



Fig. 24: The families for further study. There were sixteen families with obvious renovation being interviewed. (Source: by author.)

Building	Family	Renovation			
		Reorganization of internal space	Area extension	Driven by cultural demand	The change of function
Type A	A1	√	√		
	A2	√	√		
	A3		√		
	A4	√	√	√	
Type B	B1	√	√		
Type C	C1	√	√		
	C2	√	√		√
	C3	√	√		√
	C4	√	√		
	C5	√	√		
	C6		√		
	C7		√		
Type D	D1	√	√		
	D2		√		
	D3			√	
Type 甲	甲1			√	

Table 2: Renovation activity in the sixteen families. (Source: by author.)

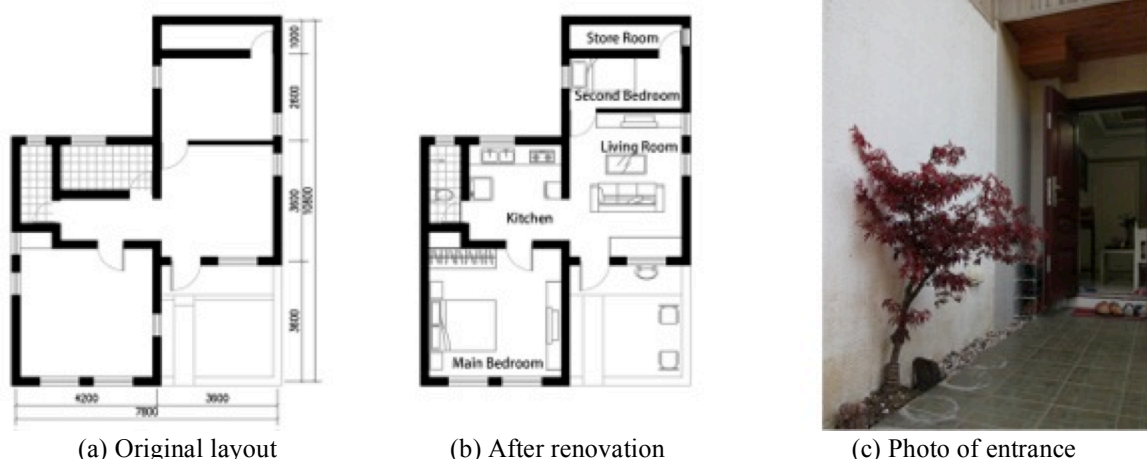


Fig. 25: Re-organisation of internal space. In the renovation, the kitchen was opened; the bathroom was extended; the Infill partition was moved. (Source: by author.)

*The first episode* was driven by the dissatisfaction with the internal space. The typical example was provided by a young couple who bought their suite in this community for its wonderful location. As soon as they moved here in 2004, the householder, who was a young artist graduating from China Central Academy of Fine Arts (Beijing, China) with his Master's degree, made a renovation plan for of their second-hand house.

According to their memories, the previous owners were an old couple above seventy years of age. They lived in the house for nearly twenty years without any renovation. This choice was widely accepted in the elders' families. Because of limited energy and physical strength, they seldom made any obvious changes. Consequently, when the new couple moved in, the suite kept its original layout, which consisted of two bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen, together with a bathroom and some small storage. Their renovation began with the unsatisfactory areas of kitchen, living room, and secondary bedroom.

The kitchen was extremely small. It became unbearable when the integrated kitchen cabinet was placed, the width of which was 600 mm at minimum. And the living room was

also small, almost as small as the secondary bedroom. It was quite inconsistent with the current style which calls for a specious living room and a small bedroom.<sup>67</sup>

Consequently, their renovation focused mainly on the reorganization of living space. They changed the closed kitchen into an open one so that it was less crowded. In addition, the partition between the second bedroom and living room was moved in order to provide more space for the latter. It should be emphasized that they kept the second bedroom, although they do not plan to have a baby in the near future. When asked why, they replied that this room was being left for their relatives, who might spend one or two nights in their house. This thought was representative for Chinese, who value the kinship very much.

Their renovation revealed clearly the users' positive response to the changeability of entire style of housing. This building was designed under the trend of "big bedroom and small hall" in the 1980s. However, since the late 1990s, the overall tendency has shifted, with more emphasis being

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Family A4. May 2nd, 2014.



Fig. 26a, b: Area extension. The renovation was conceived to build an independent room for the son. As a result, the suite was finally changed to a duplex apartment. (Source: by author.)

placed on the living room while the function of bedroom became more simplified. Through the movement of “Infill,” this change was realized by users themselves without destroying the building structure. Their movement was in accordance with the architect’s intention, and the positive aspect of flexibility was particularly shown in this process (Fig. 25).

