keywords: gentrifying rural areas; community development; community making; community governance; rural amenity

1 Rural gentrification: Spatiotemporal contextuality and a multidisciplinary perspective

In the context of postindustrial and postmodern socioeconomics, the phenomenon of urban-rural mobility, in which people are attracted by rural amenities, occurs at multiple scales...
and in multiple places around the world. In Europe, migration, social change and conflicts are taking place in the Empordanet area in Catalonia, Spain, a Mediterranean coastal region with extensive tourism (Solana-Solana, 2010), and rural gentrification is occurring in Santiago Millas, a heritage village located in the Maragatería region of Spain (Pablo, 2017). Mild rural gentrification driven by tourism and second homes is occurring in villages in Tuscany, Italy (Carrosio et al., 2019). Ongoing processes of horsification, simplification and decommercialization of agricultural land are occurring in Scotland (Sutherland, 2019). Similarly, in the United States, the postindustrial regime of production/consumption and the rural gentrification of the New West Archipelago have taken place (Hines, 2012). Additionally, international lifestyle migrants from the United States perform privilege, import rurality and exert their impact on the local community of Vilcabamba in a longevity valley in the Andes Mountains of Ecuador (Kordel and Pohle, 2016). Moreover, in the Western Asia and Asia-Pacific regions, seasonal immigration has affected the temporalities of the rural change of Alasun in southwest Anatolia, Turkey (Kocabıyık and Loopmans, 2021). Since 2010, new kinds of tourists and expatriates and new relationships with local culture and community have developed. Ubud is no longer a village-with-tourists but a diversifying international town (MacRae, 2016). Rural amenities have also helped create a global countryside in Cromwell District, Central Otago, New Zealand (Perkins et al., 2015). New immigrants and their living practices have exerted profound and extensive influences on rural areas with amenities, natural environments or activities and have drawn many theoretical interpretations from multidisciplinary perspectives and multispatiotemporal contexts.

Based on the theoretical perspective of social humanism, the fields of sociology, tourism and anthropology conceptualize the lens of “amenity migration”/“lifestyle migration” (Cohen et al., 2015) to analyze immigrants’ life stories, living consumption, investment and operation, identity construction, belonging and place attachment, as well as the response from villages and impacts on community development. International lifestyle migration is consumption-led, tourism-related and leisure-based and is situated within late modern, global, elitist, borderless and highly mobile social practices (Torkington, 2012). Lifestyle migrants interpret and perform rurality in their postmigration lives according to their economic and symbolically privileged status through everyday practices; consequently, they foster various transformations of local society, economy and public space in dual ways, such as establishing enterprises that contribute to local development and creating parallel societies and exclusive rural spaces that result in segregation and marginalization (Kordel and Pohle, 2016). Neoliberal economic theory provides an analytical framework for transnational migration and “the global countryside.” Rural communities throughout the postindustrial world are in the midst of a significant transition, of which amenity migration can be conceptualized as both a driver and an influence, resulting in significant changes in the ownership, use, and governance of rural lands as well as in the composition and socioeconomic dynamics of rural communities (Gosnell and Abrams, 2011). After three decades of neoliberal trade and agricultural policy reform in Australia, the country’s inland regions are embedded in “the global,” yet their economic, demographic, and social fortunes are also being profoundly shaped by the processes operating at a range of other spatial scales (Argent and Tonts, 2013). Actors “reresource” vineyards and wine-making in a spectacular high-country landscape in processes of globalization and amenity migration (Perkins et al., 2015). Second-home own-
ers seek to protect their investments by supporting regulations that support their version of a rural idyll. Therefore, policy-makers should be wary of strategies to promote regulations that advance aesthetic rather than social and ecological functions (Kondo, 2012).

Political economy, human geography and urban and rural planning tend to use the concept of gentrification, which is an inherently complex spatial phenomenon that embodies the changing economic, demographic, social, physical, and cultural landscapes caused by the immigration of middle- and upper-class households into rural residential spaces (Phillips and Smith, 2018). From the perspective of liberal humanism theory, gentrification is a “cultural movement” driven by gentrifying life and consumption preferences (Zukin, 1990), in which the middle class is transformed into a postindustrial middle class through the agricultural production and living practices of the American West, producing rural spaces with postindustrial landscapes (Hines, 2012). Moreover, according to neoliberal economic theory, the capital, information, technology and other elements connected by immigrants flowing into rural areas support the diversified development of spatial functions and rural industries and increase rural vitality and community resilience. From a supply-side perspective, neoliberalism has come to characterize much of the economic landscape on both a local and global scale (“encompassing”), and neoliberal forces produce a supply of gentrifiable rural property (Nelson, 2018). The Jackson, Wyoming case study further demonstrates the ways in which these flows of capital produce rural space in a relational sense by linking the local rural to the national and global through complex networks of capital investment operating at multiple scales (Nelson and Hines, 2018). Postproductive agricultural policies encourage gentrification (Sutherland, 2012). Neomarxist political economy critically analyzes the injustice and unfairness of rural gentrification (Nelson, 2018) and focuses on the negative effects of spatial segregation, cultural distortion, and, in particular, the marginalization and displacement of lower income classes under private land ownership and capital grabbing (Phillips, 2021). Due to such effects, planetary gentrification has encountered resistance from both policy-making and social practice (Lees, 2019).

Neomarxist political economy is the mainstream paradigm of gentrification theory research. López-Morales (2018) claims that rural gentrification is a middle-level theory that is highly dependent on the temporal and spatial context and its implicit causal conditions. Maloutas argues for gentrification scholarship to emphasize place-specific temporal and spatial contexts emblematic of the individualizing comparative approaches (Maloutas, 2012; Nelson, 2018). In response, Lees et al. (2015) argue that scholars can (and should) examine well-documented individual cases to identify “global regularities” in the gentrification phenomenon that highlight social injustices and uneven power relations. Such global regularities reflect universalizing comparative strategies and advocate inclusive rather than generalized comparisons (Lees et al., 2016). Nelson (2018) and Phillips and Smith (2018) carry out comparative approaches and theoretical dialogs that combine spatial and temporal scales. López-Morales (2018) strongly asserts that the study of gentrification not only can but must be driven beyond the Anglo-American domain and emphasizes the possibility of gentrification mutating across time and space, necessitating the embrace of the complexity of theory and epistemology.

