Formal and Informal Planning-Dominated Urban Village Development: A Comparative Study of Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou in Hangzhou, China

Yue Wu 1,2,3,* and Yi Zhang 1

1 Department of Architecture, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310058, China; yiwu100@zju.edu.cn
2 International Center for Architecture & Urban Development Studies, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310058, China
3 China Institute for New Urbanization Studies, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou 310058, China
* Correspondence: ywu100@zju.edu.cn

Abstract: Urban villages, namely villages encircled by urban environments, are unique phenomena that proliferated during China’s rapid urbanization process, as well as important development issues for many Chinese cities at present. This article focuses on two planning approaches for urban villages, dominated by the government’s uniform and formal planning and villagers’ spontaneous and informal planning practices, aiming to examine which planning approach is more conducive to urban village development. The two planning approaches for urban villages have simultaneously appeared in Hangzhou, a Chinese metropolis with a combination of high-speed economic growth, a unique geological environment, and a long cultural history, providing appropriate comparative study cases for this research. Two urban villages, Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou, located in plain and hilly areas in Hangzhou, respectively, and developed through the two planning approaches were selected as study cases. Primary data were collected based on field investigations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaire surveys. The villagers’ rental income, shopkeepers’ business benefits, and tenants’ residential satisfaction were investigated to compare the development of the two urban villages. Results indicate that compared with the formal planning-dominated approach, the informal planning-dominated approach achieves continuously rising rental income, more stable business benefits, and higher residential satisfaction, better suited to urban village development. This study contributes to coordinated urban–rural interaction in the urbanization process and enriches the formality–informality debates from a spatial planning perspective.

Keywords: urban village; formal planning; informal planning; urbanization; Hangzhou

1. Introduction

China’s rapid urbanization has led to a unique phenomenon, namely urban villages. They were previously traditional villages and mainly depended on agricultural production. Over time, these villages lost their agricultural lands and became engulfed by China’s rapidly growing cities. Although located in urban areas, these rural settlements exhibit distinct characteristics from their surrounding environments in terms of economics, population composition, administrative system, living style, and built environment, becoming “islands” in the city [1].

As an important part of China’s urbanization process, the development issues of urban villages and their planning approaches have drawn considerable attention from researchers, policymakers, and planners [2–5]. Most scholars believe that urban villages provide space and time for landless farmers to adapt to the new lifestyles in cities [4,6]. They also provide low-cost accommodation, basic services, and opportunities to run small businesses for large numbers of migrants [7,8], playing a positive role to certain degrees during the rapid urbanization period. Nonetheless, in the new stage of urbanization emphasizing high-quality
development, urban villages are facing numerous development challenges including insufficient infrastructure, unsatisfactory living conditions, and inefficient use of land, and new planning approaches are needed to address these issues in urban villages. For decades, the majority of planning approaches for urban villages have been based on a government-led “demolition–redevelopment” model [9,10], in which the original settlements of these villages are bulldozed and local villagers are then relocated to new residential areas uniformly planned by governments, developers, or village committees [11,12]. This type of planning approach aims to improve infrastructural and living environments in urban villages and advance land-use efficiency and economic development by redistributing land and spatial resources [13]. However, in recent years, some “demolition–redevelopment” projects have encountered problems of excessively high cost and long project cycles [14,15]. Some have even not gone beyond the initial study stage due to severe conflicts of interest among different stakeholders [9]. Moreover, some redevelopment projects overlooked the basic benefits and needs of shopkeepers and tenants in urban villages, resulting in new urban issues including inadequate affordable housing, exacerbated job–housing contradictions, and the outflow of migrant workers from cities [16–18]. Furthermore, the “demolition–redevelopment” mode in pursuit of modernist city images is considered to have damaged the local culture and ecological integrity in rural urban areas, increasingly destroying the ecological, sociocultural, and historic urban fabric of Chinese cities [19–21]. As a result, the existing planning approaches for urban villages are no longer cost-effective or suitable for urban village development demands, and new planning approaches are urgently required to improve urban village development at this time.

In Hangzhou, China, two types of planning approaches for urban villages have simultaneously appeared in the rapid urbanization process. One is dominated by the government’s uniform planning, while the other is dominated by local villagers’ spontaneous planning practices. Hangzhou is a metropolis in the south of the Yangtze River Delta that exhibits a combination of high-speed economic growth, a unique geological environment, and a long cultural history. In the past 40 years, Hangzhou has experienced rapid urbanization, with the built-up area of the main city increasing by more than five times, resulting in the emergence and proliferation of 246 urban villages (Figures 1–3). Hangzhou displays a distinctive topography with hilly and plain terrains coexisting in the main city. Thus, when compared with the development of urban villages in other plain cities, the development of urban villages in Hangzhou main city demonstrates both universality and particularity. On the one hand, plain areas are suitable for rapid urban expansion with relatively low costs. The local government leads the process of land expropriation, rural settlement demolition, new residential area relocation, and uniform planning for urban villages located in the plain areas in Hangzhou main city [22,23], similar to the development process of urban villages located in other plain cities. On the other hand, hilly areas are improper for large-scale construction because of the relatively high cost for land development. The local government normally bypasses the villages located in these hilly areas, leaving land development and housing construction to local villagers themselves. Consequently, the development of urban villages located in plain and hilly areas in Hangzhou main city is dominated by the government’s uniform planning and local villagers’ spontaneous planning practices, respectively, providing appropriate comparative study cases for this research.
From the perspective of formality and informality, this article proposes an analytical framework of the relationships between the government’s uniform planning and local villagers’ spontaneous planning practices in the development of urban villages. Local
governments typically lead uniform planning in a top-down, formal manner through a set of laws, governmental rules, and regulations, referred to as formal planning, whereas local villagers mostly engage in spontaneous planning practices based on informal institutions, social networks, and trust, referred to as informal planning [24–26]. This article thus focuses on formal and informal-dominated planning approaches. Two urban villages located in the plain and terrain areas in Hangzhou that were developed through the above two planning approaches were selected as representative study cases for comparative analysis to determine which planning approach is more conducive for urban village development. Since variations exist concerning spatial planning practices across different cities, this research does not aim to provide a paradigm model for Chinese urban villages. Instead, it seeks to understand the different roles played by formal and informal planning in the process of urban village development.

