

Beyond the Invariable Style: The Development of Residential Architecture in Yanxia Village, China

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The study of historic Chinese architecture typically identifies the archetypes and commonalities that persist across periods and regions. This article offers a different perspective, emphasizing the evolution of spatial relations, spatial quality, and uses of space in vernacular houses in China. Drawing upon archival research, building surveys, and ethnographic fieldwork, it examines the development of residential architecture in Yanxia by studying five houses built between the mid-sixteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. It argues that the changing values and social status of residents, combined with the growth of pilgrimage activities, resulted in the introduction of new programs, spaces and ideas.

The study of historic Chinese architecture has typically focused on identifying archetypes and commonalities in style, construction, and spatial relations. Indeed, the “first generation” of modern Chinese architects, including Sicheng Liang and Huiyin Lin, started their analyses of historic Chinese architecture in the 1930s by defining common features of Chinese building tradition.¹

Nancy Steinhardt has written that the work of this first generation still dominates Chinese architectural history, and that it does so largely because of the unchanging style of Chinese architecture itself.² Following from their analyses, she argued that “Chinese architecture is archetypical, but not chronotopic.”³ She defined such an archetypical style through its basic elements: platform, wooden pillars, wooden bracket set and roof frame, and ceramic roof tile. She then specified ten principles of Chinese architecture in terms of spatial arrangement and hierarchy, construction scale, modules, methods, and use of colors.⁴

Steinhardt’s contemporary, Pu Miao, took a similarly universalizing approach, identifying the commonalities of Chinese architectural tradition, which he referred to as its “essence.”⁵ From a phenomenological perspective, he identified thirteen characteristics

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shared by all historic Chinese architecture. These include the division of space, the connection between inside and outside, the sequential relationship between major and minor spaces, two-dimensional composition, and so on.⁶ If Steinhardt, Liang and Lin focused more on the physical attributes of historic Chinese architecture, Miao emphasized its spatial attributes. Yet, when taken together, these scholars have all described a *style* of historic Chinese architecture that is “universally recognized” — a style that matches the reality that, as Steinhardt concluded, “many Chinese buildings look like many other Chinese buildings.”⁷

Steinhardt further argued that the first generation architects, such as Liang, recognized this archetypal style, and that their work established a canon for the study of Chinese buildings constructed before 1950.⁸ This canon has been followed with few exceptions and has typically been organized by chronological, typological and regional divisions.⁹ Such an approach is also evident in the study of Chinese vernacular architecture, where typological identification and comparative analysis between regions are the dominant methods. One example is the ten-volume *Xiangtu Guibao* [*The Jewel of Vernacular*], based on studies conducted by professors and students of Tsinghua University between 1988 and 2004. Each book in the series addresses a different building type, such as the house or ancestral hall, and each author starts by defining the commonalities of the building type before describing representative buildings from different regions.¹⁰ This approach is important because it provides critical understanding of building types in rural China. However, a typological approach overlooks the importance of the changing identities and meanings of spaces beyond their seemingly invariable Chinese style. Typological methods also neglect the roles of residents and their daily activities in defining and refining spaces and the meaning of places.

This article offers a different perspective by examining vernacular building in China with an emphasis on the evolution of architectural space, including spatial relations, spatial quality, and use. Vernacular buildings are living structures endowed with meaning by everyday lives. As Paul Oliver has argued, they “may be adapted or developed over time as needs and circumstances change.”¹¹ Changing needs and circumstances, in general, have had little effect on the overall structure of Chinese vernacular architecture, but they have led to the rearrangement and redefinition of spaces within buildings.

According to Kevin Lynch, “the best environment is one in which there are both new stimuli and familiar reassurances, the chance to explore and the ability to return.”¹² Although Lynch was referring to stimuli that are part of the built environment, certain intangible factors can also act as stimuli affecting the evolution of the built environment. In the context of Chinese vernacular dwellings, “new stimuli” have included changes in life cycle, social status, and the financial well-being of residents and family members, as well as the development of new kinship structures and changes

in the makeup of family clans.¹³ The stimuli for architectural evolution can also come from outside a family or village through larger-scale social and political change, the introduction of new ideas, or the integration of foreign activities. Such stimuli may induce residents not only to explore and alter the built environment but to reinterpret the meaning of architectural spaces. Meanwhile, existing spatial relations and qualities, which reflect sociocultural contexts at the time of construction, not only provide familiar reassurances, but also constantly shape and limit the ways people understand and redefine the dwelling space.¹⁴

This article examines the development of residential architecture in Yanxia in Zhejiang province, China, through the study of five houses built between the middle of the sixteenth and the middle of the twentieth century by members of the Cheng family. It attempts to understand the evolution of building layout and the way different kinds of architectural spaces have been used and transformed beyond a seemingly invariable *style* in response to changing needs and circumstances. The article argues that the residential buildings of Yanxia have been constructed and transformed in response to both internal and external stimuli, including the growth and development of the Cheng family, their changing values and social status, and the flourishing of pilgrimage activities that demanded and introduced new architectural programs, spaces and ideas.

The five houses studied share many common traits. They have a similar appearance and are all characterized by the archetypal style described by Steinhardt; and they share the “essence of tradition” defined by Miao. Further, they are all courtyard houses, in accordance with Amos Rapoport’s definition, which implies an architectural form based on a fundamental organization of space, consisting of an open space, a court, and its boundaries, which can be defined in different ways.¹⁵ However, each house is unique in the way it represents a critical moment in the evolution of the residential structures in Yanxia. The examples studied consist of a communal house, a housing complex for a couple, a three-sided-courtyard house for a single family, a courtyard house revised to respond to the introduction of seasonal programs, and a courtyard house embedded with Western architectural ideas.

The study of these five houses is based on the triangulation of archival research, building surveys, and ethnographic fieldwork. As Zhihua Chen has recommended, the analysis of each house includes not only an understanding of the social status, family history, financial situation, personal experience, and the educational background of the builder, but it also entails an appraisal of the changing functions and meanings of architectural spaces over time.¹⁶

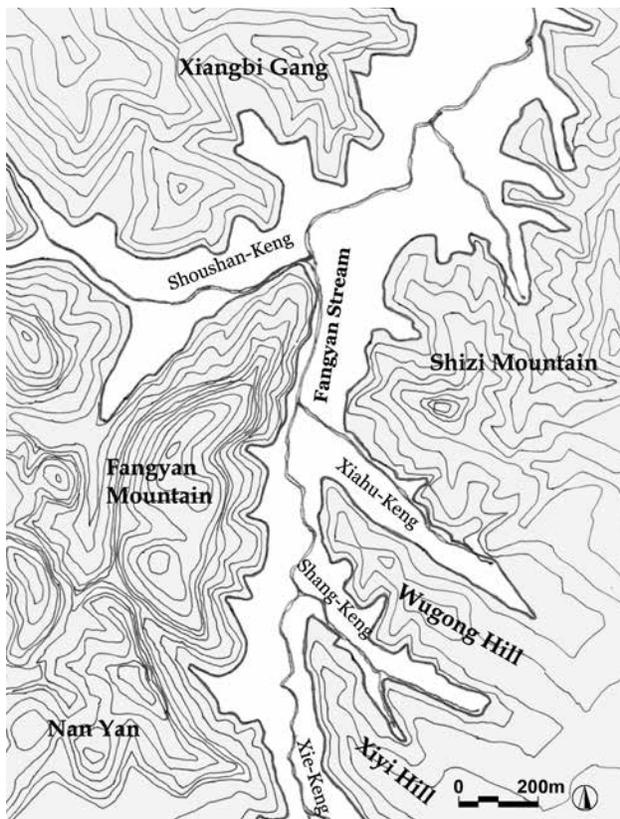


FIGURE 1. Fangyan valley. Drawing by author.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Located in the middle of Zhejiang province (220 miles south of Shanghai), Yanxia village lies inside the Fangyan valley, which is defined by Fangyan Mountain on the west and a group of small hills and secondary valleys on the east (FIG. 1). A path coming from the north connects Yanxia to the outside world, and eventually winds up to the top of Fangyan Mountain. The Cheng family came to Yanxia in the early fourteenth century when Yanxia was a small settlement inside one of the area's secondary valleys, Shang-Keng.¹⁷ By the middle of the twentieth century, the family had not only transformed Yanxia into a lineage-based settlement, but also populated many other villages in the region (FIG. 2).