Rural development is a comprehensive process of cycle accumulation and dynamic evolution of rural regional systems (Guo and Liu, 2021). Interactions between rural areas and the external environment determine rural evolution (Li et al., 2019). In China’s grand, com-
plex, mobile society, rural gentrification arises mainly in coastal urban villages and suburban areas with convenient commuting and is dominated by the young middle class (Qian et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2021). Rural gentrification is also increasingly seen in terraced fields, exotic ancient towns and longevity villages in southwestern ethnic areas with characteristic cultural landscapes and healthy geographical environments, driven by tourists, retired immigrants and health immigrants (Tan and Zhou, 2022). In contrast to the displacement and resistance to gentrification in response to private ownership of land and capital plunder in the Western world, Chinese peasants who have long-term land use rights (homestead and agricultural land) tend to be more active in rent-seeking (Qian et al., 2013). In view of the urbanization characteristics of rural areas in eastern China, this paper selects a typical gentrification village area in western China—the longevity villages in the Panyang River Basin of Bama in Guangxi—as a case study and implements the theoretical perspective and analytical approach of “community research” of the sociology school of Yenching University (presently Peking University) to analyze gentrifying rural community development (GRCD) in China and provide insights from the Chinese case for theoretical research on rural gentrification in the Global South. Based on the previous explanation of the multidisciplinary theoretical progress and spatiotemporal context of rural gentrification, the following sections are arranged as follows. The second section presents the analytical framework for GRCD, including the concept of and approach to community, the connotation and mechanism of community development, and the analytical framework of GRCD. The third section presents the case introduction and investigation process. The fourth section explains the main characteristics, formation mechanism and regulation path of GRCD in the case study. The fifth section provides the discussion and conclusion.

2 Analytical framework for gentrifying rural community development

2.1 Community as a concept and approach

The Chinese community (shequ) is translated from the English community, derived from the German Gemeinschaft (community), which is a social theoretical construction proposed by Ferdinand Tönnies in response to the great social changes brought about by the industrial revolution and urbanization. It is also an ideal social type, emphasizing humanity and emotional identity (Ding, 2021). Parker, a representative of the Chicago School, defined the community from the perspective of human ecology, emphasizing its regional characteristics, that is, the territorial community, and developed a fieldwork approach based on field research to explain practical problems (Ding, 2021). Wu Wenzao and Fei Xiaotong from the Sociology School of Yenching University endowed the concept of community with a clear spatial meaning and conducted field “community research” in China through a cultural, holistic approach. They developed an approach to understanding and resolving Chinese issues called the Chinese School of Sociology (Qi, 2014). British anthropologist Edmund Leach doubted “whether microresearch of individual communities can be used to generalize to China as a whole.” In response, Fei (1990) stated that “Jiangcun village cannot represent all rural areas in China, but a type of rural China, and it is possible to gradually approach the whole from the individual through type comparison.” The current academic research on community understands the concept not only as an ideal social type but also as the method-
ological significance of field research (Ding, 2021). Community moves from an academic concept to policy-making and social practice with methodological and ontological significance. In terms of methodology, “community” is regarded as a special social field of multi-agent interaction; it is also a “lens” for understanding other theoretical issues (Xiao, 2011). Meanwhile, in terms of ontology, “community” is understood as area-based settlement space, i.e. social entities in the form of urban and rural settlements, comprising four basic elements: people, social interaction, spatial domain and community identity (Xiao, 2011). These elements have both regional and social characteristics and can be conceptualized as a research unit, spatial scale and research object. In summary, community is a regional entity space, an ideal social construction, and a field research approach (Figure 1).

2.2 Community development

Community development is spatially heterogeneous process. The United Nations (UN)-led community development approach in the 1950s took antipoverty as its primary task through the dual approach of material improvement and value transformation (Wu and Li, 2021). At that time, community development was defined as a process aimed at creating conditions for the economic and social progress of the whole community through active community participation, relying as fully as possible on community initiatives (Clyde, 1958). In the context of diverse societies since the beginning of the 21st century, in response to the imbalance of urban and rural development, rural decline, disappearance of traditions, community alienation and other challenges, rural construction and community movements have been implemented worldwide, such as Japan’s “Zoumachi Movement” and the “Peach Frog Garden” of the Taomi Community in Taiwan. Rural community development increasingly emphasizes resilience (Lendvay, 2021), sustainability (Ruiz-Ballesteros and Gálvez-García, 2014), well-being (McCrea, 2019), inclusiveness (Castro-Arce and Vanclay), rurality (Kordel, 2016), and authenticity (Westhuizen et al., 2021). Academic research defines community development in two ways: first, as a process that entails organization, facilitation, and action, which allows people to establish ways to create the very community in which they want to live; and second, as a process that provides vision, planning, direction, and coordinated action toward desired goals associated with the promotion of efforts to improve the conditions under which local resources operate (Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan, 2012). Because of its institutional context and spatiotemporal heterogeneity, community development has both general and regional mechanisms. Factors that promote community development include engagement with nonhumans (Lendvay, 2021), collective governance of common-pool resources and socioecological systems (Ruiz-Ballesteros and Gálvez-García, 2014), bottom-linked governance and social work innovation (Castro-Arce and Vanclay, 2019), and transdisciplinary approaches (Westhuizen et al., 2021). While neoliberalism and privatization have led to elite capture, social isolation, environmental degradation, uneven community development (Toolis, 2021), and participatory rural development without participation...
in postcommunist countries, centralized and hierarchical governance systems pertinent to these countries may introduce serious challenges for community-driven development and newly established community-based organizations (Kvartiuk and Curtiss, 2019).