2. Debates of Formality–Informality: From Categories of Territory or Labor to Forms of Urban Practice

Early studies on urban informality mainly focused on the informal economy, labor, and informal settlements and often viewed the relationship between formality and informality as dichotomous [27–31]. Since the 20th Century, many scholars have questioned this perception, arguing that treating formality and informality as dichotomous may generate problematic corollary propositions [32], such as equating informality with poverty and taking it to be territorial (e.g., the “informal communities”) or a specific group (e.g., informal labor) while assuming formality to be the office of state, formal labor, and so on [33]. Informality is not exclusive to the poor, and there is no specific spatial template for formal and informal activities [32,33]. Moreover, informality is not entirely outside the jurisdiction of the state and government, but the categories of formality and informality are often designated by the state as a governmental tool [34,35]. Based on the discussions of the relationship between the state and informal practices, Roy and AlSayyad [36] introduced the concept of “urban informality” and defined it as a state of deregulation and an organizational logic. It is able to connect different economies and spaces to one another and appears as a negotiable value [32]. Informality is now widely recognized as a dynamic and adaptable urban practice [37,38] that functions productively in developing sustainable cities through contributing to long-term economic growth, social equity, protection and supply of environmental resources, and inheritance of neighborhoods’ cultures and heritages [39,40]. Formality and informality are no longer perceived as dichotomous. Instead, they are dialectically related and inter-reliant, usually described as a continuum [32,37,41,42], where formality and informality may be mutually enhancing at best and mutually corrupting at worst [43].

In recent years, more scholars have taken the formality–informality relationship as a starting point to analyze complex urban conditions [44]. They conducted empirical studies to explore how formality and informality interact with each other and how these interactions may serve as positive resources, configurations, or practices in the process of urban development [26] and improve socioeconomic development. For example, Schroder and Waibel [45] conducted a case study on the development of Guangzhou Science City in China and found that interaction-based informality could be a tool of flexibility as well as of experimental policies attracting knowledge-intensive industries and a better-educated workforce, contributing to economic restructuring and structural upgrading. Mbaye and Dinardi [46] investigated cultural governance in two cities, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Dakar, Senegal, and argued that integrating grassroots cultures and their spatial practices into formal institutions helps mitigate spatial and social segregation to some extent. Meijer and Syssner [24] analyzed different patterns of linking social capital generated by the interactions between non-governmental and governmental planning agents to explore development strategies for depopulating areas. Altrock [41] further distinguishes two different functions of informality with different forms of social interactions between formal and informal sectors. In summary, the focus of the research concerning formality
and informality has shifted from certain laborers or territories under somewhat static categorizations to the interactions between formal and informal sectors as well as their dynamic urban practices.