The early development of residential structures in Yanxia (before the 1850s) was similar to that in other villages of the region. Thus the first example investigated here, a communal house built in the middle of the sixteenth century, took the same form as communal houses constructed in other Cheng-lineage-based settlements of the region. In general, the three-sided courtyard house built in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries also represented a typical housing layout within the region until the introduction of concrete-frame buildings at the end of the twentieth century.

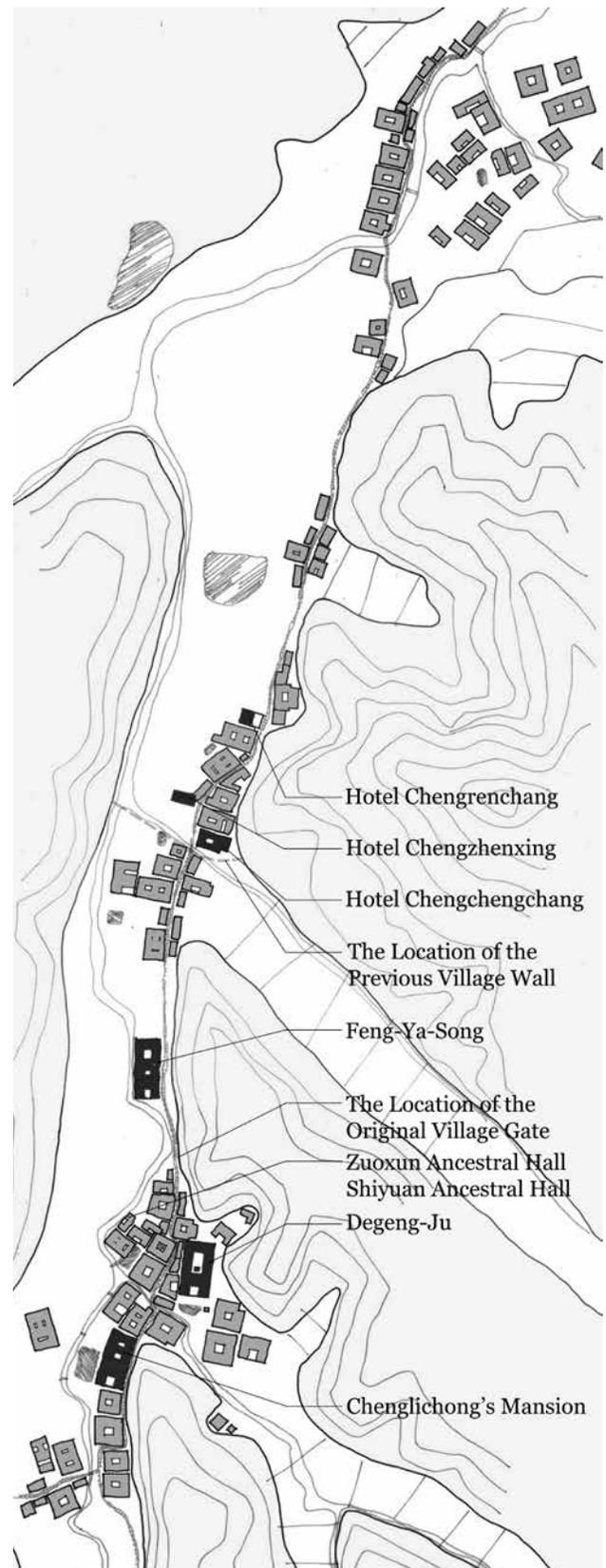


FIGURE 2. Yanxia village. Drawing by author.

Development patterns after the 1850s, however, became more unique because an external stimulus created the need for innovative design changes that exist only in Yanxia. The external stimulus was associated with the local religion of Hu, who has been enshrined in the Buddhist temple on the top of Fangyan Mountain for the last nine hundred years.¹⁸ During the pilgrimage season between August and September of the Lunar calendar, thousands of pilgrims from southeast China come through Yanxia every day. And the Cheng family started to host pilgrims after a devastating fire in 1849 destroyed the monastery where pilgrims used to stay. The demands from the growing pilgrimage activities in the subsequent century altered not only the layout and the meaning of the existing courtyard house, but also introduced Western architectural ideas that affected relations between and the quality of architectural spaces. By the middle of the twentieth century, the Cheng family had transformed Yanxia into a linear-shaped settlement along the pilgrim path and populated it with hotels and stores.

EARLY COMMUNAL HOUSE: DEGENG-JU

As the oldest surviving house in Yanxia, Degeng-Ju is unique in the ways it represents the collective identity of the Cheng family (REFER TO FIG. 2).¹⁹ This identity was established through a communal lifestyle that Degeng-Ju once supported, and it was reinforced by sociocultural events and activities sustained by its spaces. In addition, the name Degeng (“to be able to plough” or “to be satisfied with plowing”) recalls a member of the third generation of the Cheng family, Quan (1333–1385), the original house he built in the area, and the wisdom he left for his descendants.²⁰ Seen in this way, Degeng-Ju became an icon of ancestor veneration and a signifier of the collective identity recognized by the residents of Yanxia.

Degeng-Ju was built in the middle of the sixteenth century by the seventh generation of the Cheng family, Kui (1474–1548), during the time when his family shared Yanxia with other families.²¹ Kui built this large structure to house his family and his descendants. Shared by many generations of the Cheng family, Degeng-Ju once supported communal life for the entire lineage. It also kept the family living space separate from the rest of the village.

The overall dimensions of Degeng-Ju are about 28 meters wide by 54 meters deep (FIG. 3). The structure remains largely intact today as a two-level courtyard house with a double-eave wall-style entrance. Its major public spaces, including a main hall, two courtyards, a pond, and stage, are located at its center, surrounded by private spaces, which include a rear hall and thirty side rooms. Most of the residential space in this large structure is located within the double-level side rooms. Each of these constitutes a living unit, equipped with an interior ladder to connect its levels. The upper level was usually used for storage, but could be transformed into living space when the number of inhabitants increased. The building’s

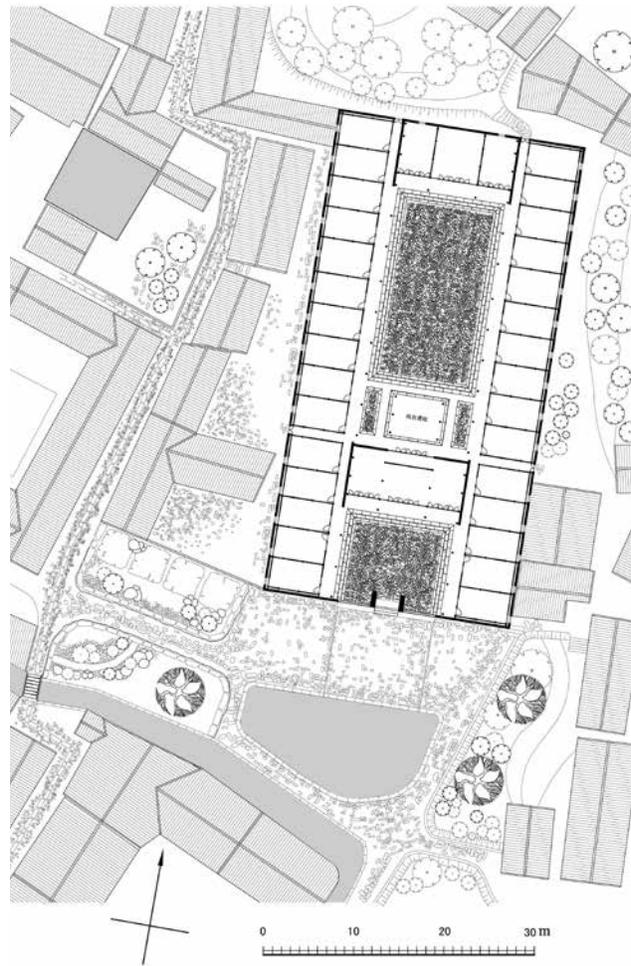


FIGURE 3. Site plan of Degeng-Ju. Drawing by Yongming Lin.

perimeter blocks were segmented by corridors defined by solid walls at four locations, as well as by entrance gates at the end of each corridor. The segmented layout had practical advantages: it allowed for easier construction and helped minimize damage in the case of fire. It also had a social rationale. Degeng-Ju was designed to accommodate a growing, extended Cheng family, with the anticipation that every one of Kui’s descendants would be able to live here. The extra gates, therefore, provided a level of internal privacy, as well as convenience.

