

Creating equal, inclusive and indigenous public spaces for livable neighbourhood

—Taking the entrance of JisuanXincun, Yaofangmen as an example

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Abstract

In the concept of "equal, inclusive and indigenous", by using the implementation mechanism of "Sub-district Office opens the corner idle land, local residents participate in the whole process, and Red Property Management Company implements long-term management", and by keeping the corner land at the entrance of "JisuanXincun" as an experiment, Yaofangmen livable neighborhood has accomplished the endeavors including "equal reuse of stock space in the neighborhood", "long-term support for flexible public activities of residents in a changing society" and "humanistic innovation of the conventional blueprint based planning method". Its concept, implementation mechanism and practical method can be replicated for public space creation in the neighbourhood renewal.

Keywords

Corner land excavation and utilization, Sub-district Office overall planning, Residents' participation, Long-term flexible management

1. JisuanXincun in the neighbourhood renewal

In order to facilitate transformation of urban development pattern and build a city satisfactory to the people through the urban renewal endeavor, Jiangsu Province initiated "Building Beautiful and Livable Cities" in 2019. Neighbourhoods, as the important urban space unit, are the main arena for urban renewal. In the same year, the "Yaofangmen Provincial Pilot Livable Neighborhood", as one of the first provincial-level pilot livable neighborhood projects, officially commenced, with the hopes that people will extensively and intensively participate in development of the livable neighborhood to establish the governance model of "Co-building, Co-governance and Co-sharing".

The Beijing-Shanghai Railway built in the Qing Dynasty passed through Yaofangmen in the history, and the present-day Yaofangmen Neighborhood is also adjacent to the a-century-old Nanjing East Station, thus has a long culture of railway freight. The residents in the neighborhood are mostly the employees of state-owned railway or petrochemical enterprises. They share the collective memory of living in residential compounds, which is why the neighborhood clearly has the characteristics of acquaintance society and the population aging is a severe problem.

JisuanXincun is an old families' residential compound of the state-owned enterprises built in the 1980s when the "purchased public housing" project was implemented in the Yaofangmen Neighbourhood, so it is more defined by public benefit than other commodity housing. In 2019, taking the opportunity of "separating and transferring power supply, water supply, gas supply and property management for the families residential compound of state-owned enterprises¹", the Yaohua Subdistrict Office vigorously worked on renewal of JisuanXincun, in an attempt to improve the general environment of Yaofangmen Neighborhood by starting with renewal of JisuanXincun, establish the renewal concept of "equal, inclusive and indigenous" through the creation of the public space at the entrance of JisuanXincun, and try to create demonstration through the innovated implementation mechanism.



Fig. 1 Location of JisuanXincun. Source: drawn by the author.

2. Creating public space at the entrance of JisuanXincun

JisuanXincun is a residential compound of enterprises employees; its entrance is in the northeast and faces the T-junction at the intersection of 2 two-way single-lane roads. JisuanXincun occupies a land of approx. 7,328.0m², its gross floor area 17,700m², and it contains 7 buildings and 242 households in total. The total investment for the renovation project is around RMB 5,142,600.

¹Separation and transfer of power supply, water supply, gas supply and property management means such public service functions are transferred from the state-owned enterprises to the professional entities who fulfill the management functions. This management model is policy-oriented and highly professional, it involves many elements, and its process is unusually complex. This endeavor can help integrate the resources, upgrade the infrastructure, and further improve the residential environment of the employees.



Fig. 2 Layout of JisuanXincun. Source: drawn by the author.

2.1. Sub-district Office overall utilized the stock spaces: excavation, transformation and opening of corner space with EQUALITY

After obtaining the authority to overall utilize the idle land in JisuanXincun, the Yaohua Subdistrict Office started renovation of the corner land vacated after handover of "power supply, water supply, gas supply and property management", in an attempt to transform the run-down entrance space into characteristic public space in the service of the whole neighborhood. This practice of imbuing the corner stock space at community entrance with public service functions and opening it to the public is a manner of equal repurposing of the neighborhood stock space.