The Chinese urban village, a special phenomenon generated against the background of the urban–rural dual system, is one of the important fields of research on formality and informality. Existing studies have investigated the sources of informality in urban villages, namely dual land ownership and management systems, informal service provision, and marginal status of village governance [5,9,47]. In the Chinese urban–rural dual system, urban land is owned by the state and developed by local governments. Rural land is owned by village collectives and can be converted into state-owned land through land requisition for urban construction [9]. To realize rapid urban expansion while avoiding large amounts of land requisition compensation and social burden, local governments only requisition agricultural lands while bypassing these rural settlements or returning the land designated for housing to village collectives [4,48]. These settlements maintain collective ownership of land and receive no public services provided by local governments. Meanwhile, since local villagers are not required to pay for a land leasing fee for development, the cost and rent of villagers’ housing are relatively low, making it desirable to migrants who cannot afford high rents in commercial apartments [48]. To obtain more rental income and maximize the volume of floor space, local villagers build a large number of illegal constructions with relatively lax land management by village collectives, gradually forming extremely high-density spatial patterns and distinctive landscapes such as “kissing buildings” in urban villages [4]. A large amount of literature reveals that urban villages satisfy the real needs of local villagers and migrants to a certain degree, thereby playing a positive role in the rapid urbanization period and alleviating some pressures on local governments. First, urban villages provide basic living security and social welfare by generating profits through household and collective land resources for local villagers, who now rely on rental income rather than agriculture as before [48,49]. Second, urban villages are able to provide low-cost accommodation and convenient living environments for migrant workers to settle in the city [4]. Furthermore, small shops spontaneously formed in urban villages offer opportunities for migrants to start businesses and employment [9,50]. However, despite their positive roles in the rapid urbanization period, more studies consider urban villages as transitional communities that will eventually be demolished [51]. In these studies, urban villages are usually conceived as informal communities that should be replaced with formal urban communities for local governments because of the insufficient infrastructures, chaotic land use, and limited open spaces in urban villages, creating a breeding ground for health issues, fire hazards, and crime [52]. Less research considers the phenomena of urban villages as long-term and dynamic urban practices where formal and informal sectors interact with each other and sustainable development outcomes can be achieved. Among a few studies, Wu et al. [10] compared three urban villages in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou and discovered that differences in the relationships between the state, capital, land, and villagers lead to various development outcomes of urban villages in different cities. Schoon and Altrock [53] introduced the notion of “concede informality” and summarized several governance strategies toward informality with different implementation results in the urban villages of the Chinese Pearl River Delta (PRD). Gan et al. [14] investigated how the government strategically makes use of informality and interacts with the market and local villagers on tenure legalization to fulfill the demands of urban development at different phases. Zhang [54] studied the development of Gaobeidian in Beijing and discovered a continuing formalization of coordination and increasing cooperation between the government, village collectives, and villagers. Zhang claims that villagers and collectives are able to seize opportunities and mitigate undesirable effects in a moment of dynamic change. The above studies reveal different interactions between various stakeholders and their impacts on urban village development, indicating that formality and informality are not mutually exclusive, and good cooperation between them may effectively improve urban village development. However, all of the above research analyzes the interactions between formality
and informality in the development of urban villages from the perspective of governance mechanisms, but none has analyzed the issue from a spatial planning perspective, partly because the indigenous spatial patterns of urban villages in a majority of Chinese cities are being or have been erased and replaced with normal urban spaces during the urban expansion process or in redevelopment programs commonly implemented through formal planning approaches, making it hard to conduct long-term investigations concerning interactions between formal and informal planning practices.

In summary, the current research on formality and informality has increasingly focused on the interactions between formal and informal sectors and their influences on urban development. However, research on Chinese urban villages, an important part of studies on formality–informality, has rarely addressed the interactions between formal and informal sectors in the development process of urban villages. Additionally, this topic has not been explored from the perspective of spatial planning. Furthermore, existing research suggests that urban villages function well in providing certain rental income for local villagers, as well as offering opportunities to start small businesses and to work, and suitable accommodation for migrants, exerting a certain degree of positive force during rapid urbanization periods. However, more scholars consider urban villages as transitional communities and focus on state-initiated planning approaches in which villages are demolished and rebuilt, rather than other planning approaches that reserve urban villages for sustainable development. Therefore, this paper focuses on the interactions between formal and informal (spatial) planning in the development of urban villages, with a concentration on two planning approaches: formal planning-dominated and informal planning-dominated approaches. By long-term observation and analyzing the rental income of local villagers, business benefits of shopkeepers, and residential satisfaction of tenants, this article aims to compare the development of urban villages with the two planning approaches and discuss which approach is more conducive to urban village development.

3. Study Area and Methods

3.1. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of this study is shown in Figure 4. First, based on a field investigation, document analysis, and literature review, the planning and construction process of the two urban villages and the interactions between local governments, village committees, and local villagers are analyzed. Then, this article compares the rental income of local villagers, business benefits of shopkeepers, and residential satisfaction of tenants to compare the development of urban villages with the two planning approaches. The rental income of local villagers in the two urban villages is investigated by analyzing the variations in housing rent and calculating the growth rate of housing rent in the two urban villages. Additionally, the business benefits of shopkeepers in the two urban villages are compared by examining changes in business patterns and calculating the changing frequency of the businesses in the two urban villages. A higher changing frequency of business indicates a less stable business benefit. Moreover, the residential satisfaction of tenants reflects the matching degree between the living environment of urban villages and the living demands of tenants [55]. Higher residential satisfaction indicates a greater degree of congruence between actual and desired conditions [56] for tenants, as well as a higher degree of attractiveness of urban villages to the tenants. This research investigates the residency status of tenants and calculates the percentage of tenants satisfied with residential and neighborhood conditions to compare the residential satisfaction of tenants in the two urban villages. Finally, this article compares the spatial patterns of the two urban villages and discusses how formal and informal planning influence urban village development, as well as a new planning approach that is more conducive to urban village development at this time.
3.2. Study Area

Two urban villages in Hangzhou, China, namely Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou, were selected as study cases. The two urban villages were chosen for the following reasons: First, the two urban villages are both located in Xihu District in Hangzhou (Figure 5). They are governed by the same district government that led their renovation projects in 2016. Second, both urban villages have been providing affordable housing and street-side shops for migrants from approximately 2000 to the present, and they are at similar development stages. Third, the two urban villages are located in plain and hilly areas (Figure 6) and are developed mainly through formal and informal planning. The locations and basic information about the two urban villages are shown in Table 1.
Figure 6. Topography of Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou.