*The second episode* was about the area extension as a response to the change of family members. During the investigation, I was deeply impressed by the random, but creative, extension activity taking place. The private gardens in the corners might be covered with roof, or the spacious terrace could be enclosed as an additional room. Even the rest platforms of the staircase might be occupied by residents. Among them, Liu’s family was one of the most typical examples. After the extension, Liu’s apartment, which was on the top level, was changed to a skip-floor residence with two bedrooms, two halls, a kitchen, and a bathroom.

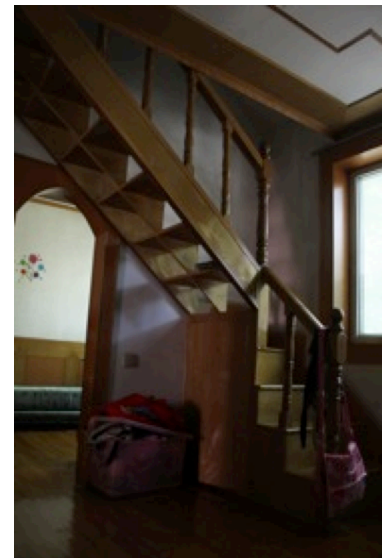


Fig. 26c: Interior staircase. (Source: by author.)

Liu was an ordinary bank employee who was born in the early 1960s. Thirty years ago, he moved to this community with his new wife. In the early years, he was generally satisfied with his apartment and did not make many changes except for closing the balcony off for their bedroom. This arrangement was kept for more than

ten years. However, as his son grew up, the inconvenience was gradually exposed.

My son shared the same bedroom with us when he was very young. Even in the early years when he was admitted to primary school, he did not have his own bedroom or study room. He had to do his homework in our living room. However, we could not avoid walking to and from when he was working: it certainly affected his learning efficiency. Consequently, I proposed to provide him with a personal space. Meanwhile, our dining room was too small for three people to have dinner together. That was the other problem which I wanted to solve in the renovation.<sup>68</sup>

Because he had great interest in architecture, the householder organized and controlled the renovation by himself. It mainly consisted of two extensions. Most importantly, he increased the height of his bedroom and used the upper space as a bedroom for his nine-year-old son. He wanted to increase the height of his whole unit, but eventually gave up this idea due to its tremendous cost. Also, he made his kitchen open, in order to enlarge the area for the dining room. The kitchen was later moved to the rest platform of the public staircase. Meanwhile, some decoration work was conducted as well - the floor was covered with tiles, and the roof was colored a light yellowish brown.

The increase or decrease of family members had long been taken as the most important driving factor of change. Existing researches on flexibility paid much attention on this problem. Liu's family was a fine example of this aspect. As opposed to the architect's concept, Liu did not solve this problem by re-organizing internal space. Rather, living on the top floor provided him special inspiration. The

limitation of design was particularly shown in this example (Fig. 26).

*The third episode* was provided by a family of three, and their creative renovation was primarily driven by cultural needs. Wandering through the community, I was attracted by a garden door that looked like it belonged somewhere more ancient. The vermilion wooden door, grey brick portal frame, and delicate carving made this house obviously stand out from the others. Being particularly interested in this house, I visited the owner two times, and at last he accepted my interview.

As a self-employed businessman and an antiques collector, Xiao was fifty-five years old. Over the past thirty years, he gradually acquired three suites in the community: the first was for he and his wife, the second was for his adult son, and the third was prepared for his son's marriage. The strong economic base separated this family from their neighbors. As a result, he never suffered from the limited space.

Xiao's decoration activity was profoundly influenced by his consistent enthusiasm for antiques. Different from other collectors, who kept their collections in private exhibition halls, Xiao tried to exhibit them in his house: the great majority of his furniture was genuine antiques. In order to cooperate with the Chinese style of his furniture as well as the whole community, he planned to make a special decoration by himself. His concept was especially expressed by the house in which he was living. First, he built an ancient door with a deep roof, a brick doorframe and drum stones. Then, a traditional Chinese garden was designed for the entrance space, with a gallery, pool and rockery. Third, the original brick partition that separated the living room into two parts was replaced by a Chinese partition.

