

## How are youth living in ageing neighbourhoods? A Case Study in the Central District of Shanghai

Yun Yu<sup>1</sup>, Yi Huang<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tongji University, China

\*Email: huangyi@tongji.edu.cn

### Abstract

With the construction of youth development-oriented cities, the phenomenon of housing/community youthification has emerged in the central districts of mega-cities. Communities in central mega-cities, which used to be mature, tend to have a significant ageing population and have formed their own cultural atmosphere and social relations. The living conditions of young people in these communities need to be studied. Taking Chuangyu 228, a youth-oriented guaranteed rental housing in Yangpu, Shanghai, as an example, the living conditions and satisfaction of young people are surveyed and analysed based on both the supply-side and demand-side perspectives from the physical, social, and cultural dimensions. The research provides empirical evidence of housing/community youthification in Chinese mega-cities and offers insights for optimising youth housing policies and community planning.

### Keywords

youth apartment, youth community, affordable rental housing, youthification, youth-friendly city

### 1 Research Context

#### 1.1 Real-world Context: Construction of Youth Development-oriented Cities and Youth Housing in China

In China, as innovation has become an increasingly important driver of urban development, young talent has also become the mainstay of urban social development. In January 2021, the Chinese government proposed to build youth development-oriented cities, and currently 60% of Chinese cities have proposed to build youth-friendly cities and communities. One of the most important strategies is the provision of youth-oriented affordable rental housing.

Although many youth housing units have been built in the suburbs, a significant proportion of them are located in the city centre in the context of urban renewal. On the one hand, the central urban area attracts young people because of its abundant job opportunities and great amenities. On the other hand, some communities in the central city have been built for a long time and are in urgent need of renewal, which can be seen as the frontiers of gentrification according to Neil Smith's rent gap theory. The government carries out a series of urban regeneration activities to re-invigorate the land's value and the city's vitality, of which the youthification of houses and neighbourhoods is one form.

#### 1.2 Theoretical Context: Youthification Phenomenon in Housing/Communities in China's Mega-City Central Areas

Youthification is the contemporary lifestyle, demography, and socio-economic condition of the young 'playing out in the landscape' (Moos, 2016). From a spatial perspective, youthification

is manifested in the aggregation of the youth population in a given space. From a social perspective, youthification refers to the increase in youth discourse and youth cultural influence. Studies on gentrification often consider youthification as an indicator of gentrification, but Revington et al. (2023) argue that youthification is a different process from gentrification because youth include not only the middle class but also those in ordinary economic conditions. Research on age-based sociospatial differences has not been emphasised. In recent years, although there has been an increase in the literature on youthification, most of the studies explore the settlement patterns of young people at the macro city scale, and there is a lack of studies that explore youth residential characteristics from the micro block scale. At the same time, there is also a lack of empirical support for the possible neighbourhood effects of youthification. On the one hand, youth population aggregation may influence the values and behaviours of other age groups to have the status and qualities that young people have, thus making society more dynamic and creative. On the other hand, it may also lead to age-based spatial segregation and age discrimination (Luo, 2017). As for the mature neighbourhoods in the city centre, they usually have an ageing population and have developed their own cultural atmosphere and social relations. How young people live in these ageing neighbourhoods and whether they can integrate or not need to be examined. In addition, research on youthification based on the Chinese context is a relatively blank area. China's unique political system and economic and social background will further enrich the theory of youthification.

### **1.3 Research Question: Issues of Youth Living Conditions in Youthified Housing and Communities**

Therefore, this study takes the youthification of housing in ageing communities as the research theme. Based on a dual perspective from both the supply side and the demand side, the article examines the living situations of youth from physical, social, and cultural dimensions, investigates the youth's satisfaction with their living conditions, analyses the problems therein, and proposes corresponding strategies. The study provides an empirical case of the phenomenon of youthification of housing from a Chinese megacity and enriches the theory of youthification. It also provides references for optimising youth housing policies and neighbourhood planning.

## **2 Research Design**

### **2.1 Research Subject**

Chuangyu 228, an affordable youth rental apartment within 228 Block is selected as the research subject.