Table 1. The locations and basic information of the two urban villages.

|                  | Luojiazhuang                                | Yangjiapailou               |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Planning approach| Formal planning-dominated                   | Informal planning-dominated |
| Location         | Wenxin Subdistrict, Xihu District, Hangzhou | Liuxia Subdistrict, Xihu District, Hangzhou |
| Distance from the nearest CBD | 7 km                                    | 9.5 km                      |
| Population proportion of local villagers to migrants | 1:6                                      | 1:7                         |

3.3. Data Collection and Methods

This research obtained first-hand data mainly through field investigation, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaire surveys. It acquired open data from governmental and nongovernmental open platforms. The detailed data collection process is shown in Table 2. First, based on a field investigation, document analysis, and literature review, the planning approaches of the two urban villages were analyzed. Then, semi-structured interviews in the two urban villages were conducted in August 2020 with 2 leaders of the village collectives and 10 local villagers. The interviews covered topics on the development and redevelopment processes, the main village industries, indigenous cultures and customs, and challenges in future development. Two on-site questionnaire surveys were conducted with tenants and shopkeepers from September to November 2020. Questionnaire surveys
on tenants regarding residential satisfaction were conducted using random sampling. A total of 199 effective questionnaires were collected (effective rate: 97.07%) with a share of 117 for Luojiazhuang and 82 for Yangjiapailou. The questionnaire collected basic information about the respondents’ socioeconomic characteristics, residency status, and subjective evaluation of living in urban villages. Specifically, basic socioeconomic information included respondents’ native place, age, household income per month, level of education, and occupation. Information on residency status includes mode of residence and length of stay. Residential satisfaction was assessed by four questions concerning living conditions, sense of safety, neighborhood interaction, and subjective well-being. Respondents’ reflections were measured using Likert scales, with numbers from 1 to 5 representing “strongly disagree”, “moderately disagree”, “neither agree nor disagree”, “moderately agree”, and “strongly agree”. The average of the four scores was defined as the tenants’ residential satisfaction. An independent t-test was then performed with SPSS 24.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA) for Windows to examine the difference in residential satisfaction between the two urban villages. The level of significance test was 5%. We also compared the tenants’ residential satisfaction across different population groups of the two urban villages. Another questionnaire survey was conducted to collect information about the street-side shops in the two urban villages including business type, business duration, and rent price. A total of 150 questionnaires (effective rate: 97.07%) were collected with a share of 80 in Luojiazhuang and 70 for Yangjiapailou. The average levels of the business duration and changing frequency (the reciprocal of the average level of business duration) of side-street shops in Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou were calculated to compare the stability of the business benefits in the two urban villages. Moreover, housing rents of the urban villages and housing prices of their surrounding apartments during the last two decades were collected from the “National house price market platform” (https://www.creprice.cn/, accessed on 11 January 2021). To analyze the fluctuations in local villagers’ rental income, the annual growth rates of rental levels were calculated as follows:

$$x = \left[\frac{(c/a)^{(1/n)} - 1}{100}\right] \times 100\%,$$

where c is the rental level of the last year for analysis, a is the rental level of the first year for analysis, and n is the number of years between the last year and the first year in this analysis.

### Table 2. Details of the data collection process.

| Methods                        | Dates                              | Objects                                      |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Field investigation            | 13–19 July 2020                    | On-site visit in Luojiazhuang                |
|                               | 20–26 July 2020                    | On-site visit in Yangjiapailou               |
| Semi-structured interviews    | 4 August 2020                      | Deputy secretary of the village collective of Luojiazhuang |
|                               | 25 August 2020                     | Director of the village collective of Yangjiapailou |
|                               | 5–6 August 2020                    | Six local villagers in Luojiazhuang          |
|                               | 12–13 August 2020                  | Four local villagers in Yangjiapailou        |
| Questionnaire surveys         | 12–13 September 2020, 19–20 September 2020 | Tenants in Luojiazhuang                      |
|                               | 14–15 November 2020, 21–22 November 2020 | Tenants in Yangjiapailou                    |
|                               | 16–17 October 2020                 | Shopkeepers in Luojiazhuang                 |
|                               | 23–24 October 2020                 | Shopkeepers in Yangjiapailou                |
4. Comparative Case Studies

4.1. Overview of the Planning and Construction Processes of Two Urban Villages

Figures 7 and 8 illustrate the spatial practices implemented by local governments, village committees, and local villagers, as well as their interactions in the development process of Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou.

Figure 7. Planning and construction process of Luojiazhuang.

From 1992 to approximately 2000, the local government requisitioned all the farmlands of Luojiazhuang at a standard of 22,000 yuan per mu (approximately USD 5.18 per square meter) and demolished the original villages, paying each household between CNY 100,000 and 300,000 (approximately USD 15,690 to 47,070) in compensation depending on the size and quality of the houses. The local government then appointed several concentrated residential areas based on the urban master plan to relocate the landless villagers [22]. Following that, the village committee implemented a uniform plan on the new residential area according to certain village planning principles and allocated homesteads with the standard of 110 m² for large households (six persons and more) and 100 m² for medium households (four to five persons). The planning scheme should be approved by the planning department of the local government [23]. Villagers subsequently built three-layered houses on the allocated homesteads following standard design guidelines. In approximately 2000, the surrounding urban roads and commercial housing were constructed. Luojiazhuang was then surrounded by urban environments and became an urban village providing affordable housing for migrants. To maximize the volume of floor space, the local villagers infilled areas between houses and built up illegal constructions on the top of their houses. They also transformed the rooms on the first floor of houses along the
streets into street-side shops for rent to gain more profit. During this period, the local government also exerted some control over the villagers’ illegal construction, limiting the illegal addition to a certain extent. In 2016, the local government spent approximately 200 million yuan (approximately USD 31.45 million) on infrastructure improvement, house facade renovations, and greenery planting to renovate Luojiazhuang [57], reserving most of the illegal constructions built by the local villagers. The village committee assisted in environmental governance by shutting down all restaurants with a safety risk and regulating the business of shops in Luojiazhuang. The local villagers were required to build the fourth floor to ensure a uniform height of houses in Luojiazhuang. Therefore, Luojiazhuang was developed through government-led uniform and formal planning. The village committee and local villagers almost follow the principle of the uniform plan.