2.3 The connotation, mechanism and analytical framework of gentrifying rural community development

Based on the theory and practical development of rural gentrification, community and community development, this paper tentatively defines the concept of GRCD as a gentrifying rural area of abundant amenities that attracts both urban people to migrate and commercial capital to enter into and drive its material landscape renewal and social space change and in which diverse actors integrate community resources and are committed to the process of coconstruction and cogovernance and sharing of community spaces (Figure 2). Its connotative features and semantic boundaries are as follows. First is the amenity rural area, that is, a rural area with abundant natural amenities (convenient geographical location for commuting, livable environment that is close to nature, healthy geographical environment, etc.) and cultural amenities (green organic food, close relationship with neighbors, idyllic/utopic/nostalgic, etc.), with the resourceization and commercialization of rural amenities being the preconditions for attracting urban people to migrate and live in the area and commercial capital being the precondition for investment in production. Second is the gentrifying rural area, that is, the countryside in the process of gentrification, in which the urban population of a higher social class directly invades or indirectly replacing the rural population of a lower social class; its material landscape and social space are in the process of being renewed and changed, which is a (gentrification) stage or a type of rural development. Third is community development, a process in which diverse actors integrate resources within and outside the region through both exogenous and endogenous development paths to jointly build, govern and share community space, which also regulates GRCD.

Rural gentrification and community development both have an institutional context and spatiotemporal heterogeneity. Within the complex context of China’s grand mobile social form, its “better life” development stage, and its urban-rural integration development and rural revitalization, a gentrifying rural community can be understood as a type of rural reconstruction and development transformation. This paper takes community research as the approach and community development as the main line of research to construct an integrated research framework of GRCD, which includes a conceptual meaning and analytical framework implemented in a synthesized case study of the main characteristics, formation mechanism and regulation path of the framework development. GRCD provides a theoretical reference and policy insights for rural areas in China against the background of the transformation of major social contradic-
tions and China’s grand, complex, mobile society (Figure 3).

Figure 3  Analytical framework for gentrifying rural community development (GRCD)

3 Research area and investigation

3.1 Research area

Bama Yao Autonomous County of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is located in the sloped zone from the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau to the Central Guangxi Plain. This area has a tropical monsoon climate and karst landforms. It is featured by “Eighty percent of the land is mountains, ten percent is water body, and the rest ten percent is farmland.” It is a complex area that comprises a key national ecological function zone, a national tourism demonstration zone, a designated poverty alleviation county by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and a national key rural revitalization assistance county. Bama is known as a “longevity town in the world, a holy land of Chinese people” because of its special healthful geographical environment and longevity cultural resources. Bama County has explored the special development model of the steady growth of ‘migratory bird’ tourism that has driven the rapid growth of sightseeing tourism. The Panyang River Basin is rich in longevity health tourism resources, and commercial living resources are the most concentrated in the area (Tan and Xu, 2018) making it the most popular area for “migratory birds.” Due to its healthful geographical environment, low rural living costs, and the community “migratory bird” atmosphere, the Panyang River Basin continues to attract an influx of various types of people and the inflow of multiscale elements, which has led to the renewal of the material landscape and changes to the social space in longevity villages to create diverse, mobile, and

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1 Healthful geographical environment: comfortable temperature (average 20.4°C), small molecular cluster six ring (70–80 Hz) and weak alkaline (pH 7.5–8.5) water, high air anion (20,000–30,000/cm³), suitable geomagnetic intensity (approximately 45,500–50,000 nT), far infrared sunlight (4–14 micron wavelength) and selenium-rich soil (>0.4 mg/kg). Longevity health resources: longevity genetics, longevity lifestyle, Zhuangyao medicine resources, ceremony to worship gods and ancestors, and a culture built on respect and filial piety (Tan and Zhou, 2022).

2 “Migratory bird”: The local people and the media call the health tourists (middle-aged and elderly people and people with poor health) who seasonally travel to and live in Bama every year “migratory birds,” which is generally defined as amenity migration (Tan and Zhou, 2022).

3 Panyang River Basin: There are wide and narrow aspects of this region. The case study of this article refers to the narrow area of the river basin refers to the area in Bama County, from the cave entrance at Baimo Village to the starting point of Panyang River rafting in Ganshui Village, with a total area of 30 km², flowing from north to south. There are 6 administrative villages along the river: Poyue Village, Pingan Village, Songji Village, Jiazhuan Village, Baima Village, and Lagao Village; all are Zhuang settlements, belonging to Jiazhuan town (rated as the first batch of healthy towns in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region). In addition, Bama refers to natural villages as “tun,” and several “tun” (natural villages) together form an administrative village (Tan and Zhou, 2022).
heterogeneous communities (Tan and Zhou, 2022). This area thus provides a typical and expandable case to be used by research on GRCD (Figure 4).

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4** Location of the Panyang River Basin, Bama County, Guangxi, China (Tan and Zhou, 2022)

### 3.2 Investigation process

For more than 5 years, we conducted diachronic field investigations in the longevity villages of the Panyang River Basin in Bama County in three stages: on-site investigation, comprehensive investigation and supplementary investigation. In the initial stage (in August and September 2016), we naturally entered the longevity village as a tourist or a family member accompanying a “migratory bird,” observed and experienced the diversified life practices and longevity living conditions of “migratory birds,” and carried out random participatory observations and open-ended interviews. Meanwhile, we initially determined interesting research topics, such as “amenity immigrant living,” “rural gentrification in Bama” and “seasonal immigrant community,” through first-hand data coding. In the second stage (January 2018, January and July 2019, and July 2020), a comprehensive field investigation was carried out, including 2 rounds of centralized questionnaires and 3 rounds of interviews. A questionnaire on “migratory bird living practices” was distributed through interactions with people on the street, WeChat, Tencent QQ, telephone interviews and other modes; 550 questionnaires were returned, of which 509 were valid. The interviewees included 31 “migratory birds” (R01-R31), 6 local government and village elites (G01-06), 6 villagers (V01-06), 3 investment developers (I01-03) and 6 pavement operators (O01-O06). The interview format was flexible and covered...
broad content, including but not limited to living (space), health promotion, social integration, nonprofit organizations of “migratory birds,” rural changes, community development, rural livelihoods, rural well-being, human-land emotions, “migratory bird tourism,” and the projects, investment and operations of the comprehensive health industry. During the final stage (May and November 2021), we conducted a supplementary survey, revisited certain surveyed sites, clarified several ambiguous problems, supplemented the research content, and then slightly revised the research conclusions.