228 Block is located in the Changbai Xincun Subdistrict of Yangpu District, Shanghai. Originally constructed in 1952, it was one of the first batch of "Twenty Thousand Households" worker housing projects in Shanghai, aimed at addressing housing difficulties for industrial workers. However, the "economical and practical" housing built under limited economic conditions at that time could no longer meet contemporary residential needs. From 2016 to 2023, the government carried out an urban renewal project in the 228 Block, constructing 450 sets of affordable rental housing targeted at youth, namely Chuangyu 228. Additionally, a series of community commercial and service facilities were established (Lacime Architects, 2023). As of December 2023, 426 households had moved in, with an occupancy rate of 96%. The residents include young talents from various industries such as the Internet, finance, and entertainment, mainly from nearby areas such as Wujiaochang, B-Link, Changyang Campus, and Fudan Software Park. The traditional worker's new village has been upgraded to the new generation of young achievers' community ecosystem.



Figure 1. Location of Chuangyu 228

The Second Residential Area of Changbai Road, where Chuangyu 228 is located, is a neighbourhood characterised by a significant elderly population. According to data from the Seventh National Population Census of China, in 2020, the proportion of elderly people aged 60 and above in the community was 33 %, with those aged 65 and above accounting for 22%, both higher than the average levels of 24% and 16% in Shanghai. Therefore, Chuangyu 228 serves as a representative case for studying youth housing and community in ageing neighbourhoods.

Table 1. Proportion of Elderly Population

	Aged 60 and Over.	Aged 65 and Over.
Shanghai	24%	16%
Yangpu District	32%	22%
Changbai Xincun Subdistrict	24%	34%
The second Residential Area of Changbai Road	22%	33%

## 2.2 Research Methods

A combination of questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, and on-site surveys is employed by the study to analyse the housing and community characteristics of Chuangyu 228 and the living conditions of its residents. The questionnaire survey is mainly utilised to understand the composition of young residents, the use of community places and facilities, social interaction within the community, and the community identity and residential satisfaction of the youth. In-depth interviews target both the staff of Changbai Xincun Subdistrict, Second Residential Area of Changbai Road, and Shanghai Yangpu Technology & Innovation Group to comprehend the renewal process and management of the Chuangyu 228, and the residents of Chuangyu 228 to achieve a deeper understanding of the questionnaire content. On-site surveys are mainly conducted to understand the housing conditions, distribution, and utilisation of surrounding public service facilities.

## 3 Youth Community Provision

### 3.1 Physical Dimension: Building a Home-Centred Residential Life Circle



#### 3.1.1 Small-Scale, Sophisticated Housing Units

Chuangyu 228 provides small-scale housing units of approximately 40 square meters for young families of 1-2 people. These units possess balconies and private bathrooms and are fully furnished with high-quality wooden furniture (bedside tables, wardrobes, desks, sofas, double beds), and equipped with branded appliances (air conditioning, refrigerators, water heaters, televisions, washing machines, range hoods, induction stoves), as well as modular bathroom

systems and other furniture facilities. Surveys among tenants show that favourable living conditions are a significant factor that attracts them to choose Chuangyu 228 as their residence.

**Table 2. Unit Types of Chuangyu 228**

Source: Promotional materials for Chuangyu 228

Unit type	A	B
Floor Area	35-40 m <sup>2</sup>	40-45m <sup>2</sup>
Floor Plan		



**Figure 2. Interior Rendering of Chuangyu 228**

Source: promotional materials for Chuangyu 228

### 3.1.2 Comprehensive Public Service Facilities

The apartment is located 800 meters from the Yingji Middle Road Station on Metro Line 8. Within a radius of 500 meters, there are 13 bus stops, making transportation extremely convenient. At the same time, through the provision of facilities at the levels of subdistrict, block and apartments simultaneously, a 15-minute community life circle centred around the apartment for young residents has been established.

At the apartment level, relying on the innovation and entrepreneurship resources of Shanghai Yangpu Technology & Innovation Group, the brand "Create+" is implanted into the apartment, providing office workstations, multi-functional halls, meeting rooms, and other shared space carriers, which can carry the functions of office negotiation, book reading, and socialising. A rooftop garden is built on the 12th-floor terrace of the apartment, where public activities such as camping and planting can be carried out. Provide a pet boarding warehouse to provide tenants with pet boarding services. The apartment also provides pet boarding facilities, offering pet boarding services to tenants.