2.1.1 Unified authority of stock public space: the Yaohua Subdistrict Office has always fulfilled the duty of maintaining the street public space in the neighborhood. In 2019, taking the opportunity of transitioning power supply, water supply, gas supply and property management, the Subdistrict Office obtained the authority of the public land in JisuanXincun. After gaining the unified authority of internal stock space in the compound and external stock public space in the neighborhood, the Subdistrict Office found the potential opportunity to break the closed wall of this residential compound and develop the internal and external public space in an integrated manner. Under the guidance of the Bureau of Housing and Construction of Qixia District, the Subdistrict Office proceeded with renovation of internal space of JisuanXincun and improvement of the neighborhood environment at the same time, and this endeavor also engaged the other parties including Yaofangmen Property Management Company affiliated to the subdistrict, the state-owned enterprises concerned and the Jiangsu Provincial Planning and Design Group.

2.1.2 Excavation and transformation of corner space: during renovation, the Subdistrict Office found great value in the corner land near the entrance of JisuanXincun that were vacated after removal of the heating pipelines, because the entrance sustained heavy traffic. The corner land areas near the entrance can be renovated together with the wall, so that the run-down entrance space can be transformed into

characteristic public space. After such renovation, the public space can open both ways and serves the residents both inside and outside JisuanXincun and even the residents of the entire neighborhood.

2.1.3 Equal opening-up of renovated public space: Through imbuing the stock space at the boundary of JisuanXincun public service functions and opening it to the whole neighborhood, the use right of the stock space which is exclusively available to the residents in JisunXincun before, has now shifted to the residents of the whole neighbourhood. The function of the obscure space near the property rights boundary has transformed from private service to public service. This is a way of equally redistributing and repurposing the stock public space of the neighborhood.



Fig. 3 Public service for JisuanXincun covers the whole neighbourhood. Source: drawn by the author.

2.2. Local residents participated in the whole process: popular design, multiple function and cultural rejuvenation with INCLUSIVENESS

In order to genuinely accomplish "Co-creation" during transformation of the corner space, the Subdistrict Office and the Jiangsu Provincial Planning and Design Group together organized the public activities oriented for the local residents, e.g. "oral history of old Yaohua residents", "online demand survey", "livable summer work camp", "designer in campus" and "neighborhood volunteer service". The local residents autonomously participated in the whole process ranging from planning and design, opinion survey to service and maintenance, so the diverse needs were understood, included, represented and fulfilled. The concerted efforts of multiple parties engendered the popular design defined by the local characteristics: the "containers", which carries the collective memory of railway freight. This public space is constituted of multiple containers at the boundary of JisunXincun, integrates functions in the service of various groups of people, and becomes a place where the acquaintances in the neighbourhood recollect their past.

2.2.1 Summer workshop, arousing public enthusiasm and engendering inclusive "local popular design"

In 2019, the Jiangsu Provincial Planning and Design Group and Yaohua Subdistrict Office organized the "Livable Yaofangmen Summer Workshop" program, where they recruited students and parents living in Yaofangmen, and college students to together provide design proposals for the development of the livable neighborhood, and also invited experts to offer opinions and suggestions. During the workshop that lasted a few days, the public was enthusiastically engaged and contributed many "popular design" that serves practical needs, economic efficiency and child interests. In elementary school students' sketches, there are imaginary images of the flexible public space along the street; in the jointly designed "old people healing park" scheme, a space is designed for activities and interactions of old people near the entrance of JisuanXincun, which is intended to awaken the collective memory of the neighborhood, and this design was the rudiment of the final "container".



Fig.4 (left) Workshop scheme: "healing park at the entrance of JisuanXincun". Source: JPDG

Fig.5 (right) Sketches of Yaohua elementary school students. Source: JPDG

2.2.2 Online opinion survey of the neighborhood, representing the actual public needs during the pandemic

In 2020 when the pandemic broke out, the community planners conducted an online opinion survey with the residents in the neighborhood, with the topic of "Study on Public Service Facilities for Livable Communities in Jiangsu". The results of the survey shows that, the most needed cultural and recreational facilities in the community are "activity room for the olds" and "reading room"; the most needed outdoor activity space and amenities are "fitness equipment, walkway, children's playground and public toilet"; the residents hope "the daily service information publicized by the neighborhood can be smoothly communicated in order to for residents to publicly discuss the community affairs"; the residents believe that the "property management company" is the most important community management organization in the pandemic control. The actual public needs during the pandemic inspired diverse design options for the Subdistrict Office to implement community renewal and neighbourhood environment improvement.