Figure 8. Planning and construction process of Yangjiapailou.

In Yangjiapailou, local villagers generally applied for homesteads from the village committee on a household basis and then designed and built houses themselves, each with a courtyard on the authorized homesteads. In the late 1990s, several factories were built in Yangjiapailou, attracting a large number of migrants to live and work there. To provide more low-cost housing and street-side shops for the migrants, local villagers rebuilt their houses and built illegal constructions (usually one or two floors) in their courtyards as well as open spaces around their houses. With relatively lax supervision of housing construction during this period, local villagers’ illegal construction was almost unrestrained, and the base area of the illegal construction was approximately 54,000 m², accounting for more than half of the total base area of buildings in Yangjiapailou. In 2016, the local
government invested approximately 200 million yuan (approximately USD 31.45 million) to upgrade Yangjiapailou [57] by removing illegal constructions while preserving the main houses, as well as enhancing infrastructure, refurbishing facades, and placing greenery and open spaces in the urban village. The village committee cooperated in removing illegal constructions and factories in the urban village and constructed new public buildings, including an auditorium, an activity center, and a marketplace. Therefore, Yangjiapailou was developed primarily through the local villagers’ spontaneous and informal planning practices. The local government and village committee mainly improve the environment and implement new construction projects based on the layouts developed by local villagers’ spontaneous planning practices.

4.2. Comparison of Urban Village Development

4.2.1. Rental Income of Local Villagers

By investigating the variations in housing rent levels of Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou from 2001 to 2020, as well as housing prices of the surrounding commercial apartments (Figure 9), this research analyzes the rental income of local villagers in different time periods and compares it to changes in the surrounding land value.

![Figure 9. Housing rent of Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou and housing price of their surrounding commercial housing (Unit of rents: USD/m²/month; Unit of housing price: USD/m²).](image-url)
The surrounding blocks of Luojiazhuang are predominantly for residential use, with several medium- and high-end housing projects completed between 1999 and 2003. Among this commercial housing, two areas, namely Guihuacheng and Xinjindu, were chosen for the analysis of housing price variation and comparison with housing rent variation in Luojiazhuang. In approximately 2000, local villagers in Luojiazhuang began to rent out their vacant rooms. The overall rental price variation showed a significant upward trend from 2001 to 2016. Specifically, the rental price grew rapidly before 2007 with an annual growth rate of 21.52%, but it fluctuated slightly from 2007 to 2016 with an annual growth rate of 4.57%. Prices of houses in Guihuacheng and Xinjindu, which were built in 2000 and 1998, respectively, also exhibited a rising trend from 2001 to 2016. Their housing prices rose dramatically before 2009, with annual growth rates of 30.35% and 26.18% but fluctuated between 2009 and 2016, with growth rates of 3.39% and 1.01%. Since 2016, Luojiazhuang has undergone renovation. The housing rent of Luojiazhuang and its surrounding areas was significantly improved from 2016 to 2018. The annual growth rate of rental prices in Luojiazhuang was 25.34%, and the annual growth rates of housing prices in Guihuacheng and Xinjindu were 30.55% and 37.49%, respectively. After 2018, however, the housing rent in Luojiazhuang fell by 9.94% annually, while the housing prices of the surrounding apartments continued to rise by 3.26% and 7.39% annually. It is inferred that the local villagers in Luojiazhuang had constantly growing rental income from 2001 to 2016 when the land value continued to rise. Moreover, the renovation from 2016 significantly improved the rental income for local villagers as well as the land value of the surrounding blocks. However, after 2018, the land value surrounding Luojiazhuang continued to climb while the rental income of local villagers in Luojiazhuang appeared to decline.

The surrounding blocks of Yangjiapailou are less intensively established, and all commercial housing near Yangjiapailou was built after 2015. Two regions, namely Yuquan and Fudishan, were chosen for analysis of housing price variation as a comparison with the housing rent variation of Yangjiapailou. Before 2016, the housing rent of Yangjiapailou rose at a relatively lower rate of 7.62%. Since 2016, Yangjiapailou has been renovated. From 2016 to 2018, the housing prices of both Yuquan and Fudishan, as well as the housing rent of Yangjiapailou, grew greatly. Housing rent in Yangjiapailou increased by 27.81%, and the housing prices of Yuquan and Fudishan grew by 46.37% and 36.05%, respectively. After 2018, the housing rent in both Yangjiapailou and housing prices in Yuquan and Fudishan continued to rise. Yangjiapailou’s housing rent grew at a higher rate of 14.22%, while the housing prices in the two areas grew by 3.19% and 7.04%, respectively. These findings imply that before 2016, when urban village renovation was implemented, the rental income of the local villagers in Yangjiapailou rose at a relatively lower rate. However, during and after renovation, both the land value surrounding Yangjiapailou and the rental income of local villagers steadily and rapidly improved, with the rise in rental income for local villagers being substantially higher.

