



Photo Essay

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The Textbook Level Examples of Gentrification

Lee Tung Street was once a famous place for printing materials and shops in Hong Kong, especially for wedding invitations. The developer has revamped the old street, creating a middle-class, upscale, European-like atmosphere. The red Chinese lanterns hanging on Lee Tung Street in the European style have attracted many visitors to the area. At weekends, many people come to enjoy themselves, sitting on the benches and relaxing, and walking their dogs. Rebuilt has led to an increase in visitors to neighbouring streets, such as Shantou Street and Xiamen Street, which are becoming more and more crowded with interesting shops and coffee shops. Lee Tung Street has "middle-classed" the area.

However, the new Lee Tung Street can barely trace its human history back to the days when the street was a hub for wedding invitation printers in Hong Kong. Now, only this corner, which is shown in the photo, can help us find the traces of the old Lee Tung Street, which was known as Wedding Card Street.





From Tenements to The Avenue



This picture is one of the new buildings in the Lee Tung Street, named The Avenue. This new housing program provides 1,275 houses for middle-class. In the past, there used to be tenement houses. Around 2004, the government announced to take back this street ownership, and planned to redevelop this street into a comprehensive development area. They accepted a "dumbbell" repair plan, which was given by H15 concern group. Nevertheless, the government did not give stores and housing back to the group, and no guarantee to the original tenants that they have the priority to return to operate the stores. It was not as same as the original 'dumbbell' plan when they negotiation.

Now, the new Lee Tung Street is prosperous, middle-class, high-ranking, and close to European style, but there have no printing stores, original wedding card stores, and Tenements anymore.



The Last Standing Store

The old Lee Tung Street was the most famous printing street and wedding card street in the Hong Kong. But because the gentrification, decoration of the new Lee Tung Street is modern. To keep the original style, the new stores and restaurants in this street all have 'wedding' and 'jubilant' elements and atmosphere, like hanging lanterns, couple sculpture created by artist Li Huixian, dolls in pairs and ring store.

On the ground floor of Wan Chai railway station, we can find the Xin Qi Da wedding card printing store, which is the last original store from the old Lee Tung Street. However, due to poor profitability of the three years of COVID-19, the owner plans to close the store.





Island

The addition of cultural and creative shops to Tai Nan Street has split the native community into small islands for them. The reason is pedestrian flow. In the photoshopped picture, you can see the different between old Cloth material shop and the new coffee shop. Gentrification can attract people to the middle-class shops but not to the old ones.

After the establishment of the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), large redevelopment projects were carried out throughout Sham Shui Po, and a total of 18 projects were built in collaboration with property developers after demolition. The entry of high spending shops for the young and literate accelerated the degradation and invasion of the middle class clean culture to the chaotic multiculturalism of grassroots living. They drove up property prices and rents in the poorer neighbourhoods. In the end, the street fame created by the small shops may be absorbed by the consortia that move in, forcing all the small shops out and the developers to continue with their cafes and cultural and creative shops.



Struggling to Make Ends Meet



The unaffordable rent restricts South Asian businesses from setting up stores on the revitalized part of Tai Nan Street. While the multi-language store signboard shows a mixture of Chinese and Western styles, it differs significantly from Lee Tung Street. Stallholders are surrounded by piles of building materials. Without the shop window, construction scaffolding becomes a tool for displaying clothes, and goods are haphazardly placed on the floor for sale. Air conditioners and shop signs hanging on the outside walls are wobbly. This seems to be a dangerous place for pedestrians, let alone a place to relax and shop. Let's shift the camera to South Asian moving goods, demonstrating what the title means. Their customers are usually residents of the neighborhood and the township because the environment is so messy that it is difficult to draw in visitors and wealthy customers. Although gentrification brings vitality to society, it would exacerbate inequality by widening the gap between affluent newcomers and underprivileged locals..