The whole work was in the direct control of the householder himself. The great majority

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Family C4. April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

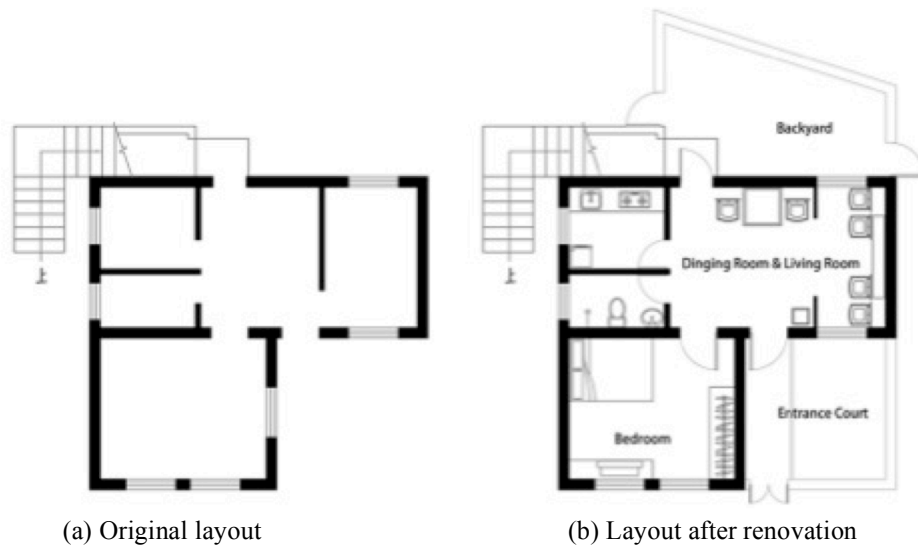


Fig. 27a, b: Renovation driven by cultural demand. In the renovation, the Infill partition was replaced to a “moon gate”, the entrance court was redesigned. (Source: by author.)



Fig. 27c: Moon gate. The old brick partition was changed to a traditional partition. Fig. 27d: Pathway. The pathway in front of the entrance was designed and laid by the user. (Source: by author.)

of building materials were provided by him: some of the materials were acquired from the traditional houses in Wuxi which were demolished in the process of urban regeneration, some were bought in the second-hand market, some were acquired from other collectors, and the rest were from his private collections. In addition, the design was conceived by the householder. The renovation was not finished at one time. After acquiring this suite, he was continuously working on the decoration.

The pathways at the front and back gate were all made by the homeowner (Fig 27).

I also do some work by myself. Last year, I spent three months on the pathway in front of our main entrance - buying various cobblestones and making them into patterns. This year, I am working on the floor in our backyard. And after that, I plan to reorganize our external environment. I have brought enough stone and thick



glass for the handrail along the river, although the specific plan is not ready at present.<sup>69</sup>

In the existing research, the user's personality was widely emphasized and increasingly valued. Personality necessitated flexibility. And Xiao's family was an appropriate example to demonstrate this opinion. His renovation was completely initiated by his personal characteristics instead of any particular point of dissatisfaction with his house. Also, the self-built experience inspired Xiao and his family's deep love for their house. This point of view, which was discussed early in the 1970s, was particularly confirmed by Xiao's 27-year-old son's response when being asked if he liked living in this old community. His answer was affirmative for various reasons, among which was his love caused by his involvement.

*The last episode* was about the transformation of the entire function. As the most creative example, Zhang's washhouse in Building 107 showed a clear process of function change. Zhang and his wife moved into the community as a relocated household in 1985 when he was working as a dressmaker. At the first glance, he decided to use this apartment as his workshop.

The apartment is just by the side of the road, and the entrance is also facing the community road. More importantly, there is not any fence separating the house from the road. I think it would be better used as a workshop than an apartment.<sup>70</sup>

Subsequently, Zhang divided the whole apartment into two parts: one was used as a little tailor shop, while the other was their home. He did not use the original door that faced the street as the entrance of their

house. On the contrary, he preferred to enter their house through the staircase and built an independent door along the road for his workshop.

About five years later, the living part became crowded because Zhang's son was born. He then brought another apartment in this community, and the living part of this suite was rented out until 2000 when tailoring decreased in popular and washhouses were booming. Being sensitive to the market trend, Zhang decided to open a comprehensive washhouse which provided the services for washing of clothes and shoes, the making or tailoring of clothes, and leather care. Consequently, the rented part was withdrawn, and the whole suite was renovated into a big washroom.

The renovation was conducted in 2001, and three main modifications were made. First, the wall between the living and working space was demolished; second, the door leading to the staircase was filled, and the bathroom, kitchen, and entranceway were connected as a washroom; third, the space under the upper balcony was built as a new entranceway. Later, it was further extended as an entrance combined with a mini shop for cigarettes and alcohol. These alterations were not fulfilled at one time, but were instead completed gradually (Fig. 28).

The change of function was outside of the architect's plan, however the possibility was embedded in his management of the special entrance for families on the ground floor: some of those entrances were inside the courtyard, while others were outside. The external entrances, especially those facing the community street, motivated those apartments to be used in other ways. In practice, most of the apartments with such a feature were given a non-resident function. This brings a special energy and vitality to the community.

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Family 甲 1. April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Family C2. April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014.