4 Gentrifying rural community development in the Panyang River Basin

4.1 Main characteristics of gentrifying rural community development

The core of rural gentrification lies in the renewal of the material landscape and social space caused by class replacement. Its main characteristics include comprehensive reconstruction of the resident population, surface interaction and social separation of the host-guest community, residential structure change and settlement landscape renewal, and delocalization of the healing landscape and lifestyle changes.

4.1.1 Comprehensive reconstruction of the resident population

After more than 20 years of large-scale immigration and the living practices of “migratory birds,” the geographical category, health status, social class and age structure of the resident population in the Panyang River Basin have been completely reconstructed. The geographical categories of the resident population primarily comprise Bama natives and “migratory birds.” In 2020, the 6 administrative villages in the Panyang River Basin had a local household population of approximately 14,500. The “migratory bird” urban-rural mobility to the Panyang River Basin lacks public statistics. According to a comprehensive assessment of information from local governments, authoritative media and “migratory bird” social organizations, there were approximately 120,000 “migratory birds” in the area in 2019, including approximately 24,000 long-stay (6+ months) migrants. The scale of “migratory bird” migration has been affected by COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) and China’s epidemic prevention and control policy, and the scale of returning “migratory birds” has experienced repeated fluctuations and sharp shrinkage. According to a comprehensive assessment of field surveys and interviews with volunteer village organizers, “migratory bird” social organizers and senior executives of health-based real estate who participated in the implementation of epidemic prevention and control, the “migratory bird” scale since the epidemic was approximately 40,000 person-times/year, including approximately 8000 person-times/year for long-stay “migratory birds.”

The “migratory birds” and the Bama natives have distinct socioeconomic characteristics. The peaceful and harmonious Zhuang settlements have lined the Panyang River for many years. In 2020, there were 102 centenarians, which is 5.7 times the international standard for “longevity regions.” Bama natives typically have a primary or junior high school education and maintain deep beliefs in temple gods and a strong ethnic identity. According to the questionnaire results, most (79.39%) of the “migratory birds” come from the developed eastern coast, the severely cold climes of northern China, and the central and western provinces adjacent to Guangxi. The “migratory birds,” as a whole, are middle class, and most (71.58%) are younger seniors (50–70 years old), most of whom (64.03%) suffer from
chronic illnesses, major diseases or postoperative healing. Most (74.32%) of these migrants have a high school education level or above, and most (78.59%) work for government agencies, state-owned enterprises and institutions, private business owners or are self-employed. The vast majority (90.77%) have a monthly disposable income of more than 2000 yuan. “Migratory birds” have the dual roles of “tourists” and “residents,” forming a living state of “healing, rural life, tourism and vacation, work and investment” that focuses mainly on healing/rehabilitation, a healthy and long life, and avoiding pollution. Some 59% of these migrants have revisited and resettled in the area, and 75.76% of them have stayed for more than 3 months, demonstrating transitional characteristics from tourism to permanent living.

In the context of grand urban-rural migration, 70% of young and middle-aged men and unmarried women leave the area to work or run businesses, and “migratory birds” can be seen everywhere, thus creating an obviously “aging” atmosphere; the age structure of the resident population is, therefore, increasingly unbalanced.

4.1.2 Surface interaction and social segregation of the host-guest community

The longevity villages along the Panyang River Basin are Zhuang settlements that naturally form the Zhuang community (i.e., the Zhuang social group) through strong ties of blood and geography. The Zhuang community and settlements along the river, represent the dominant ethnicity with strong place roots and high well-being. The Zhuang community is the foundation of the longevity rural community because its atmosphere, culture and customs are the very elements of rural nature and nostalgia for which people constantly yearn. Further, Bama’s longevity genes can only be inherited by the original community.

Nonetheless, longevity villages are increasingly diversified due to the large-scale influx of “migratory birds” and their living practices of seasonal tourism and long-stay living, as well as the development of the comprehensive health industry. “Migratory birds” have formed a variety of interesting and aspirational groups and have established “migratory bird” social organizations. As a result, the “migratory bird” community represents the foreign and newly born local community and consistently generates community stories and spatial significance in their “second hometown” and “distant home.”

“Most of the members of Blue Bond are younger seniors with sound bodies and some critically ill patients with good mentality. We cherish the Bama and carry out environmental protection, such as garbage collection activities on the 15th of every month. We have never stopped for six years. We also do our best to help local kids. Experts in ‘migratory birds’ actively participated in consultation with the Jiazhuan Town Governance and Poyue Village Development.” (R01, male, 56 years old, college education, CEO, liver cancer, a long-stay “migratory bird” for healthy life, social work and business)

There are massive differences in wealth, culture, experience and lifestyle between Bama natives and “migratory birds.” Generally, these groups maintain only superficial contact, and it is difficult to achieve genuine social integration. The Bama natives have shrines in temples; the villagers believe in temple gods who are honest and responsible and have a strong ethnic awareness, and it is thus easy to maintain a strong ethnic group identity. Clan culture and collective consciousness are conducive to avoiding the risk of the host being marginalized (Tan and Xu, 2019). The “migratory birds” lack a deep understanding and recognition of village sacrificial activities, and there are conflicts of interest between “migratory birds” and villagers regarding the use of living resources and recreational space. Not all “migratory
birds” are willing to participate in rural construction, regarding the longevity geographical environment as free for their health and welfare. The self-interested behavior of critically ill patients and patients with skin diseases taking baths and immersing their feet in the Panyang River has caused panic and disgust among the locals. Some “migratory birds” have become a group that was “stared at” by local residents and became unpopular (Tan and Xu, 2019).