**Figure 3. Key Public Facilities in the apartment**

Source: <https://www.jfdaily.com/sgh/detail?id=1086968>

At the block level, the 228 Block is positioned as a community commercial and service centre during the renewal, focusing on the complementary provision of the original surrounding living service facilities and configured with public facilities such as community canteens, fast-food stores, convenience stores, fresh food supermarkets, and municipal facilities such as public parking lots. In particular, it focuses on the needs of youth groups, introducing cafes, bars, fitness centres, boutique supermarkets and other businesses that attract young people. At the same time, 228 Block merchants offer a series of tenant-oriented discounts so that youth can access convenient, discounted services.

At the subdistrict level, the 15-minute living circle of Chuangyu 228 covers Changbai Xincun and Yanji Xincun Subdistrict. The mature neighbourhoods of the two subdistricts provide convenient basic living service facilities for the young tenants.



**Figure 4. Functional Distribution of 228 BLock**

**Source:** drawn on the image from <https://finance.sina.com.cn/jjxw/2024-01-28/doc-inaezyzi2164839.shtml>

### **3.2 Social Dimension: Implementing Admission Mechanisms to Screen Residents**

Chuangyu 228 offers 450 sets of standardised guaranteed rental apartments targeted at young people. Through entry policies, apartment types, and rental rates, it selects a homogeneous and stable tenant group.

#### **3.2.1 Entry Policies**

Chuangyu 228 is included in Shanghai's guaranteed rental housing management system and adheres to a unified admission system. Applicants are required to fulfil two basic requirements. First, they should be in-service personnel legally employed in Shanghai and their spouses or children. Second, they must not own any property in Shanghai. Alternatively, if the applicants, their spouse, or children own property or lease public housing within the seven central districts of Yangpu, Hongkou, Huangpu, Jing'an, Xuhui, Putuo, Changning, and Pudong New Area (inside the outer ring), the per capita residential floor area should be less than 15 square meters.

#### **3.2.2 Rental Rates**

The apartment rent is paid either with a one-month security deposit and one month's rent upfront or with a one-month security deposit and three months' rent upfront. Different from market-rate apartments, the unit prices for water and electricity are based on the standard rates for residential use. The apartment rent strictly follows the evaluation of relevant municipal departments, with a one-price-per-room policy. Rentals are offered at less than 90% of the evaluated price. For rooms with a floor area ranging from 30 to 45 square meters, the average monthly rent falls within the range of 3200 to 4600 yuan. The rent includes property management fees. Internet access is provided for free.

The lease contract period is typically not less than 1 year and not longer than 3 years. After the lease contract expires, if the occupants still meet the admission criteria after undergoing reevaluation, they may renew the lease. However, if they no longer meet the admission criteria, they should vacate the premises.

As a result, tenants of the apartment are mostly new white-collar workers with stable incomes but shorter working years and limited savings.

### **3.2.3 Unit Types**

The apartment mainly provides one-bedroom units, and occupants must be the lessee themselves, along with their spouses and children. Therefore, the majority of tenants are young singles and married couples without children.

## **3.3 Cultural Dimension: Cultivating a Cultural Atmosphere for the Youth Community**

### **3.3.1 Internal: Community Building**

Chuangyu 228 actively carries out diversified and youthful community activities, such as regularly organising leisure and entertainment activities loved by young people such as board games and script-based role play games, as well as festive and holiday-themed events such as Women's Day Tulip Handicrafts and the Anniversary Carnival. These efforts aim to enrich the tenants' leisure time, foster a sense of community, and enhance young adults' sense of belonging and identity with the apartment's youthful culture.

In addition, spaces like the community service centre and the central lawn within the 228 Block regularly host various events organised by the street and city authorities, such as park fairs, lawn concerts, outdoor movie screenings, and community health clinics. These events encourage the young residents living in the apartment to participate.