In reinforcing the collective identity of the Cheng family, Degeng-Ju became not just a residence, but a center for public and private events. Its front courtyard, which is almost square, is enclosed by the wall-style entrance on the south, the three-bay main hall on the north, and five side rooms to east and west. The double-height main hall can be entirely opened to the front courtyard (a space commonly referred to as a *mingtang*). During the Chinese New Year the portraits of earlier generations of the Cheng family are hung inside the hall to receive veneration from their descendants. A *taishibi* [large screen] used to be located at the rear of the main hall to

prevent direct view through doors behind it of the relatively more private rear courtyard.

The second courtyard is rectangular in plan, bordered by ten side rooms each on the east and west, the elevated stage and underneath sun-moon-well pond on the south, and the ruin of the once two-story, three-bay rear hall on the north. According to residents, before the construction of a new theater in the village in the 1980s, multiday theatrical performances were held inside Degeng-Ju on Chinese New Year or to celebrate a senior family member's birthday. During these performances, traveling artists would use the main hall as their backstage and living space, and access the stage by means of a pair of staircases behind the *taishibi*. Premium seating for these performances would be located on the upper level of the rear hall, whose lower level was used to sell snacks such as fried peanuts, smoked tofu, and wontons. During such events the entire second courtyard, including all the side rooms, might be packed with people. Besides being used for performances, the ground level of the rear hall was also used for family weddings and funerals. These ceremonies were relocated to the main hall after the rear hall collapsed.

Degeng-Ju and the open space in front of its main entrance continues to serve as the center for other important Cheng family social and cultural activities. On January 14 of the Lunar calendar, Degeng-Ju becomes a key venue for the Dragon-Lantern Festival. Foods are prepared in the main hall; dragon-lanterns are assembled in the open space; and the opening and closing ceremonies are held there.

Even though Degeng-Ju is largely empty nowadays, with only a few families residing there, the open space and the pond

in front of it are still an active place, populated by many locals and enriched by various kinds of daily activities (FIG. 4). Women wash their clothes and vegetables in the ponds; men go fishing; and clothes and crops are dried in the open space. When it is sunny, residents come out and socialize with their neighbors, and the open space becomes a shared living room where people eat lunch, play *majiang*, and watch children play.

Although the open space in front of Degeng-Ju is a shared public space, nearby residents have developed a sense of ownership by maintaining it. One resident proudly announced that her husband helped lay every single slab inside the pond. Another cleans the pond and the open space around it regularly as if it were his living room.

MULTICOURTYARD PRIVATE HOUSE: CHENGLICHONG'S MANSION

The second oldest surviving residential structure in Yanxia, Chenglichong's Mansion (hereafter the mansion), was constructed in the middle of the eighteenth century when the Cheng family in Yanxia acquired more prestigious social and financial status. This change in status is evident in terms of the mansion's site selection, building layout, and spatial quality.²² In addition, compared to Degeng-Ju, which was built with practicality and unity in mind and to support a shared communal life, Chenglichong's Mansion was originally intended only to provide a comprehensive setting for the private life of a single young couple.



FIGURE 4. Degeng-Ju as a center for various kinds of daily activities. Photo by author.

Decades before the construction of the mansion, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Cheng family had already transformed Yanxia from a multifamily settlement into a lineage-based village. This was evidenced by the construction of Zuoxun Ancestral Hall and Shiyuan Ancestral Hall on the west edge of the village (REFER TO FIG. 2).²³ The first of these structures was built at the beginning of the eighteenth century and dedicated to a highly respected figure, Zuoxun (1646–1725).²⁴ The establishment of Yanxia as a lineage-based village is further documented by wedding registries from nearby villages, which record marriages only of Cheng women from Yanxia since the early eighteenth century.²⁵

The owner of the mansion, Lichong (1736–1793), was the youngest grandson of Zuoxun and the most renowned figure within the Cheng family at the time.²⁶ When he married the daughter of an official from a nearby village, his father-in-law sponsored the construction of their house.²⁷ Nowadays, the pond, well, and first courtyard of the living quarters largely remain in their original form. The rest of the property has been rebuilt and altered by Lichong's descendants. The entire original layout of the property can be conjectured, however, by examining the remaining foundations and paving, and

comparing it with information obtained through interviews with local residents.²⁸

Compared to Degeng-Ju, which was constructed on flat land inside a secondary valley, the mansion was built on the south edge of the village and sandwiched between Fangyan Stream and Xiyi Hill (REFER TO FIG. 2). To solve the problem caused by the change in elevation between the basin level, where Fangyan Stream is, and the foot of Xiyi Hill, the living quarters were built on a solid elevated foundation, using stacked stones at the perimeter and tamped earth inside. Besides solving a practical problem, this treatment made the house seem taller than it was when seen from the valley side.

The main entrance was located at the higher level, at the southeast corner of the mansion, facing east — an auspicious corner according to *feng-shui* beliefs. From here, the main entrance provided access to the path running along the foot of Xiyi Hill. Internally, it was then connected by designed passageways to the living quarters to its north and a garden to its south. A passageway also extended to the west side of the property, situated at the basin level, where a pond, well, and small piece of agricultural land were all enclosed by a property wall (FIG. 5). The property wall stood facing the west edge



FIGURE 5. The pond to the west of Chenglichong's Mansion. Photo by author.

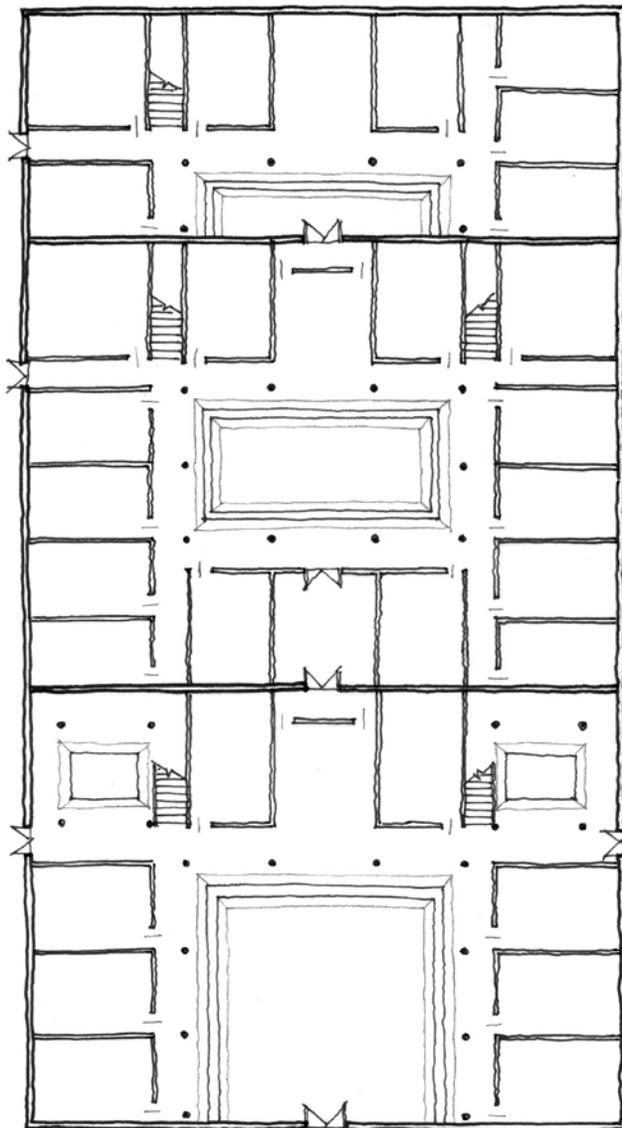


FIGURE 6. Plan diagram of the first floor of the living quarters of Chenglichong's Mansion. Drawing by author.

of the pond, creating a semi-covered space, which was used for storage and for keeping domestic animals. Prior to the construction of this house, ponds and wells had been shared by all residents in the village; having a private pond and well was therefore considered luxurious.

