In the context of urban regeneration, the conflict between corporate city and urban villages poses a crisis of authenticity. In Zukin’s research of New York City, she regards ‘a city is authentic if it can create the experience of origins’ (Zukin, 2010:3). Reviewing many cities in the world, gentrification process has been associated with ‘authenticity’ while reproducing local spaces both physically and socially. The case studied in this research is an old neighbourhood in inner Shanghai which is preserved and gentrified owing to the local authenticity of Shikumen architecture. Informed by Bourdieu’s field theory (1986, 1993), this research tentatively applies it in urban studies by developing the field analysis of this neighbourhood. Based on the field work between 2008 and 2011, this paper reveals the dilemma of authenticity at the neighbourhood level, and how gentrification as an uneven process, leads to the social exclusion and inequality among the local residents. Wacquant (2008:198) suggests the need to go beyond the diagnosis ‘gentrification of gentrification research’, and to recharge gentrification studies by a sturdier analytical framework for capturing ‘the (de)formation of postindustrial proletariat’. The development of field analysis in this case study is therefore, on the one hand, an echo of Wacquant’s call to systematically probe into the social relations in gentrification, and on the other, to explore the potential of Bourdieu’s field theory in urban studies (Savage 2010).

The case, Tianzifang (abbreviated as ‘TZF’), is an old inner-city neighbourhood of industrial real estates and alleyway tenements, known as ‘Shikumen’ (‘stone-gate house’) in the local context. In the end of the 1990s, artists started to settle in the vacant factories, making it an ‘art street’ which was later designated as a ‘creative industry cluster’ by the municipal government. Over the past decades, regeneration expanded from the industrial properties to the adjacent run-down Shikumen dwellings. The place gradually transformed to a well-known cultural and tourist destination themed on Shikumen heritage, and to a mixed neighbourhood and a space of consumption.

Primarily using in-depth interview and visualisation for collecting data, the field analysis of TZF is focused on two groups – the local people who are still living in the neighbourhood, and those who have moved out by a rent gap thus becoming landlords. First, tensions and conflicts among the mixed neighbourhood are exposed. These are various forms of encroachment upon the local residential life from other space users, including shops, restaurants and tourists. These tensions develop into appeals and conflicts from the local residents for claiming their space from the commercial re-zoning. Secondly, this paper brings the discussion about the landlords, the economic profits and other benefits they have gained. Their particular identity – as previous long-term neighbours of the remaining residents, and landlords of boutiques, cafes and restaurants, brings them into alliance for safeguarding their vested rent gap. They formed a volunteering group to mediate the conflicts of the mixed neighbourhood and meanwhile adopting other strategies. Thirdly, I will summarise the distinct positions, strategies and struggles of the two groups as well as the forces in the field transformation of TZF.

From a comprehensive analysis of the various space users, the remaining residents became the most vulnerable group in the field and were socially excluded from TZF though physically in space and perceived as a sign of ‘authenticity’, which marks the disruption of the original long-term established neighbourhood. Finally, the policy implications will be pulled out in terms of governing the mixed neighbourhood.