4.2.2. Business Benefits of Shopkeepers

By analyzing the business patterns, business duration (Figure 10), and changing frequency of side-street businesses in Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou, this study compares the stability of the business benefits of side-street shopkeepers in the two urban villages.
Street-side shops in Luojiazhuang are mostly situated on the main and secondary roads. Before the renovation in 2016, the total area of side-street shops was approximately 8500 m$^2$, accounting for approximately 6.36% of the total floor area. Catering was the most common business type, accounting for 48.84% of the total commercial space. Other shops providing retail services (supermarkets, fruits, vegetables, etc.) and life services (express delivery, beauty and manicuring, laundry, communication services, etc.) make up 17.28% and 33.88%, respectively, of the total commercial space. During the renovation in 2016, the village committee introduced stricter commercial governance, and a large number of restaurants were either closed or relocated to the newly built commercial street focusing on catering services in Luojiazhuang’s northwestern outskirts. Currently, the total area of side-street shops is approximately 4100 m$^2$, accounting for about 3.10% of the total floor area in Luojiazhuang. The main business types are retail and life services, accounting for 36.47% and 56.92% of the total commercial space, respectively. According to the questionnaire survey of shopkeepers, only around 20% of the street-side shops in Luojiazhuang have been running for more than five years, and they all provide retail services (supermarkets, fruits, and vegetables, etc.). The average business changing frequency in Luojiazhuang is 0.26.

Street-side shops in Yangjiapailou are mainly found on both sides of the main street. Before the renovation in 2016, the overall area of side-street shops was approximately 8150 m$^2$, accounting for about 3.10% of the total floor area. The different business types were evenly distributed. Shops providing catering, retail, and life services account for 27.70%, 37.60%, and 34.70% of the total commercial space, respectively. During the renovation in 2016, a large number of illegal buildings were demolished, reducing the commercial space to approximately 5300 m$^2$. Currently, the total area of side-street shops accounts for about 2.70% of the total floor area. Shops providing catering, retail, and living services account for 27.22%, 38.56%, and 34.22% of the total commercial space, respectively. According to the questionnaire survey, approximately half of the shops in Yangjiapailou have been running for more than 5 years, and more than 20% of the shops have been running for more than 10 years. The average business changing frequency of street-side shops in Yangjiapailou is 0.15.

In summary, the shops in Luojiazhuang now mainly provide basic living services for residents inside Luojiazhuang and exhibit a certain degree of homogeneity in terms of business patterns. These businesses change more frequently, implying that the shopkeepers in Luojiazhuang may obtain less stable business benefits. In contrast, the side-street shops inside Yangjiapailou offer a broader range of commercial services including catering, living services, and retail services. These businesses change less frequently, providing a more stable business benefit for the shopkeepers in Yangjiapailou.
4.2.3. Residential Satisfaction of Tenants

Table 3 shows the basic socioeconomic characteristics and residency status of respondents in the two urban villages. There are similar numbers of male and female respondents recruited in surveys in Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou. Luojiazhuang has a higher proportion of young people (30 or younger than 30) and better-educated people (college degree or above). More than half of the respondents are employed in finance, internet technology, or administrative services. In Yangjiapailou, the tenant demographics are evenly distributed, with the majority of tenants being young (30 years old and younger), middle-aged (31–40 years old), or elderly (51 years old and older). The population of the less educated (high school degree or below) in Yangjiapailou is larger, and half of the respondents work in the commercial and service industries. Moreover, the average length of stay for tenants in Luojiazhuang is approximately 2.23 years. Only 9.4% of tenants in Luojiazhuang have been living there for more than five years, and only 2.56% of tenants have been living there for more than 10 years. In contrast, the average length of stay for tenants in Yangjiapailou is approximately 5.43 years. A total of 42.68% of tenants have been living in Yangjiapailou for more than five years, and 20.73% of tenants have been living for more than 10 years. Meanwhile, 68.38% of the tenants in Luojiazhuang live alone, with an average stay of 1.68 years, compared to 3.43 years for tenants living with family members (with husband/wife, children, or elderly relatives). For Yangjiapailou, 75.61% of tenants live with family members, with an average residency time of 6.21 years. The average length of stay for other tenants living alone is 3 years. According to the tenants’ residency status in the two urban villages, most tenants in Luojiazhuang live alone and usually take Luojiazhuang as a temporary residence, whereas most tenants in Yangjiapailou live with family members and usually take Yangjiapailou as a long-term residence.

Table 3. Basic information of respondents in Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou.