Although the living quarters of the mansion and Degeng-Ju were alike in scale and layout, their spaces were endowed with distinctly different meanings. Intended to provide a comprehensive life for Lichong and his family, the mansion expressed order, privilege and privacy (FIG. 6). Built on a north-south axis, the living quarters were divided

into three connected sections, whose open courts decreased in size from south to north. The first two sections on the south were equal in size and about twice as large as the third one, yet they provided different spatial experiences and meanings. The first section was built around a three-sided courtyard which took the form of a large square *mingtang*. In the second, the addition of a row of rooms on the south of the *mingtang* not only decreased the size of the court by half, but also defined a more intimate space. The third section of the house was built around a three-sided courtyard, but it and its *mingtang* were only half the size of the other two. The layout of these spaces delineated a clear hierarchy from south to north — from public, to semi-private, to private. The order was further emphasized by a central axis, along which patterns of access were marked first by a single-eave, wall-style entrance and then by an alternation between *mingtang*, main halls, *taishibi*, doors, and rear halls.

As the most renowned figure in Yanxia at the time, Lichong sought to demonstrate his wealth and social status not only through house layout but through construction details and decorations. Their quality can still be seen in the remaining first section of the building. This section and its *mingtang* are similar in size to the ones in Degeng-Ju, but once contained two additional sky-wells at its northeast and northwest corners. In plan, the two sky-wells and the *mingtang* formed the Chinese character “品” (pronounced “pin”), creating a layout whose meaning expressed an allegory of blessing that the family members might become high-ranking officials.²⁹

Although both its exterior and interior enclosure walls have been modified extensively, the internal wooden structure of this section of the building and other of its details still pronounce a past glory. The *yueliang* (moon-shaped beam) in the main hall here is highly decorated with elegant and abstract curvy patterns, and the *queti* (bracket) under the beams facing the *mingtang* are carved in multiple layers with flowers, birds, and other animals with allegorical meanings (FIG. 7).³⁰ Wooden panels at the second level are slightly curved outwards to protect the *queti* from rain, and the gutters surrounding the *mingtang* are laid out precisely using large stone slabs. These features represent a construction method and decorative style used in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties by financially well-established owners in this region. They are only present in two other structures in Yanxia — an ancestral hall, and a house built by one of Lichong's descendants.

To ensure privacy, the three interconnected sections of the house were originally designed to remain largely separate. This was achieved by locating load-bearing masonry walls between them, with a single door penetration in each on the first level only. Besides restricting access, these masonry walls acted as fire breaks.

Internally, each building section had one or two pairs of staircases connecting its ground level to spaces on its second level. But the spaces on the second level in each section were

FIGURE 7. *The highly decorative quieti in Chenglichong's Mansion. Photo by author.*



separated from those on the others by the internal masonry wall. While entertaining guests inside the first section of the house, Lichong could therefore have maintained a quiet, private area at the rear of the house for his family — which included two wives, seven sons, and many grandsons.³¹ In addition, having residential quarters built in sections made the division of Lichong's household easier when needed.

After Lichong passed away, his heirs divided up his property, and this process repeated itself in succeeding generations. As a response to new residents' changing needs, the architecture of the mansion evolved considerably: the three building sections were completely separated; the layouts of the second and third sections were substantially revised; new entrances were added; new structures were built on its gardens and agriculture land; property walls were removed; sky-wells and public halls were converted into living areas; and staircases were taken down.

INTERCONNECTED SINGLE-COURTYARD FAMILY HOUSE: FENG-YA-SONG

Feng, Ya and Song are three independent, yet connected, courtyard houses constructed between the end of the eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth century. When examining their layouts, one can see they were modeled after the first courtyard of Chenglichong's Mansion, which in turn was derived from the first courtyard of Degeng-Ju. The construction of this housing complex marked another milestone in the development of residential structures in Yanxia because each house expressed a common housing layout of that period, the three-sided courtyard, which became widely

adopted as a housing model in Yanxia during the following decades. When comparing these three houses side by side, however, one can see the differences between the social status and value standards of their owners, as well as changes in the sociocultural context during which the houses were built.

Located outside the original village gate and separate from all other buildings at the time, Feng-Ya-Song was built between Wugong Hill on the east and a large field on the west (REFER TO FIG. 2). According to a current resident at the time of the field research, the two houses on the north, which would later be named Ya and Song, were built in 1797 by descendants of Lichong. Lijin (1778–1862), who was the current resident's ancestor five generations ago and a local official, later purchased Ya and Song from Lichong's descendants.³² Lijin's only son, Yueyong (1832–1866), who was also a local official, added the third house, Feng, to the south and furnished it with lavish wood carvings around 1860. In addition, Yueyong constructed an open space with a well in front of Feng and purchased a large amount of agriculture land and forest around the houses. When Yueyong's family was divided, each of his sons inherited one of the houses, which were then given the names Feng, Ya and Song, from south to north respectively. Each word represented the *fanghao* of one male descendant.³³

Although they have almost identical plans, the houses that comprise Feng-Ya-Song are different in their relation to the landscape and their internal spatial relations, architectural details, and decorative motifs (FIG. 8). For example, it is clear that the builders of Feng, Ya and Song all had to adjust to existing site conditions in locating their courtyards. However, their solutions differed both in terms of accommodating a desired ideal building layout to a nonideal site and in terms

of the extent to which they were able to re-form the landscape. Built between the path and Fangyan Stream, Feng, Ya and Song were all constructed on elevated foundations using the same method employed for the mansion.³⁴ Apart from the shared design of an elevated foundation, however, the perimeters of the three houses differ slightly. The west exterior wall of Ya was built at an angle, which was very likely due to the course of Fangyan Stream at the time of construction. The plan of Song was affected by Fangyan Stream as well, yet to a lesser degree. The builder of Feng, on the other hand, achieved an ideal symmetrical plan, possibly by altering the stream's course, which might be why the stream makes an almost ninety-degree turn at the southwest corner of Feng.

Although the three houses share a common layout — a *mingtang* enclosed by a three-bay main hall on the north, side rooms to the east and west, and a solid wall on the south — their spatial relations and the qualities of their public spaces vary. The first major difference has to do with sky-wells. Ya was built with sky-wells at its northwest and the northeast cor-

ners, forming in plan the same allegoric character, 品, seen in the mansion. According to the current resident, Song was built as the kitchen for Ya, which explains its lack of sky-wells, its austere appearance, and minimum of decoration. Feng, on the other hand, originally included sky-wells, but each of these was later converted to two additional rooms on each level. The additional eight rooms provided critical living space for Zhaogong, Yueyong's oldest son, and his large family.

The second major difference between them lies in the design of their *mingtang*. Ya was designed with a wide covered corridor on all four sides of the *mingtang*, while the other two houses were built with narrow corridors on the north, west and east sides only. In addition, the *mingtang* of Ya was covered by large rectilinear stone slabs with gutters on all sides — the most costly means of paving. The second most expensive method, used in Feng, was to build with gutters framed by stone slabs but with a cobblestone interior. The cheapest way, widely adopted in later houses, was that used in Song, where a cobblestone-paved *mingtang* was combined with a rainspout on each corner. Thus, in comparison to the other two houses, the *mingtang* in Ya appeared to be more grand and spacious. Lastly, the sections of these three houses were similar, except that the roof ridge of Feng was about a half meter lower than that of the two older houses. This height represented a new sectional module, evident also in most of the houses built after Feng (FIG. 9).