### **3.3.2 External: Activity Constraint**

Chuangyu 228 is a centralised living space for youth and is located in the northwest corner of the site. The spatial isolation from other residential buildings somewhat limits the interaction of youth with other age groups. Also, the tenants' social behaviour is subject to certain constraints by the leasing regulations established by the apartment. For example, Chuangyu 228, being a tightly managed gated apartment, is equipped with a facial recognition access system, allowing only residents to enter. Visitors are required to register at the lobby and are not allowed to stay overnight. It has been shown that gated management can provide tenants with discreet and secure private spaces, but may also reinforce the segregation of residents from other members of the community (Roitman, 2005; Wu, 2005).

## **4 Youth Community Living**

### **4.1 Physical Dimension**

#### **4.1.1 Commuting**

##### **(1) Mainly Public Transit**

Young tenants of Chuangyu 228 mainly commute by a combination of "walking/cycling + subway" and "walking + bus". The subway and cycling were the most popular modes of travel, both chosen by more than half of the respondents. Walking and buses were also chosen by about 30% each. In contrast, cabs and private cars were chosen by a lower percentage. This reflects the accessibility of public transportation around Chuangyu 228.

##### **(2) Mainly Short Commutes**

Overall, the daily commuting time of young tenants is relatively suitable, and the balance between work and residence is relatively good. The survey shows that 82% of the respondents have a one-way commuting time of less than half an hour. Among them, 55% of people have a one-way commute time between 15 and 30 minutes, while 27% have a one-way commute time

of less than 15 minutes. 18% of people have a one-way commuting time of between 30 and 45 minutes, which is relatively low. No one has a one-way commute time exceeding 45 minutes.

#### **4.1.2 Use Frequency of Places and Facilities**

##### **(1) Within apartments: low use frequency of places and facilities**

The results of the questionnaire show that the intelligent boarding kennel, VIP reception room, and shared meeting room are hardly being used. While some users opted for "at least once a week" or "at least once every two weeks" for the shared hall and rooftop garden, the majority still chose "less than once a month," at 64% and 73%, respectively. Apartment managers need to adapt and optimise the function and orientation of their facilities to better meet the needs of their residents. Apartment managers need to adapt and optimise the function and positioning of these facilities to better meet the needs of their residents.

##### **(2) Inside the 228 Block: high variation in use frequency of places and facilities**

According to the survey results, residents exhibit varying frequencies of use across different types of life service facilities and places within the 228 Block. Tenants most often use bars, cafes, milk tea stores and other space facilities that provide beverage vending and third-place functions, and more than 80% of tenants use them at least once a week. The use frequency of activity places and facilities, including outdoor public spaces (such as central lawn, small squares, vacant lots, etc.), and the 228 Sports and Health Centre, is also relatively high, with over 45% of tenants using them at least once a week. There are differences in the use frequency of dining facilities. Commercial snack shops, fast food restaurants, and branded dining establishments have higher use frequencies, with most people using them once every two weeks to once a week. However, nonprofit community canteens, which are popular among the elderly, are not very popular among young people, with most people using them once a month. In terms of shopping facilities, branded supermarkets and ordinary convenience stores have similar use frequencies, with most people using them once every two weeks to once a week. Other convenient commercial facilities, such as hair salons, eyewear stores, and nail salons, have lower use frequencies, with 64% of respondents using them once a month or less. The use frequencies of service facilities (community public health service station, community party service centre, union service station, etc.) and children's facilities are also low, indicating that the tenants of Chuangyu 228 are not the primary service clientele for these two types of facilities.

##### **(3) Outside the 228 Block: low use frequency of places and facilities**

Similarly, young residents exhibit relatively low use frequencies for external life service facilities and places. Among these, dining facilities (such as restaurants, cafes, beverage shops), shopping facilities (such as convenience stores and markets), and public spaces (such as parks, squares, fitness trails) have relatively high use frequencies, with over 46% of tenants using them at least once a week. Furthermore, leisure facilities (such as KTVs, bookstores, cinemas) also have relatively high use frequencies, with 36% of residents using them at least once every two weeks. The use frequencies of community cultural activity facilities (community cultural activity centres, cultural activity rooms) and medical facilities (hospitals, community public health service centres, and public health service stations) are relatively low. Specifically, 36% of tenants use these facilities at least once a month. The lowest use frequencies are observed for employment facilities and parent-child facilities, with less than 10% of tenants using them at least once a month.