|                      | Luojiazhuang | Yangjiapailou |
|----------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Number of valid responses | 117 (3 invalid) | 82 (3 invalid) |
| Age                  |              |               |
| 30 and younger than 30 | 93 (79.49%)  | 29 (35.37%)   |
| 31–40                | 14 (11.97%)  | 18 (21.95%)   |
| 41–50                | 3 (2.56%)    | 11 (13.41%)   |
| 51 and older than 51 | 7 (5.98%)    | 24 (29.26%)   |
| Gender               |              |               |
| Male                 | 67 (57.26%)  | 39 (47.56%)   |
| Female               | 50 (42.74%)  | 43 (52.44%)   |
| Education            |              |               |
| Lower than middle school | 12 (10.26%)  | 40 (48.78%)   |
| High school          | 13 (11.11%)  | 19 (23.17%)   |
| College              | 40 (34.19%)  | 16 (19.51%)   |
| Bachelor or above    | 52 (44.44%)  | 7 (8.54%)     |
| Household Income     |              |               |
| (unit: CNY per month) |              |               |
| Below 3000           | 5 (4.27%)    | 3 (3.66%)     |
| 3000–9000            | 62 (53.00%)  | 40 (48.78%)   |
| 9000–15,000          | 41 (35.05%)  | 35 (42.68%)   |
| Above 15,000         | 9 (7.69%)    | 4 (4.88%)     |
| Inhabitancy Pattern  |              |               |
| Living alone         | 80 (68.38%)  | 20 (24.39%)   |
| Living with spouse   | 28 (23.93%)  | 22 (26.83%)   |
| Living with children | 9 (7.69%)    | 28 (34.15%)   |
| Three generations together | 0 (0)       | 12 (14.63%)   |
| Length of Stay       |              |               |
| Less than 3 years    | 80 (68.38%)  | 34 (41.46%)   |
| 3–5 years            | 26 (22.22%)  | 13 (15.85%)   |
| 6–9 years            | 8 (6.83%)    | 18 (21.95%)   |
| Above 10 years       | 3 (2.56%)    | 17 (20.73%)   |
Through a further comparison of tenants’ residential satisfaction in the two urban villages and across different population groups (Table 4 and Figure 11), it was found that:

1. Overall, respondents in Yangjiapailou were more satisfied with their living conditions than respondents in Luojiazhuang. Moreover, for both urban villages, respondents’ evaluation of the sense of security was relatively higher, and their evaluations of neighborhood interaction was relatively lower.

2. Young respondents (under 30) in Luojiazhuang, who make up the majority of the population, scored much lower, indicating that Luojiazhuang is in great need of enhancement of the matching degree between the living environment and the demands of young people. Moreover, the main group in Yangjiapailou, namely tenants under 30 years old, 31 to 40 years old, and above 50 years old, had relatively higher satisfaction evaluations, indicating that the living environment of Yangjiapailou is well-suited to the needs of most tenants.

3. The respondents living alone in Luojiazhuang scored relatively higher, while those living with family members (with husbands or wives, as well as with children and seniors) scored much lower. Moreover, the respondents living with family members in Luojiazhuang scored significantly lower than those in Yangjiapailou. This suggests that Luojiazhuang may be better suited to the tenants living alone, whereas Yangjiapailou may better satisfy the living demands of the tenants living with family members, including the elderly relatives and children.

### Table 4. Residential satisfaction in Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou.

|                                    | Luojiazhuang | Yangjiapailou | Difference of Average | Level of Significance |
|------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| “I think this community is a good place to live” | 3.74         | 4.33          | −0.59                 | 0.000 **              |
| “I feel safe living in this community”   | 4.21         | 4.66          | −0.45                 | 0.000 **              |
| “I am familiar with my neighbors”       | 3.47         | 4.02          | −0.55                 | 0.000 **              |
| “I feel happy living in this community” | 3.88         | 4.27          | −0.39                 | 0.004 **              |
| Average scores                      | 3.82         | 4.31          | −0.49                 | 0.000 **              |

** p < 0.01.

**Figure 11.** Box plot of residential satisfaction in Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou.

In summary, Luojiazhuang has a relatively lower residential satisfaction than Yangjiapailou. Specifically, Luojiazhuang may be more suitable for tenants who live alone, but...
the living conditions in Luojiazhuang may not meet the needs of the majority of tenants in Luojiazhuang who are young. In contrast, the living conditions in Yangjiapailou may better match the needs of the current tenants, especially those living with family members.

4.3. Summary

The comparison of Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou, developed through different planning approaches, is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. The comparison of Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou.

| Planning approach                              | Luojiazhuang | Yangjiapailou |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| **Variations of housing rental income**        |              |               |
| Annual growth rate of rental price (before 2016) | 11.05%       | 7.62%         |
| Annual growth rate of rental price (2016–2020)  | 6.25%        | 20.82%        |
| **Stability of business benefits**             |              |               |
| Changing frequency of business                 | 0.26         | 0.15          |
| **Residential satisfaction of tenants**        |              |               |
| Percentage of respondents who are very satisfied or satisfied with living conditions | 50.43%       | 73.17%        |

According to the comparative analysis, the growth rate of local villagers’ rental income in Luojiazhuang was higher than that in Yangjiapailou before 2016. However, since 2016, there has been a decline in the growth rate of local villagers’ rental income in Luojiazhuang, while the growth rate of rental income for the local villagers in Yangjiapailou has greatly improved. Moreover, the changing frequency of the businesses in Luojiazhuang is significantly higher than that of the businesses in Yangjiapailou, implying that the business benefits of side-street shopkeepers in Luojiazhuang may be less stable, while shopkeepers in Yangjiapailou may gain more stable business benefits. Additionally, only approximately half of tenants in Luojiazhuang feel satisfied with living conditions, while this is the case for 73% of tenants in Yangjiapailou. In summary, Yangjiapailou is able to constantly provide economic benefits for local villagers and shopkeepers, as well as satisfactory living environments for tenants. However, Luojiazhuang struggles to provide increasing rental income for local villagers and stable business benefits for shopkeepers. Moreover, the existing living conditions in Luojiazhuang cannot meet the needs of the current tenants.