A side-by-side comparison of Feng, Ya and Song also reveals changes in architectural details and decorative motifs. Such changes reflected their owners' changing social status and design standards. The builder of Ya adopted the same kind of highly decorative *queti* and elegant curved panels used in the mansion (FIG. 10). As a building feature, the *queti* originated as an important structural member that helped support and stabilize long-span beams, but it gradually lost its structural function and became more decorative when construction techniques reached maturity. The out-reaching curved wood panels on top of the beams were not only elegant but also functional, because they protected the wood members underneath, including the *queti*, from rain. When *queti* were no longer used in buildings, curved wood panels were replaced by simple, straight wood panels, as in Song, Feng, and later houses.

Another unique detail in Ya was the bold engraved *yue-liang* in the main hall, while only plain, rectilinear beams were used in the other two houses. Lastly, although both Ya and Feng were highly decorated, with fine woodcarvings over windows, doors, and some structural members, the styles of decoration were very different. Abstract and classical patterns were largely used for the woodcarvings in Ya. In contrast, figurative motifs with fine details were applied over the doors and windows of Feng, and all its *liangtuo* (another kind of bracket) were covered with complicated urban scenes carved in three dimensions (FIG. 11).³⁵

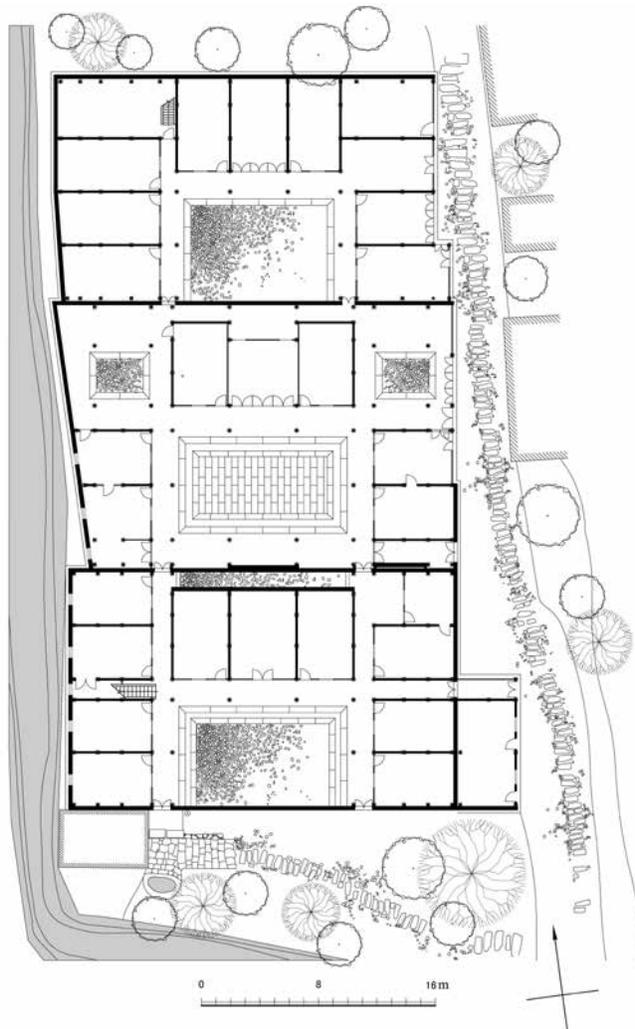


FIGURE 8. First-floor plan of Feng-Ya-Song. Drawing by Na Sun.

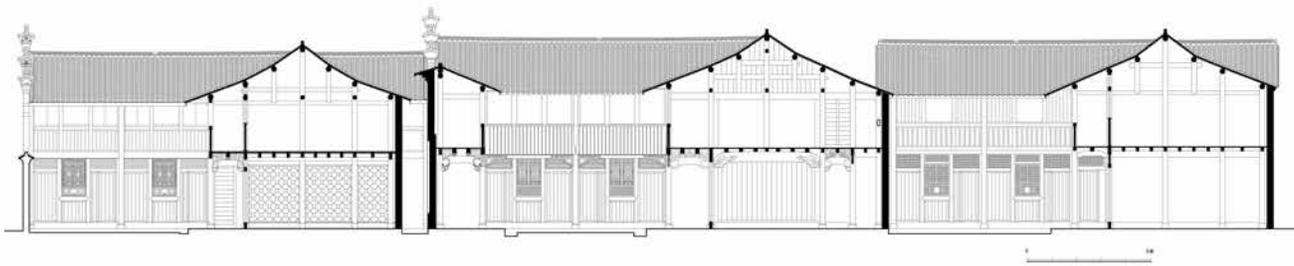


FIGURE 9. North-south section of Feng-Ya-Song. Drawing by Na Sun.

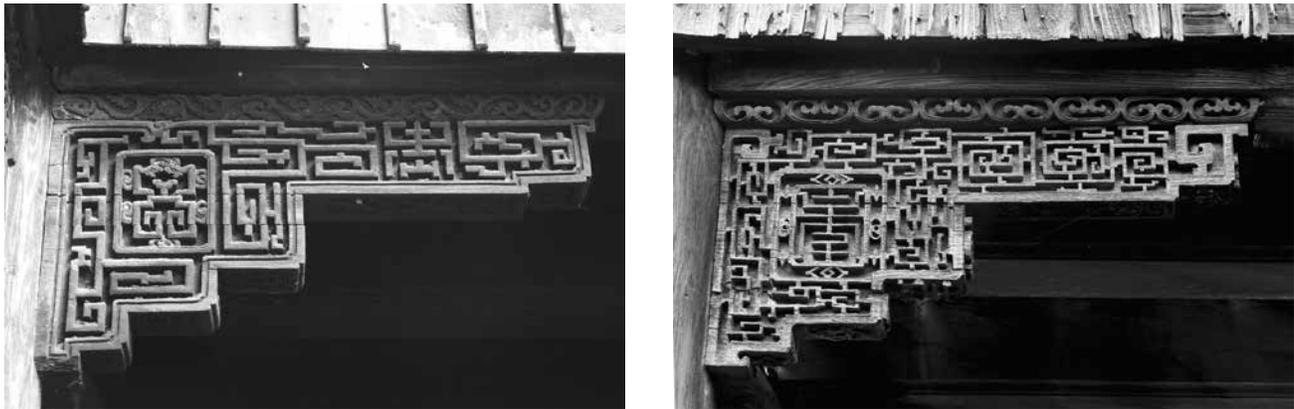


FIGURE 10. The highly decorative qieti and the curved wood panels that reach out to protect it from rain. Photos by author.



FIGURE 11. The woodcarvings on the liangtuo inside the house of Feng. Photo by author.

These subtle differences in public space, architectural details, and decorative motifs are an indication of the financial and social status of the buildings' owners at the time of their construction. More importantly, these changes represent differences in the way people valued the quality and meaning of architectural spaces. During the late eighteenth century when Ya was built, financially and socially well-established owners valued tall, open, spacious and refined *mingtang* with fine stone paving, and they included beautifully engraved *yueliang* inside their main halls since these were spaces where they would greet and entertain guests. The builders of Ya and the mansion also valued a 品-shaped courtyard layout, which they believed would help them get promoted. They further believed that classical and abstract woodcarvings would represent their scholarly background.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, when Song was constructed, a growing local population and a lack of building sites, as well as the introduction of the hotel business in the 1850s, changed these conditions. Financially well-established owners adjusted their preferences to more economic and practical layouts, which allowed them to house a large family or accommodate more hotel guests. Yet these builders also demonstrated their financial and social status by adopting expensive figurative woodcarvings, most of which had allegorical meanings related to bringing good fortune or living a long life. In contrast, simple window patterns were used in the houses built by other Cheng family members living in Yanxia, who were not as financially and socially established as Lichong, Yueyong, or owners of the large hotels (FIG. 12).