“Bama village is poor because of laziness. The men here are too lazy, drink too much, indulge in life and enjoy themselves, while women do most of the work on the land and at home. Every time they make sacrifices to the temple, they kill livestock and indulge in eating and drinking together.” (R3, female, 63 years old, college education, subhealth, a revisiting seasonal tourist for rural and healthy life)

“The ‘migratory birds’ are here. We earn some rent, do odd jobs, and make some money, but most of the young people have gone to work in big cities. In recent years, ‘migratory birds’ have been everywhere in Bama villages. There are many ‘migratory bird’ activities, such as fetching water, singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, climbing mountains, performing, but they are all their ways of playing, their own circles. Sometimes, our grassroots organizations set up a stage to hold a theatrical performance for the villagers and ‘migratory birds.’ There is no atmosphere like it used to be. And ah, those with cancer and skin diseases are bathing in the Panyang River. Who knows what diseases they have and whether they will be contagious?” (V2, female, 46 years old, high school education, a village cadre)

4.1.3 Residential structure change and settlement landscape renewal

The “migratory birds” have leased, purchased and developed second residences, leading to the construction of residential space in the Panyang River Basin. A large number of residential buildings have been rebuilt or newly built, primarily village home inns, block apartments, rural villas and high-end health care resorts. Initially, “migratory birds” lived in village homes with relatively simple living conditions or converted village home inns and were widely distributed throughout the longevity villages along the Panyang River Basin. With the differentiation of residential needs and consumption upgrades of “migratory birds,” the types of residential structures have become more diverse, and the conditions are more comfortable. The block apartments are mainly distributed in commercial living blocks and tourist blocks, such as in Baimotun village, Poyue Street, Ping’antun village, and Jiazhuan Street, where “migratory birds” live together. These apartment buildings have introduced hotel management services and provide relatively comfortable and convenient accommodations. The pastoral villas are distributed along the middle and lower reaches of the Panyang River Basin. Ponatun village encouraged the neighboring village Pomotun to develop homestays and collectively built 158 rural villas. Boutique hotels and Yuanxiang sojourn brands have successively entered. The area is an emerging high-quality “migratory bird” living space that relies on pastoral villas and ecological leisure agriculture and has developed into the five-star rural tourism area known as the Jundabanlan scenic area. Real estate developers use the landscape health care real estate development model to build high-quality health care communities to meet the needs of amenity immigrants for high-end living and care (Tan and Xu, 2019). In addition to the renewal of residential structure and conditions, the Panyang River Basin has added a variety of tourist and residence spaces, such as scenic spots, tourist facilities, leisure and recreation sites, commercial facilities, and public facilities.
The “migratory birds” congregate in tourist commercial streets with dense buildings, prosperous markets and numerous street shops, as well as unified planning areas such as rural homestay-type settlements and high-end health care resorts. The Panyang River Basin presents a mixed settlement landscape of a “city in the village,” which serves as both a longevity metaphor and a middle-class aesthetic modern pastoral and quality health enclave (Figure 5).

**Figure 5** Mixed settlement landscape (rural villa home inns, block apartments, rural villas and high-end health care resorts)

4.1.4 Delocalization of the healing landscape and lifestyle change

Longevity rural amenities in the Panyang River Basin have been transformed into a material amenity space and cultural landscape through sojourn consumption and commercial capital investment, but there has been a certain degree of blind development and a trend of quick success. “Migratory birds” relax, heal and live in Bama’s healthful geographical environment of harmony between humans and nature, which is a process of a natural return to the essence of life and gradually integrating themselves into the location. Nonetheless, Bama is full of commercialized and pseudoscientific health care products and longevity lifestyles. In addition to the common spas, magnetic therapies, and oxygen therapies, absurd treatments such as dog climbing and walking, fasting and purification, divine medicine and pseudoscientific and technological health care have also emerged. In the hype-based operations of commercial capital on Bama’s healthy geographical environment, Yao and Zhuang minority medicine resources and the “centenarian” phenomenon have emerged. Furthermore, through word of mouth regarding the “migratory bird” healing miracle, Bama’s healthful environment and longevity phenomenon have been exaggerated, and the “longevity land” has been constructed as a “holy land” for preserving people’s health and a “recuperation heaven” for critically ill patients. Due to the lack of statistical data and comprehensive research on the
scale and structure of critically ill patients gathered in Baimotun village, Bama has suffered from the stigma of being a “cancer village” under the media’s out-of-context and inaccurate reports on the healing phenomena taking place there (Wang et al., 2020).

“Cancer patients regard Bama as the ‘last straw’, ‘you can travel through a hundred demons and cure all diseases’, and they believe that the water, geomagnetism and negative oxygen ions in the Baimo cave can drive away evil spirits and cure all diseases, including cancer. With an increasing number of patients, Baimotun village has another name: ‘cancer village’.” (R12, male, 66 years old, postgraduate education, subhealth, a long-stay “migratory bird” for healthy life and business)

The improvement of material living conditions is changing the original healthy eating style of the villages, and the original lifestyles of these villages are also quietly changing (Tan and Xu, 2019). Bama’s traditional production and lifestyle of “blessings from heaven and earth, self-sufficiency, enduring hardships and eternal happiness, longevity in benevolence and health in safety” have been constructed as or have been impacted by consumption experiences. For visiting centenarians, receiving blessings is an important type of longevity cultural experience, the widely circulated longevity landscape of centenarians waiting for visitor gift tips wrapped up in red packets has occurred with only a few centenarians in Pingantun Village, which is an open tourism village. Most seniors maintain the work habit of “live old, work old.” What changes is not the work habit but the method. In addition to farm work, the elderly are engaged in small businesses with low labor intensity (Figure 6).

“The government also provides living allowances to centenarians and regular home physical examinations, but the elderly in their 90s in the village cannot enjoy it. Our Zhuang and Yao elderly rarely celebrate their birthdays, so it is difficult to verify the real age of elderly individuals, and the phenomenon of false age reporting and striving to be a centenarian has naturally appeared.” (V3, male, 38 years old, high school education, an agricultural technician)

“Bama’s longevity eating habits are not deliberate. In the past, there was not enough oil and rice, so we could only eat hemp, polenta and green vegetables. During the festival, we ate chicken, duck, pig, and sheep and boiled them in water. The eating habits of white burning and white cutting are symbols of poverty. Now the living conditions are better, and I like...
to eat stir-fried vegetables and meat, more delicious.” (G1, male, 36 years old, college education, a township cadre)

4.2 Formation mechanism of gentrification rural community development

Situating the main characteristics of GRCD in the Panyang River Basin within the context of urban-rural mobility, rural changes and power-capital structure provides a better understanding of the background conditions and structural dynamics underlying the gentrification phenomenon.