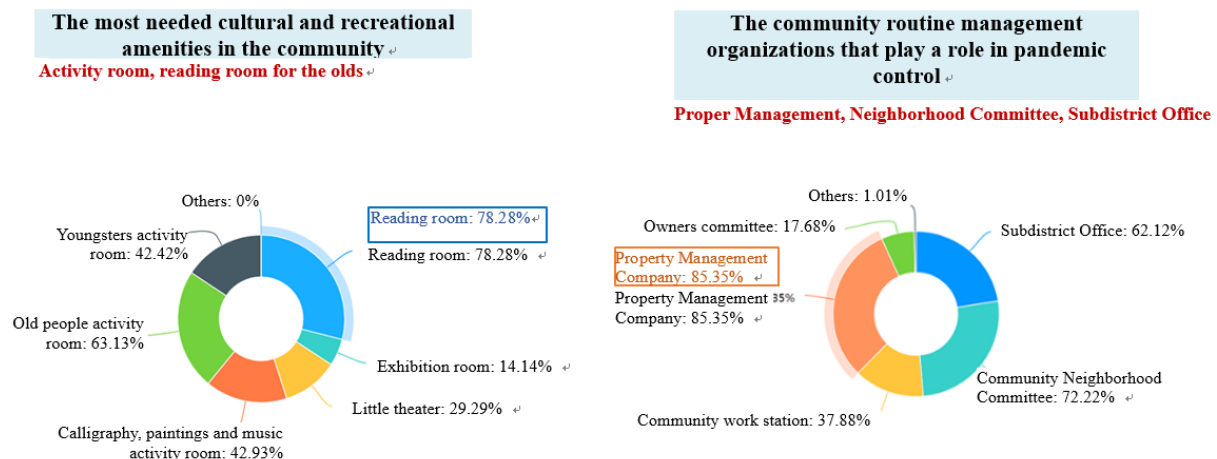


Fig. 6 "Study on Public Service Facilities for Livable communities in Jiangsu" during the pandemic. Source: JPDG

2.2.3 Oral history of Yaofangmen, awakening collective memory, rejuvenating traditional culture

In order to tap into the abundant historical and cultural resources of Yaofangmen and rejuvenate the traditional culture, in 2020, the community planners visited and interviewed the local Yaofangmen celebrities who spent a long time working and living in Yaofangmen. They orally told the history of the neighbourhood, including the Deputy Secretary of Yaohua Subdistrict and former principal of Yaofangmen Primary School. This endeavor, conducted by the means of door-to-door visit, oral history and collection of antique articles, brought care and love to the decent people who devoted their entire life to the neighborhood and was also meant to explore the local historical and cultural elements that can be used for various livable neighborhood renewal projects in the future, to awaken the collective memory of the residents in the neighborhood and to rejuvenate the historical culture of Yaofangmen.



Fig. 7 Community planners visiting the principal of former Yaofangmen Primary School. Source: photographed by the author

2.2.4 "Container" with the collective memory of railway freight, neighborhood public space with multiple functions

Through the diverse activities and multiple efforts, the neighborhood public space defined by the local railway culture: the "container" was born. The "container" space design awakens the "collective memory of railway freight" of Yaofangmen, and also integrates the diverse functions intended for the people of all age groups: garbage recycling and sorting, "bay-style" bus stop, public book bar, community activity and fitness center, children's playground, and property management. Before construction commenced, the Property Management Company and community management authority visited all the households and collected their opinions and signatures for consent. So the "container" was fully supported by the residents of JisuanXincun and catered to the special needs of the olds and children. Therefore, the "container" became the "shared activities space" in this acquaintance neighborhood.