Similar to the mansion, Feng, Ya and Song were subsequently divided multiple times among the heirs of Yueyong. But the descendants who are currently living in these houses are still deeply attached to their past family glory. Feng-Ya-Song, once the most glorious housing complex in Yanxia, has



FIGURE 12. A simple window pattern adopted inside another house of Yanxia. Photo by author.

not only provided a shelter for this family, but has also assured its identity for centuries (FIG. 13). One of the descendants still feels a certain sense of ownership toward all three houses and the large property surrounding the houses, even though he only owns two rooms inside Ya and a small piece of the woods next to it. Nevertheless, he proudly announces that all this property belongs to "us," because his family "had everything."



FIGURE 13. Standing by itself, Feng-Ya-Song still provides a strong identity for the family. Photo by author.

SEASONAL FAMILY HOTEL: CHENGCHENGCHANG HOTEL

Although its lot size and layout are similar to those of Feng, Ya and Song, Chengchengchang Hotel is essentially different from them (and other earlier courtyard houses) in terms of spatial relations, allocation of space, and orientation. Changes in these three interrelated architectural qualities allowed a private courtyard house to be successfully transformed into a seasonal family hotel which could also house a proprietor and his family. The revised courtyard house form of Chengchengchang Hotel is similar to that of most other seasonal hotels built along the pilgrim path around the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chengchengchang Hotel was built outside the old village wall, sandwiched between the pilgrim path on the west and Shizi Mountain on the east (REFER TO FIG. 2). Zhaofeng (1855–1928), the great-great-grandson of Lichong, built it and managed it as a seasonal family hotel.³⁶ This building took the form of a two-level courtyard house, with a three-bay main hall, five side rooms on each side, three rear rooms, a kitchen attached to the east side of the courtyard, and an additional kitchen and storage room for seasonal use (FIG. 14). It retains this design to this day.

Three changes in building layout allowed this courtyard house to be operated as a seasonal hotel. First, instead of having a three-sided courtyard layout, Chengchengchang Hotel has a four-sided layout, created through the addition of a row of rear rooms. At ground level these extra rooms are not fronted by a covered corridor, and on the second level they cannot be accessed by the open corridors that connect the other rooms there. It is as if the owner simply used the plan of Ya as a reference, yet covered the corridor on the south and converted it into rooms. Before the construction of the four-sided courtyard house, the main reason for not having living space on the south side of the courtyard was that north-oriented rooms were too cold in winter and too hot in summer. In addition, the absence of rooms here allowed greater freedom in the design of the south elevation of a house, which usually meant construction of a decorative wall-style entrance as a central focus.

The second difference between the hotel and earlier houses lies in the allocation of space. The lot size of Chengchengchang Hotel is about the same as that of Ya, built one hundred years earlier, and it is a little smaller than the first section of the mansion; the *mingtang* of these houses are similar in size as well. However, the original designs of the mansion and Ya only had seven or nine rooms per floor. This num-

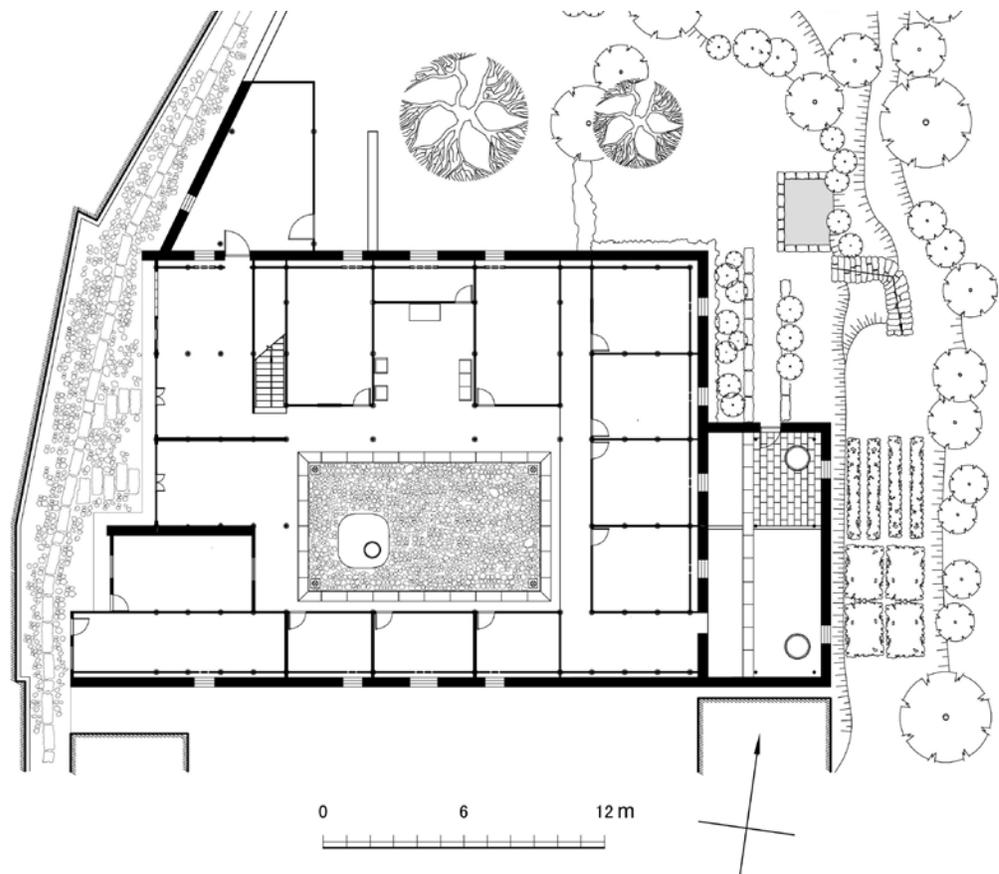


FIGURE 14. First-floor plan of Chengchengchang Hotel. Drawing by Yongming Lin.

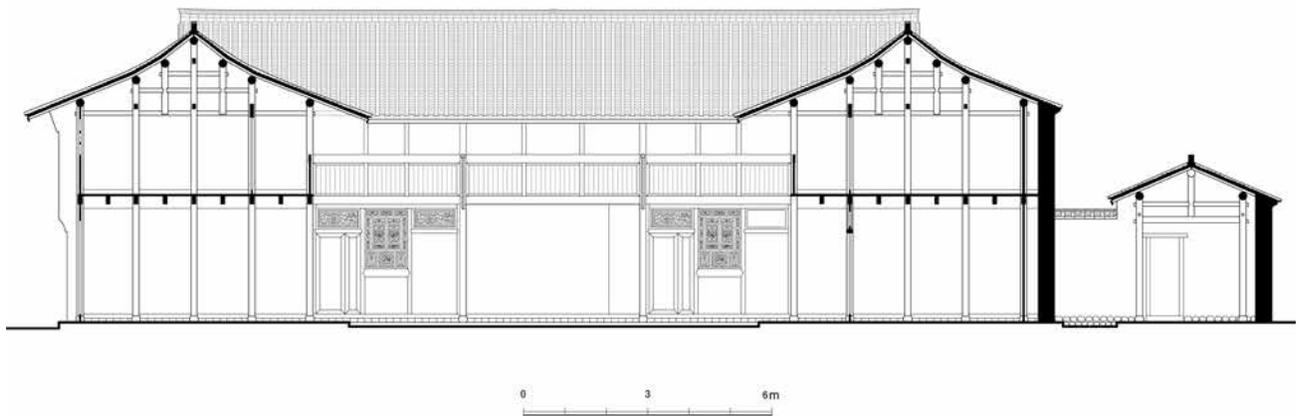


FIGURE 15. East-west section of Chengchengchang Hotel. Drawing by Yongming Lin.

ber could only be increased to eleven or thirteen through the transformation of each sky-well into two rooms per level. By comparison, Chengchengchang Hotel was built to have sixteen rooms per floor. To achieve this, its main hall and side rooms were about one meter shorter in depth than the ones in Ya, and the saved area helped create space for the extra row of rooms. To make another comparison, the houses on the northern side of the Fangyan valley, which were built at the same time but away from the pilgrim path, all continued to use the traditional three-sided courtyard plan. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the driving force for having more, smaller rooms came from the demands of pilgrimage activities.