4.2.1 The complex flow and heterogeneous living space practice of the host-guest community

The mobility phenomenon of longevity villages in the Panyang River Basin is bidirectional and complex, which is manifested in Bama natives’ periodic rural-urban mobility and the seasonal urban-rural mobility of “migratory birds.” The rural-urban mobility of the Bama people has a periodic rhythm, starting after the “Lantern Festival”\(^1\) or Zhuang minority festival celebrated on March 3\(^2\). Zhuang natives have lived in Bama for generations; they love and attach great importance to their festivals, clans and folk customs. The period from the “Spring Festival” to “March 3” is the time for Bama natives to return to their hometown for reunions and to hold parties, happy events, ceremonies and clan sacrifices. Therefore, the ending of the “Lantern Festival” or “March 3” gatherings and ceremonies naturally marks the beginning of rural-urban mobility. The “migratory bird” urban-rural mobility has obvious seasonal characteristics, and its peak season begins annually in September and ends in April the following year. Given the bidirectional mobility and differentiated mobility rhythms of Bama natives and “migratory birds,” the period from the Spring Festival to March 3 is the busiest and most vibrant time for locals and “migratory birds” in longevity villages.

The original Zhuang community and the newly emerging “migratory bird” community have jointly formed a diverse and symbiotic community relationship and have constructed community living spaces with different functions and meanings, which naturally form social divisions. As far as the Bama people are concerned, the settlement bears the multiple functions of agricultural (sideline) production, residential life and the relationship between relatives and neighbors, forming an integrated space for their survival, production and life. Bama natives obtain economic benefits from the large-scale immigration of “migratory birds” by sharing or transferring part of their “home” and settlement spaces. As a result, the function of rural production and living has transitioned to tourism and living. As far as the “migratory birds” are concerned, consuming the longevity geographical atmosphere and realizing fitness and longevity are living themes. The “migratory bird” living space comprises living, consumption, recreation, emotions and health care space, which are usually embedded and integrated into the village or a health enclave isolated from the native community (high-end health care resort) (Tan and Xu, 2018). In summary, the complex mobility and “heterogeneous” living space practices of the host-guest community are the fundamental reasons driving the comprehensive reconstruction of the resident population, the social sep-

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\(^1\) The Lantern Festival: The fifteenth day of the first lunar month is the last day of the traditional Spring Festival.

\(^2\) Zhuang nationality festival on March 3: This is a major festival for local people and for Zhuang people’s folk sacrifices as well as driving to folk fairs and singing fairs; the start date is the third day of the third month of the Chinese lunar calendar, generally connected with the Han people’s Qingming Festival for worshipping their ancestors.
aration of the host-guest community, and changes to the area’s residential structure and lifestyle.

4.2.2 The longevity “myth” led by commercial capital and consumption demand

The long-term urban-rural dual structure and imbalanced regional development make it difficult for western rural areas to resist the coercion of urban consumption culture and commercial capital interests. Even in rural areas with rich amenity resources and deep ethnic cultures, it is difficult to resist the pressure of urban consumption and commercial capital as longevity destinations are transformed into sites of consumption for tourists and sojourner tourists and profit-seeking spaces for capital. In terms of the historical process and the time-space narrative of the grand strategy, a healthy geographical environment and longevity lifestyle are the most valuable amenity resources of the Panyang River Basin of Bama. The essence of the transformation from an integrated space to the heterogeneous living spaces shared by hosts and guests lies in the capitalization and commercialization of rural amenities. Local governments tend to recruit large-scale commercial capital, occupy core resource spaces on a large scale, develop high-end resorts and health care projects, and develop “health enclaves” that are separate both from the leisure and entertainment places frequented by “migratory birds” with low and medium consumption and from the natives’ living space. The local government and investment developers have jointly led the development of the comprehensive health industry, which has driven the economic development and rural construction of Bama and has brought about issues of resource development ethics and social space justice. For example, in the mixed settlement landscape in the Panyang River Basin, is the landscape “beautification” or landscape “trap” (landscape fetishism) building an inclusive and beautiful living community or building a “wellness utopia” for urban people? The phenomena of the “Bama myth,” “cancer village stigma” and “health enclave” reflect the problem of insufficient top-level design and systematic thinking about Bama’s health and longevity amenities. Capital interests and a consumption orientation together create social segregation, the longevity “myth” and delocalized development.

4.2.3 Multiple action logics and desertification community governance

The Panyang River Basin is an important area in which the Bama local government deploys its poverty alleviation strategy to connect with rural revitalization work. The local government has shifted the work focus from infrastructure construction, overall poverty alleviation, and the building of tourism poverty alleviation demonstration sites to comprehensive industry development and rural revitalization. Compared with the work fields of investment attraction, industry development, landscape renovation, ecological and facility improvement, community construction and governance are less urgent and less effective. Therefore, the Bama government tends to integrate rural governance into poverty governance and industry development. As the smallest unit of the national governance system, village organizations have strengthened their administrative functions due to the transmission and distribution of national resources in the implementation of poverty alleviation and rural revitalization strategies and have gradually formed a system-oriented, top-down rural governance model. Moreover, China has a township governance tradition of “imperial power does not go down to the county, but only clan power governs the county.” In remote rural areas such as longevity villages in the Panyang River Basin, which have the dual attributes of West China ethnic villages and South China clan villages, clan power and gentry capital play a more
significant role in township autonomy and mutual assistance. In the context of the great changes of the times, economically oriented development, and considerable rural-urban mobility, traditional rural governance, which represents local wisdom and clan culture, encounters the rigid constraints of institutional power and the implicit discipline of commercial capital and gradually loses control over resource utilization and discourse over local development. However, China’s rural land collective ownership and homestead system endow villagers with long-term land use rights to resist strong government power and commercial capital with the “weapons of the weak.” Behind the difficult-to-ban “city within a village” architectural landscape are the lagging rural planning and the land rent income of the Bama natives, which have become administrative dilemmas for the local government. Moreover, although “migratory birds” are a supplementary force for rural governance, they are an internally diverse and unintegrated group. Seasonal tourists and first-time sojourning “migratory birds” are indifferent to rural community development, whereas “migratory birds” who achieve or perceive health improvement have increased their social interaction with Bama natives during their many sojourns and long-term stays and have formed an emotional attachment in which “foreign land becomes their hometown.” They pay attention to the healthy and sustainable development of longevity amenities and actively engage in proenvironmental and responsible living behaviors. In general, the longevity villages in the Panyang River Basin lack the integrated consciousness of community development and have formed a “scattered desertification” pluralistic society, driven by the multi-action logic of local government performance pressure, economic-centric rural development, and the “migratory bird” health benefit-oriented behavior, which have deepened the issues of social segregation, landscape fetishism, and delocalized development.