#### **4.1.3 Usage Hours of Places and Facilities**

##### **(1) Weekdays: usage hours tend to concentrate**

The majority of respondents indicated that the most common period for using public service facilities and places is from 18:00 to 22:00 after work. Additionally, approximately 30% of respondents selected 14:00 to 18:00, while 20% opted for 8:00 to 11:00.

**(2) Weekends: usage hours tend to disperse**

The usage time of facilities and places on weekends is concentrated primarily in the noon and afternoon periods. In the survey, the highest proportion, 64%, selected the time range from 12:00 to 18:00. Following that, 55% of respondents selected the time range from 11:00 to 14:00. The third most popular option was "18:00-22:00," selected by 46% of respondents.

**4.2 Social dimension**

**4.2.1 Resident Population**

**(1) Mainly highly educated single youth or young couples**

The surveyed population all have a bachelor's degree or higher, with over 80% of respondents aged between 25 and 30, indicating that the majority are university graduates of about five years. Most of the respondents live alone, accounting for approximately 64%, followed by living with a spouse, with very few living with children. Overall, the residents of Chuangyu 228 are mostly single young adults or young couples aged 20 to 35, with an annual income of over 100,000 yuan and holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

**(2) Mainly transitional living**

The surveyed population is comprised of individuals with bachelor's degrees or higher. Over eighty per cent of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 30, indicating that the majority are university graduates who have been out of school for approximately five years. Most respondents live alone, accounting for approximately 64%, followed by those who live with a spouse, with very few living with children. In summary, the residents of Chuangyu 228 are mostly young singles or couples aged 20 to 35, with an annual income of over 100,000 yuan and a bachelor's degree or higher.

**4.2.2 Neighborhood Interactions**

**Low frequency and shallow levels.**

The study investigates the frequency of interaction between tenants and other residents in the community, including "greeting each other when meeting," "visiting or engaging in activities together," and "engaging in deep conversations or discussing intimate topics." The results show that the majority of respondents rarely engage in these three types of interactions. The percentages reached for each of the three interactions were 55%, 73%, and 82%, respectively. This indicates that young tenants at Chuangyu 228 tend to be conservative and cautious in their social interactions, with a lack of deeper connections.

**4.2.3 Activity Participation**

**(1) Low participation in all types of activities**

The study examined tenants' participation and willingness to participate in volunteer activities, community cultural activities, and interest-based clubs or groups. In general, residents exhibit low levels of involvement in all three types of activities. The results indicate that a negligible proportion of respondents participate in volunteer service activities, with only 19% having experience in interest-based clubs or groups. The number of individuals who participate in community cultural events is the highest, yet still less than 30%.

**(2) Differential willingness to participate in various types of activities.**

The proportion of individuals willing to participate in community cultural activities and interest-based clubs or groups is relatively high (over 45%), whereas the proportion willing to participate in volunteer service activities is low (9%).

### **4.3 Cultural Dimension**

#### **4.3.1 Perception of Community Boundary**

Young tenants of Chuangyu 228 perceive the boundary of the community mainly based on their own daily activities, with less overlap with the boundary of community management. The majority of respondents (82%) perceive the boundary of the community to be that of 228 Block, while a smaller proportion (18%) view the boundary of the community as that of apartments. The area of Changbai Xincun Subdistrict and the area of the Second Residential Area of Changbai Road are not included in the youth's perception of the community.

#### **4.3.2 Perception of Community Function**

The function of 228 Block as perceived by the young tenants of Chuangyu 228 is firstly a place for leisure and entertainment, with a score of 3.18. Secondly, it is a place for consumption and shopping, with a score of 2.64 points. The third and final category is that of a place for community interaction, with a score of 2.36. Finally, it is a place for history and culture, with a score of 1.82.

#### **4.3.3 Identity of Community Culture**

The survey of young tenants of Chuangyu 228 reveals a low level of identification with the original culture of the community. Over half (55%) indicate that they know little or nothing about the history and culture of the 228 Block, while only a small proportion (18%) demonstrate a more extensive knowledge of it.