The third difference between Chengchengchang Hotel and previous buildings is that it was designed not only around a traditional north-south axis, but also around a secondary east-west axis. This second axis runs through the entrance facing the pilgrim path on the west and a service yard outside the main building to the east (FIG. 15). The backyard was built to contain a kitchen, storage area, and toilet for the family.

Overall, the example of Chengchengchang Hotel shows that when a house was built to integrate the function of a seasonal hotel, the design focus shifted from emphasizing comfortable living conditions to accommodating more guests. The design focus also shifted from creating an elegant entrance facing south to providing easy access from the pilgrim path, whether on the east or west side of the house. The hotel was also equipped with additional spaces for seasonal and programmable uses. These small changes successfully allowed a building that was used as a house during most of the year to be transformed into a large hotel during the pilgrimage season. Chengchengchang Hotel could accommodate more than three hundred people per day, most of whom were middle-class and poor pilgrims who were willing to share a hard bed between two people or even sleep in one of the corridors.

The spatial identity within Chengchengchang Hotel was also changed to accommodate this new program. The central bay of the main hall in the houses in Yanxia is called the

shijian. It can be made to open completely onto the *mingtang* when its folding doors are taken down. The *shijian* has been conceived as a multifunctional space — as the living room and dining room for the family, as well as a ceremonial space for weddings, funerals, and ancestral veneration (FIG. 16). But as the public space for Chengchengchang Hotel, the *shijian* also acted as a lobby and reception area, and it could serve as an alternative place to worship the local deity when inclement weather prevented pilgrims from climbing the mountain. The entire open and semi-open space, including the *shijian*, corridors and *mingtang*, also served as a dining hall, theater, and temporary, additional “guest rooms” during peak season. In addition, the side rooms facing the pilgrim path were transformed into shops, with the central bay providing the entrance to the hotel. The two side rooms on the south were built to protrude outward, with the second level of the last bay bridging over the path, forming a well-defined space that



FIGURE 16. Ceremony held inside the *shijian* at the winter solstice. Photo by author.

FIGURE 17. View of the pilgrim path outside Chengchengchang Hotel and the bridge over the path. Photo by author.



served as a stage for migratory performers (FIG. 17). The resulting threshold along an already very narrow path could have provided an effective spatial strategy for encouraging customers to stop at Chengchengchang Hotel instead of the next hotel down the path.

The war with Japan between 1937 and 1945 was another external stimulus that led to modifications to the existing structure. Because of its strategic location and ability to provide office and lodging spaces, the provincial government of Zhejiang province chose to temporarily relocate to the Fangyan valley during those years. At this time not only were rooms in Chengchengchang Hotel rented to officials and their families, but its street-facing shops were converted to house a printing company. To satisfy the requirements of this new high-status, long-term clientele, a series of other changes were also made. These included the addition of a new staircase for safety, exterior windows to improve indoor lighting, and a finished wood floor for moisture proofing.

WESTERN-STYLE HOTELS: CHENGRENCHANG HOTEL'S THIRD ADDITION

The fifth building examined here, Chengrenchang Hotel, was built when the hotel industry in Yanxia reached its peak in the middle of the twentieth century. Constructed explicitly to serve pilgrims, Chengrenchang's third addition (hereafter the addition) was designed explicitly to serve the needs of hotel guests. Demands from wealthy pilgrims and exposure to Western architectural ideas, in this case, were external stimuli that led to changes in the relation and quality of ar-

chitectural space. These changes make the addition unique among all the courtyard houses in Yanxia.

The social context that enabled the construction of the addition was deeply related to the development of the hotel industry, which became mature by the early twentieth century. The development of the hotel industry had been largely driven by competitions between two families.³⁷ These competitors were Yuebiao's four descendants and Yuelai's three sons, who together once owned all the large and grand hotels along the pilgrim path.³⁸ To compete for business, large hotels sent wagons to the nearby town to pick up customers, provided various levels of accommodation and dining packages, offered a free guide service, and arranged entertainment at night. The hotel owners tried on several occasions to set up a guild to regulate services and prevent negative competition, but the agreements they reached through it were repeatedly breached. The heated competition, on the other hand, also facilitated, as well as influenced, the innovation and development of building design.

In 1882 Zhaoye (1869–1926), Yuebiao's third son, left the partnership with his eldest brother (a family business that ran the oldest hotel in Yanxia), and started Chengrenchang Hotel by himself. Within a few decades, Zhaoye's hotel surpassed all those owned by his brothers. In order to match his largest competitor, Hotel Chengzhenxing, owned by Zhaofu (1857–1939), Zhaoye provided private rooms, stylish furniture, and thoughtful services — all aimed at wealthy pilgrims from larger cities like Shanghai and Hangzhou. Zhaoye and his employees also paid yearly visits to their guests to make early arrangements and ensure their return in the next season. During his trips to these large cities, Zhaoye



FIGURE 18. The east elevation of Chengrenchang Hotel's third addition. Drawing by Na Sun and Ge Mao.

must have been exposed to buildings designed according to Western styles and ideologies, which were then preferred by the wealthy merchants and others of high financial and social status.³⁹ In order to please his wealthy guests, Zhaoye brought these avant-garde designs back to his isolated village in the early 1930s and applied them to the construction of a four-story addition (REFER TO FIG. 2). With its completion, Chengrenchang Hotel became the largest, most luxurious hotel in Yanxia, with a capacity of seven hundred guests.⁴⁰

Compared to earlier residential structures in Yanxia, the addition clearly demonstrated the influence of Western ideas. Although these new architectural ideas did not influence traditional construction methods, details, and decorative motifs, they greatly altered the relation between and quality of architectural space. Although the building has today been partially deconstructed, the changes in spatial arrangement are still evident if one examines the remaining two lower levels (FIG. 18).

The first change was one of orientation. The addition abandoned the traditional south-facing orientation and, taking a cue from Western-style buildings, was turned toward the view, which was the pilgrim path on the east (FIG. 19). This new axis was reinforced by the sunken dooryard at the front, the east-facing rooms at each level, and by the corridor at the second level. The end of this axis was further marked by the entrance to the building and a symmetrical staircase behind it.

Western design influences are also apparent if one examines the building in section. The main hall, located on the second level, exhibits the concept of a "*piano nobile*," as established in European residential buildings. Yet, in a hybrid variation, because the first level was sunken below the street, the main hall is also situated at street level (which is the same level as the main halls in other Yanxia houses).

The other major change lies in the design of the railings, which became the most dominant elements on the facade fac-

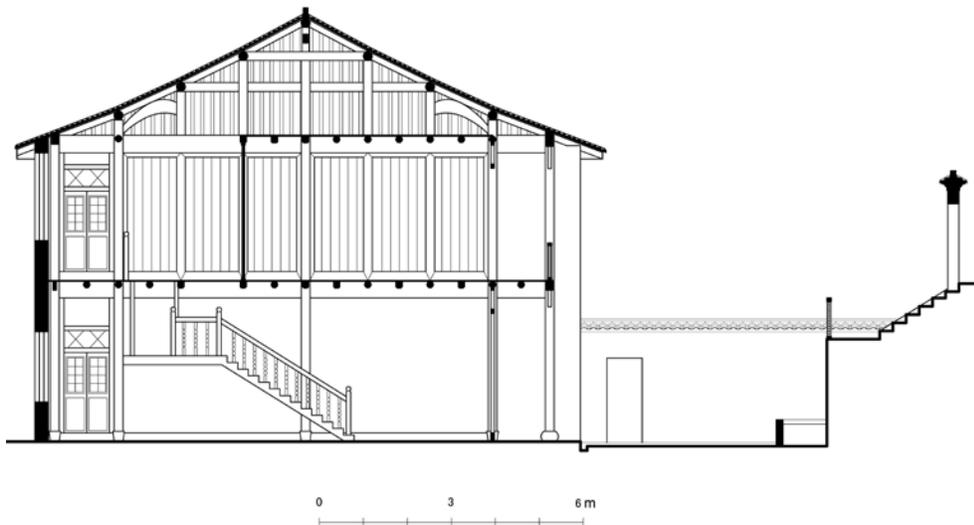


FIGURE 19. East-west section of Chengrenchang Hotel's third addition. Drawing by Na Sun and Ge Mao.