4.3 Regulation path for gentrification rural community development

Although the utilization of longevity amenities is vital to rural development, the gentrification of rural community development needs to be rationally and systematically considered with regard to issues of social equity and spatial justice, such as what to develop, how to develop, and for whom to develop, through a lens that incorporates historical changes and regional development. Both community connotation and GRCD highlight rural community space creation and social humanistic governance. We consider the main characteristics and formation mechanism of GRCD to explore the regulation paths in three areas: public and localization institutional arrangements, shared and comfortable gentrifying rural community making, and inclusive and synergistic gentrifying rural community governance (Figure 7).

4.3.1 Public and localization institutional arrangements of rural development

From native settlements to gentrifying villages, the community structure of rural life has diversified, which raises the question of whether community symbiosis or community succession predominates. In terms of the issues of “alienation,” amenity and delocalization, the healing landscape represents a contest of community power. Thus, public construction and localized development are the keys to solving the issues of GRCD. Bama County, as a place, has long been trapped in the “karst dilemma”; that is, it has a weak agricultural foundation and lacks industrial production conditions. A healthful geographical environment and centenarians are the core resources for Bama’s industrial development, so the integrated development of the comprehensive health industry is the scientific position and the only way
out for Bama’s current development situation. Local governments in rural areas, especially in ethnic areas, should adhere to the institutional arrangement, highlighting public and localization development and seeking balance and innovation between standardization and effectiveness in the implementation of poverty alleviation and rural revitalization strategies. First, the normative formulation and practical justice of local public decision-making should be strengthened. The Communist Party building of the Zhuang and “migratory bird” communities should be empowered, and rural revitalization and community development should be led by formal institutional arrangements. Second, strategies should fully mobilize the function of virtuous clan rule, utilize the benign demonstration role of the “migratory bird” elites and the organizational resources of “migratory bird” associations, cultivate new approaches to unite the region’s collective strength, and prioritize locality, dialog, and bottom-up informal institutional arrangements to form a dynamic relation and balance of interest with governments and commercial forces to prevent public interests from being strategically captured by the power-capital interest community. Third, tourism (sojourning) attractions should be empowered. Bama’s world-class longevity geographical environment, pastoral landscape, peaceful and quiet villages, minority health preservation resources and longevity lifestyle jointly constitute “longevity heaven,” which forms the core attraction for tourism, sojournng, and the development of the comprehensive health industry. Therefore, it is necessary to explore a community benefit distribution system linked to the “rights to tourist attractions.”

4.3.2 Sharing and comfortable gentrifying rural community making

The core element of community structure is people, and the carrier of community structure is the spatial field. Rural gentrification is partially induced and driven by amenity migrants’ rural life practices. Therefore, a comfortable people-oriented living environment is the basic condition for community formation in gentrifying rural areas. Community making comes from place making, and place making implies “governance,” which is a process in which the local government, commercial capital and living groups jointly build shared spaces and develop common meanings. Since longevity villages represent the simplicity, longevity, and
authenticity of pure rural imagery, the soul of the longevity village has always been the local
life, clan story, local memory and longevity genes. The life cycle of the longevity village is
far more than the human life course of one or several generations. Thus, consumption
growth is only one dimensional expression and a certain stage and form of rural revitaliza-
tion, and it is by no means the purpose of rural system revitalization and ultimate develop-
ment. Rural revitalization needs to move toward a resilient development and better life. In
other words, coconstructing a livable environment with shared comfort and resilience is the
key to community making in gentrifying rural areas. The core of the amenity concept is
pleasantness and comfort, yet it is also a humanistic conception of the regional environment
(places and facilities) and its characteristics. Under the “longevity myth” and “cancer village
stigma,” the plan (design) and construction of a comfortable community can be based on the
local context and make good use of “localized” natural scenery, traditional aesthetics and
local cultural heritage while remaining aware of the delocalization of construction and the
"lifeless" spatial form of rough production dominated by consumer demand and urban aesth-
etics. In addition, it is necessary to make good use of local wisdom, integrate the human
resources of “migratory birds,” comprehensively consider the needs of rural consumers and
living subjects, and consider the livelihood development of the host and the construction of a
better living space for immigrants (Tan and Xu, 2021) to jointly build a shared space of jus-
tice in a comfortable longevity community that offers better homes and better lives.

4.3.3 Inclusive and synergistic gentrifying rural community governance

Inclusive development emphasizes subject universality, comprehensive content, equal pro-
cess and sharing of results (Gao, 2021). There is no universal model of governance, and
governance paradigms vary according to differences in governance subjects, scales, objects,
content, and methods. In essence, the core of governance lies in power domination and ben-
efit distribution and emphasizes power pluralism and benefits coordination. GRCD de-
dpends on inclusive development and collaborative governance. The first is the tolerance of people,
that is, the complementary advantages and harmonious development within communities
(social groups). Regarding the longevity villages in the Panyang River Basin, the roles and
functions of host and guest communities are complementary, although these communities’
interest needs are naturally differentiated. The inclusive development of gentrifying rural
communities needs to integrate community resources and guide the localized transformation
of multiple forms of capital, such as economic, social and cultural capital, to increase the
connection and expansion of factor flow and the interactive development between the rural
and the external environment. The second is the tolerance of humans and nature, that is, the
coordinated development of human-land relationships and environmental justice. Within the
concept of strong sustainability, there is a certain interactive relationship among the econo-
my, society and the environment that should be structurally reasonable. The people-centered
casti of economic and social development allows negative growth of the environment
(Wang and Li, 2021), but extremes will turn against each other. The alienation of the “Bama
myth” and the “cancer village stigma” encountered by a healthful geographical environment
and the longevity of “centenarians” represent an unjust environmental utilization and an in-
tolerant community relationship. Rural resilience arises from the intertwined process of in-
stitutional arrangement and daily life (Lendvay, 2021) that cherishes the area’s core attrac-
tions and accommodates “migratory birds” (cancer patients) who are recuperating. Third, the
tolerance of people and society requires coordinated governance to achieve fairness and justice. The governance of a large, vibrant East Asian country has naturally formed a campaign-style governance strategy. Western China has formed a rural development model in the context of poverty alleviation and rural revitalization that features the allocation of financial funds and projects, the leadership of grassroots organizations, and the development of economic centers. However, it is difficult to highlight villagers’ subjectivity and initiative due to their nonactive participation. Moreover, it is challenging to avoid implicit deprivation and discipline by government power and capital force. Resultant justice cannot replace procedural justice. The Chinese Practice of Tourism Poverty Alleviation—the methods of community empowerment, rural attraction rights, benefit distribution and cultural heritage inheritance of the “Azheke Plan” in Yuanyang Terraces, Yunnan (Bao and Yang, 2022)—can become good governance tools for gentrifying rural communities in longevity villages.