#### **4.3.4 Sense of Community Belonging**

The majority of young tenants (55%) surveyed exhibit a strong sense of belonging to their community. However, a notable proportion (36%) express uncertainty about their sense of belonging, while a smaller group (9%) report a "weak sense of belonging." No respondents indicate a lack of belonging or a strong sense of belonging.

### **5 Youth Residential Satisfaction**

#### **5.1 Overall Satisfaction**

The survey indicates that the majority of Chuangyu 228 residents are either relatively or very satisfied with their living situation, representing over 90% of the total.

#### **5.2 advantages of Living**

Better housing conditions and more complete community service facilities are the main advantages of living in Chuanyu 228, recognised by over 75% of respondents. This demonstrates the importance young people place on housing and community hardware facilities. Three potential advantages of Chuanyu 228, including better value for money, easier commuting, and closer proximity to commercial centres, are also recognised by over 30% of respondents. In contrast, the option of having more peers only received 11.11% agreement, indicating that this does not seem to be a major factor influencing young people's housing choices.

#### **5.3 Youth Development Support**

##### **(1) Primary support for basic living**

The support in "meeting housing needs" and "providing diverse and convenient daily life services and facilities" is universally recognised by respondents, with over 70% of individuals considering the help "very significant" or "quite significant".

**(2) More support for leisure and culture**

The support in "obtaining rest and relaxation, maintaining physical and mental health" and "enriching spiritual and cultural life, showcasing cultural personality" receives considerable recognition, with over half considering the help "very significant" or "quite significant".

**(3) Less support for socialisation and skill enhancement**

The support in "expanding social circles, improving social skills," "acquiring life skills, enhancing social adaptability," and "providing opportunities to participate in public affairs, enhancing urban integration" is acknowledged by some respondents, with approximately 10% choosing "very significant" or "quite significant" help for each of the three aspects.

**(4) Least support for work and family-related matters**

In terms of "increasing employment opportunities, improving work efficiency, and obtaining economic benefits" and "providing elderly care and childcare services, sharing family care responsibilities," respondents' satisfaction is relatively low, with over half considering the help "very little" or "quite little". This result may be related to the residents' relatively stable employment and the minimal pressures of elderly care and childcare within their life cycle.

**6 Conclusion**

**6.1 Boundaries between Young and Old Individuals' Lives are Clear.**

There are notable contrasts between younger and older individuals in their utilisation of community facilities and space. In terms of temporal patterns, younger individuals tend to utilise community facilities in the evenings or on weekends, while older individuals are more active during the day. In terms of spatial preferences, younger individuals prioritise freedom and privacy, as well as consumer-oriented facilities, while older individuals tend to prioritise public outdoor spaces and facilities for public welfare. The young and the old share space and facilities to a certain extent, but they have few and shallow communications and are isolated from each other in terms of social relations. It can be seen that, as a form of housing supply for young people, concentrated rental housing aimed at young people inserted into communities has a limited short-term impact on the original spatial social structure.

**6.2 Neighborhood Interactions Insufficiently Predict Youth Community Identity.**

It is generally believed that positive interactions between neighbours can contribute to the formation of a sense of community identity. However, the findings of this study indicate that, despite a reduction in the frequency of interactions among young people in their neighbourhoods, their sense of community identity remains high. The reason lies in the pursuit of high living quality and the emphasis on privacy among young residents of Chuangyu 228. They collectively establish boundaries to maintain their personal daily life domains. By creating aesthetically pleasing and comfortable living environments, and enhancing the quality of life, they turn the community into a shared living space. This result reminds planners to reconceptualise the community lifestyle of youth. The creation of free, private and personalised spaces may be more important in youth housing construction and youth community planning.

**6.3 Residential Expectations Influence Residential Satisfaction.**

Due to housing size and residency rules, the majority of tenants in Chuangyu 228 are young, unmarried and living alone, viewing it primarily as a temporary residence. They predominantly

perceive it as a place to meet basic life needs, rather than fulfilling deeper needs such as skill acquirement or expanding social circles. Consequently, despite the community's inadequate support in these aspects, overall residential satisfaction among young residents remains relatively high. For youth housing and community planning, it is essential to enhance infrastructure and service levels to meet residents' basic life needs maximally. Additionally, providing diverse and flexible housing options and fostering a rich, vibrant community environment is crucial.

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