FIGURE 20. *The decorative railing of Chengrenchang Hotel. Photo by author.*



ing the pilgrim path. In other Yanxia houses, second levels were traditionally used for storage; and so the railings there usually took the form of plain, solid wood panels. In Western residential architecture of the time, the higher levels were living spaces where semi-private balconies were popular decorative elements. The surviving railings at the second level of the addition reflect this concern, consisting of 29 highly decorative panels, each with a unique motif (FIG. 20). This semi-private and semi-open space allowed a visual and spatial connection between pilgrims passing by and guests resting on the balcony. This entire composition was a significant departure from a traditional inward-looking building orientation.

BEYOND THE INVARIABLE STYLE: CHANGING ORGANIZATION AND USE

These five residential structures built in Yanxia between the middle of the sixteenth century and the middle of the twentieth century were all courtyard houses constructed in a common style. They were thus characterized by the physical and phenomenological qualities defined by Steinhardt, Liang, Lin and Miao — including the platform, wooden frame, bracketed roof structure, modular composition, axial organization, and four-sided enclosure. This shared *style* was further established through the use of similar materials and design modules, materialized through comparable lot sizes, room dimensions, courtyard sizes, and floor and ceiling heights.

Beyond this seemingly invariable *style*, however, every building was unique in how its architectural spaces were organized and used. In comparing five buildings built by

the Cheng family in Yanxia, it thus becomes apparent that each one is a reconfigured and redefined version of those that came before it. Each also differs from the others in terms of the identity, quality and meaning of spaces. The changes embodied in each structure inevitably reflected changing economic, social and cultural contexts. More importantly, they represented the evolving family structure, cultural values, and social status of the Cheng lineage as whole, as well as of the individual Cheng families who owned each house.

As new immigrants to the village, the social status of the Cheng family first gave rise to a multifunctional protective house for the entire lineage. The established lineage-based settlement then enabled construction of a building complex with interconnected courtyards and agricultural land for a newly wedded couple. The growing village population established the three-sided courtyard house prototype. Increasing pilgrimage activities facilitated the development of the revised courtyard house with the introduction of seasonal programs. And business travel to coastal cities introduced new architectural ideas and Western influences. Finally, each building was carefully situated within the existing landscape and with a controlled change in the layout in comparison with the earlier ones.

During the life of each building, furthermore, a struggle between the lifestyle it was originally designed to accommodate and the new demands of successive generations of residents, as well as from the larger social context, created continuing pressure to redefine the function, meaning and identity of the spaces within. This constant struggle has kept each house alive and evolving, and has facilitated the development of the residential architecture in Yanxia.

REFERENCE NOTES

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17. *Shiyuan Gong Zong Pu [Family Record of Shiyuan Cheng Family]*.
18. For details regarding the making of this almighty god and the history of Guangci Temple, see W. Zhao, "The Man-Made God: Thriving between Buddhism and Daoism, the Almighty God of Hugong Dadi," *The International Journal of the Humanities*, Vol.8 No.9 (2010), pp.107–118.
19. Degeng means "to be able to plough, or be satisfied with plowing." Ju means "house."
20. *Shiyuan Gong Zong Pu*. The life spans of all the members of the Cheng family are based on this document unless otherwise noted.
21. Local residents in discussion with the author, September 2007. The history of Degeng-Ju, the ways in which its spaces were used, and the sociocultural activities that happened inside and adjacent to it are based on the author's observations and discussions with local residents in September and December 2007, July 2008, and February to May 2014, unless otherwise noted.
22. This house currently does not have a name, since it was divided by many families. Some local residents refer to it as the "house of Chenglichong." For the purpose of this study, it is named Chenglichong's Mansion.
23. According to Zhihua Chen, the construction of ancestor halls within a village marks the establishment of a lineage-based settlement. See Chen, *Zongci*, p.2.
24. *Shiyuan Gong Zong Pu*.
25. The wedding registry, as part of the family record, only records male family members' weddings. Therefore, women's weddings can only be located in the family records of the families they married into, and women usually married men outside their own villages. See *Zhoushi Zongpu [Family Record of the Zhou Family]*; *Wenlou Chengshi Zongpu [Family Record of the Cheng Family in Wenloucun]*; *Houshantou Chengshi Zongpu [Family Record of the Cheng Family in Houshantou]*; and *Dusong Chengshi Zongpu [Family Record of the Dusong Cheng Family]*.
26. Local residents in discussion with the author, December 2007. The historic development of the village is based on the construction year of the buildings and discussions with the local residents in September and December 2007 and July 2008, unless otherwise noted.
27. *Shiyuan Gong Zong Pu*.
28. The description of the original layout of Chenglichong's Mansion is based on the author's observation and survey, as well as discussions with local residents in September and December 2007 and July 2008, unless otherwise noted.
29. 品 (pronounced "pin") means the kind of ranking system for public servants.
30. *Yueliang* is the kind of beam that curves downward at both ends and slightly upward in the middle. When used in residential buildings, it is usually only used in the main hall. *Queti* is the name for brackets used beneath beams that span the width of a room or space.
31. *Shiyuan Gong Zong Pu*.
32. Local residents in discussion with the author, March 2014. The history of Feng-Ya-Song is based on discussions with the local residents in September and December 2007, July 2008, and February to May 2014, unless otherwise noted. According to another resident, the courtyard in the middle was built by Lichong in 1797, and Yueyong purchased the house from Lichong's descendants. However, Lichong passed away in 1793, according to the *Family Record of Shiyuan Cheng Family*.
33. In a prestigious family, besides receiving a name, each son is also given a *fanghao*, which means the name of the house. It usually consists of one Chinese character, which can later be used when referring to his family and offspring. Typically, the *fanghao* of all the sons can form a phrase, which has the meaning of prosperity, morality, or loyalty, etc.
34. In comparison, a more economic approach was developed in the early twentieth century. Such was the case of Chengrenchang Hotel's third addition, which was to build the first level at the level of the valley. This afforded the owner an extra level to accommodate a growing family and hotel guests without changing the scale of the building as viewed from the path.
35. *Liangtuo* is the name for brackets used beneath beams that span the depth of a room or space.
36. Descendant of Zhaofeng, the founder of Chengchengchang Hotel, in discussion with the author, September, 2007. The history of Chengchengchang Hotel is based on discussions with descendants of Zhaofeng in September and December 2007 and July 2008, unless otherwise noted.
37. Local residents in discussion with the author, September and December 2007. Description of the history of the two families involved in the hotel business, the competition between the hotel owners, and the rituals of hotel service is based on discussions with local residents in September and December 2007 and July 2008, unless otherwise noted.
38. *Shiyuan Gong Zong Pu*; and *Fangyan Zhinan [Fangyan Guide]* (1925). *Fangyan Guide* was a booklet printed by the local residents of Yanxia.
39. S. Liang, "Why Study Chinese Architecture," W. Yan, trans., *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, No.73 (March 2014), p.8 (originally published in Chinese in 1944).
40. *Yongkang Zhengxie Wenshi Committee, Yongkang Mingdian Mingchang [Noted Shops and Factories in Yongkang]* (Yongkang: 1995), p.102.