5 Discussion and conclusion

Rural gentrification in China has global commonalities as well as distinct Chinese characteristics. The phenomenon of amenity migration and rural gentrification occurs at multiple scales and in multiple places worldwide and is deeply characterized by institutional context and spatiotemporal heterogeneity. The theoretical research on rural gentrification also has spatiotemporal contextual characteristics and a multidisciplinary perspective. The concept, framework and dissemination of rural gentrification reflect different sociospatial patterns and processes influenced by different academic cultures and disciplinary boundaries and blocked or nurtured by different policies (López-Morales, 2018). How to strike a balance between economic efficiency and social justice is a common issue for rural development in many Global South countries (Zhang et al., 2021).

Rural gentrification in China has global commonalities as well as distinct Chinese characteristics. The institutional context and rural development stage differ between China and Western countries. Western scholars have carried out critical research and offered theoretical explanations on the negative effects of indigenous people’s displacement under private land ownership and the plunder of capitalism. Displacement, although a controversial theory, is increasingly understood as a multidimensional concept and is further shown to involve not only housing but also employment conditions, access to services, and the symbolism, practices and affective relations that people have with humans and beyond human constituents of space (Phillips et al., 2021). Chinese research prefers the interpretive paradigm because China’s rural gentrification is more transitional and comprehensive and because its institutional background, dynamic structure and influence are unique. China’s urban and rural areas are in a development period of large, complex flows, and rural areas have the functional characteristics of both productivism and postproductivism. The essential connotation of rural gentrification in China lies in the renewal of the material landscape and the changes in the social structure caused by the consumption and production of immigrants whose economic level and cultural capital are higher than those of rural residents (Tan and Xu, 2021). Under the collective ownership of rural land and the pragmatic preferences of the Chinese people, peasants who have long-term land use rights (homestead and agricultural land) do not face
substantial risk of displacement and thus pay more attention to maximizing and obtaining timely access to economic benefits while selectively tolerating unfair development and implicit social injustice (Tan and Zhou, 2022). Nonetheless, it remains necessary to be alert to the encroachment on ecological resources and public space by powerful capital and elite interests in China’s rural gentrification that results in explicit or implicit spatial isolation and conflicts of interest.

As mentioned, Wu Wenzao and Fei Xiaotong from the Sociology School of Yenching University developed a research approach grounded in the concept of the “Chinese community” to understand and resolve Chinese issues, called the Chinese School of Sociology (Qi, 2014). The “Chinese community” research approach, based on the local context and a holistic cultural view, can integrate theories of social humanism, neoliberal economics and neo-Marxist political economy and provide an appropriate analytical method and holistic theoretical perspective for research on rural construction and community development in the process of gentrification. Within the temporal and spatial context of China’s large, mobile society and rural revitalization strategy, rural gentrification can be understood as a rural development path that is jointly promoted by several main groups, such as the urban people who move to and consume while living in these areas, the local peoples’ participation in and sharing of land rent income, commercial capital operations and governmental power control. Based on the theoretical and practical development of rural gentrification, community and community development, we tentatively define the concept of GRCD as a gentrifying rural area of abundant amenities that attract both urban people to migrate and commercial capital to enter into and drive its material landscape renewal and social space change, in which diverse actors integrate community resources and are committed to the process of coconstruction and cogovernance and sharing of community spaces. The main characteristics of the synthesized case study—the formation mechanism and regulation path of gentrifying rural communities—show that, driven by the complex flow and heterogeneous living space practices of the host-guest community, the longevity development “myth” led by commercial capital and consumption demand, and multiple action logics and desertification community governance, great changes have taken place in the social space and material landscape of the longevity rural community in the Panyang River Basin. Such changes include comprehensive reconstruction of the resident population, surface interaction and social separation of the host-guest community, residential structural change and settlement landscape renewal, and delocalization of the healing landscape and lifestyle changes. Furthermore, we propose three areas of policy insight: public and localization institutional arrangements; shared, comfortable gentrifying rural community making; and inclusive and synergistic gentrifying rural community governance.

The research aims to provide a theoretical explanation and development reference for the development of gentrifying rural communities in China and to provide inspiration for rural gentrification and community development in the Global South from the Chinese case. Within the context of a grand, mobile society and diversified rural development, the African community practice of interdisciplinary participatory research projects (Westhuizen et al., 2021) and the Chinese practice of tourism poverty reduction—the “Azheke Plan” of the Yuanyang terraces in Yunnan Province—both demonstrate the theoretical potential and practical value of interdisciplinary dialog, work and professional knowledge for the devel-
opment of rural communities. Since the implementation of beautiful rural construction and rural revitalization in China, the art village of the Bishan Community at the foot of Huangshan Mountain in Anhui and the craftsman village of the 36th Academy of Linxi in Dongyang, Zhejiang have emerged, both of which are beneficial explorations of GRCD. China’s researchers from multidisciplinary fields should participate in theoretical research and substantive work on extensive and diverse rural construction experiments and community development, explore the successful experiences and typical models of rural construction and community development and share the Chinese experience to contribute to the world’s rural revitalization. Finally, the conclusions need to be analyzed over a longer period of time and need to be comprehensive and comparative across regions, types, and cases (Nelson, 2018); the research must be revised and improved to form a more explanatory theory of gentrification and produce practical community development research results.

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