Fig. 8 Multi-functional design of the "container" space at the entrance. Source: Yaohua Sub-district Office



Fig. 9 (left) Entrance of JisuanXincun before the renewal. Source: photographed by the author



Fig. 10(right) Containers at the entrance of JisuanXincun after the renewal. Source: Yaohua Sub-district Office

2.3. Red property Management Company executed long-term management: local employment, flexible management, and experience sharing for PUBLIC WELFARE

By the means of "Trusteeship Model for Public-oriented Property Service Enterprises", the neighborhood established the Nanjing Yaofangmen Property Management Co., Ltd, a red property management company affiliated to Yaohua Sub-district Office. Under the guidance of the Sub-district Office, "the Red property" played an important role in the work of building livable environment, providing public services and implementing long-term governance. The employees of the red property management company are mostly local permanent residents, so their localized employment contributes to neighborhood stability

and their motivation to preserve their homeland inherently drives their efforts for long-term governance. In their routine work, the red property management company implements flexible management of the public space in the neighborhood. For example, the "containers" were temporarily converted into nucleic acid test points for the neighborhood during the pandemic. As a part of the party building, the experience of livable neighborhood renewal of Yaofangmen was reported by the mainstream media outlets multiple times and generated extensive social influence.

2.3.1 Local employment

Founded in 2009, the Nanjing Yaofangmen Property Management Co., Ltd now has over 1,000 employees, and most of them are local residents in Yaofangmen. The employees, who are also residents, are responsible for management and maintenance of the neighborhood where they live, which effectively strengthens the sense of residents' unity and loyalty in the neighborhood's social network, and genuinely allows the residents in the neighborhood to participate in the whole process of "design, construction, operation, management and service". By the efforts of the residents and employees, the red property management service essentially covers the entire neighborhood and long-term management of the old communities is effectively implemented.

2.3.2 Flexible management

From 2020 till now, under the careful maintenance and management of the property management company, the fashion and colorful "container" has turned into an "internet influencer" tourist attraction in the Yaofangmen livable neighbourhood, and attracted many visitors. In 2021 when the pandemic broke out again in Nanjing, the containers were used as nucleic acid test points in the neighbourhood, where the volunteers worked together day and night. After the pandemic was alleviated, the containers resumed their diverse public service functions. Such functions serve the JisuanXincun and multiple communities around it, and its image as an "internet influencer" even benefits the entire neighborhood. The flexible space management method helps create the community atmosphere in an agile manner.



Fig. 11 (left) Nucleic acid test points in the containers. Source: JPDG

2.3.3 Experience sharing

As a part of the party building endeavor, the "design + governance" livable neighborhood renewal model of Yaofangmen has been reported over 60 times by the mainstream media outlets including xuexi.cn and Xinhua Daily, and has generated extensive social influence. For example, Xinhua News Agency published a report titled "Community Designer: Derive the Community Innovation Code from Public Opinions", the Bureau of Housing and Construction of Qixia District, Nanjing included the long-term management of the

old communities such as JisuanXincun into the list of practical activities under the "provide useful services to the people" program of 2021, and the story of the livable neighborhood has been reported through YouTube. Publicity in the party building endeavour is an effective way of writing the modern culture of the neighborhood defined by the Yaofangmen spirit.



Fig. 12 (right) Routine work of community planners at the containers. Source: Xinhua News

3. Achievements and inspirations

3.1. Propagable innovation mechanism

Three years of efforts turned this JisuanXincun "container" model into a reproducible innovation mechanism that can be used for integrated utilization of stock resources in old communities and allocation of neighborhood public service space. At the end of 2020, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development promulgated *the List of Replicable Policies and Mechanisms for the Renovation of Old Communities in Cities and Towns (First Batch)*, which explicitly introduces the practice experience from Nanjing, Jiangsu: ".....The public institutions and state-owned enterprises are encouraged to transition the idle buildings in or near the old communities to the subdistrict (county town) or community through replacement, transfer or handover of right to use." "Use the vacant land, waste land, the land vacated after removal of illegal buildings and the stock land around the community to build the supporting amenities and public service facilities and to increase public activities space. Based on the actual conditions, flexibly demarcate land boundary and simplify the Regulatory Plan adjustment procedure....."

3.2. Reflections and enlightenment

Given the reality of "closed communities" in China, the stock space resources in the old communities present the immense potential of excavation, transformation and opening-up, to provide equal, inclusive and indigenous public space to the residents in the neighborhood. Jiangsu is now in the stage of stable urbanization. The grand planning model used for rapid urbanization urgently needs to be transformed into the "small and beautiful" neighborhood renewal model, and the planners also need to change their function from blueprint drawing to accompanying consultation service. The local residents are the crucial force that maintains long-term vitality and autonomous renewal of the communities. Under the principle of "take care of their own business", they are more than just the users of the space, and also the decision-makers, participants, maintainers and operators.

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