5. Discussions
5.1. Influences of Formal and Informal Planning on Urban Village Development

The above findings suggest that the urban village developed through the formal planning-dominated approach suffers from a decline in rental income, unstable business benefits, and relatively low residential satisfaction of tenants, while the urban village developed through the informal planning-dominated approach realizes constantly increasing rental income, relatively stable business benefits, and higher residential satisfaction of tenants. To better understand the urban village development with the two planning approaches, this article further compares the spatial patterns of the urban villages generated by the two planning approaches (Figure 12) and discusses the influences of formal and informal planning on urban village development.
Figure 12. Comparison of spatial patterns in Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou.
Dominated by formal planning, the original houses, roads, trees, rivers, and agricultural lands in the urban village were cleared and replaced with a homogeneous spatial pattern, leading to some deterioration of everyday living spaces and village cultures to certain degrees [58], which may hinder the further development of the urban village. Second, through formal and uniform planning, the urban village developed a high-density spatial pattern with a grid-pattern street network mainly for car driving. This spatial pattern may satisfy basic living needs for local villagers when it was built but cannot suit the constantly varying social demands due to the rigidity of formal planning. Based on this spatial pattern, it would be difficult to place a certain area of open spaces and green spaces in later upgrading projects, and the living environment could not be improved efficiently. It may reduce residential satisfaction [59,60] and community vitality [61,62], leading to a decrease in attraction to migrants, fewer customers coming to shops, and a decline in housing rental income. Therefore, urban villages dominated by formal planning are more likely to be developed into transitional communities that help to alleviate issues including a shortage of low-cost accommodation and social contradictions, but they may be demolished and replaced with formal urban communities due to the low matching degree between their environments and tenants’ living demands, as well as a decline in socioeconomic benefits [4,17,63].

Through informal planning practices spontaneously performed by local villagers, the ancient paths, characteristic textures, and everyday living spaces incrementally formed by long-term development are reserved to some extent. These spatial elements serve as containers of local villagers’ social lives, which are the main part of components of indigenous cultures of the urban village. By reserving these spatial elements including flexible architectural layouts, organic street patterns, and diversified landscapes, the local villagers’ living styles and living scenes are retained, exhibiting cultural authenticity to some degree that serves as a drawcard for the future residents, visitors, and tourists, as well as an engine for future development [64,65]. Moreover, the ecological environments are also effectively protected without top-down and large-scale urban construction, achieving good interactions between human beings and nature. These natural and cultural resources would be of great attraction for urban residents and tenants in the urban village and conducive to the development of the tourism industry and rental economy. Furthermore, the urban village exhibits a relatively less densified spatial pattern through informal planning, which may allow some space for future development. Several redevelopment projects could be conducted at this time in response to changing demands, achieving more adaptable urban practices [37,38]. In the case of Yangjiapailou, tearing down illegal construction and flexibly placing greenery and open spaces based on the previous pedestrian-friendly spatial pattern improve living and daily interaction environments for local villagers and tenants, which is beneficial for enhancing street vitality and business atmosphere [61,62]. Moreover, the increasing demand of residents may be satisfied [59], and villagers may gain continuously rising rental income. Therefore, informal planning may play an important role that formal planning cannot replace, equipping the urban village with great development potential at this time.

5.2. A New Experience Exploring the Planning Approaches for Urban Villages in China: Combination of Ecological Protection, Cultural Inheritance, and Tourism Development Dominated by Informal Planning

At present, the “demolition–redevelopment” model, which underpins the majority of the current planning approaches, dominates in Chinese urban village development. This model aims to eliminate “informality” and create more “governable spaces” [9] through land transfers, urban village demolition, and real estate development, realizing economic growth and environmental improvement. However, this model has often been proven to be inefficient and disruptive [7,9,15]. The findings of this research indicate that informality in spatial planning in the development of urban villages did not impede economic development but rather contributed to the inheritance of village cultures and the production of ecological environments, both of which are important driving forces for economic develop-
ment at this time. Therefore, the development of urban villages should include not only land transfers and living environment improvements but also the inheritance and activation of the villages’ cultures as well as the effective production and governance of local ecology to create positive forces for urban villages that cannot be replaced by formal planning. Currently, there are several practical projects focusing on “cultural creativity” [19] for urban village development. For example, Dafen Village in Shenzhen upgraded its cultural industry by partly tearing down old buildings and constructing new cultural facilities such as art galleries [66, 67]. The Phoenix Village in Shenzhen has developed cultural tourism industry by utilizing its preserved village’s characteristic space [68]. Shuiwei Village in Shenzhen tries to introduce new cultural and creative industries to attract more talent to live in its village [69]. In this research, Yangjiapailou in Hangzhou further displays a new and successful experience in exploring planning approaches for Chinese urban villages, that is, taking informal planning practices as a driving force to achieve ecological protection, cultural inheritance, and tourism development. This model emphasizes preserving and enriching the “village-style” characteristics of the urban villages through “ecological protection” and “cultural inheritance” achieved through informal planning and activating the potential of urban villages hidden in the early stage of the rapid urbanization period by ecological governance, infrastructure upgrades, and public space renovation with the coordination of the government’s’ formal planning, realizing better development for urban villages.

6. Conclusions

From the perspective of formality and informality, this research focuses on two urban village planning approaches, one dominated by the government’s uniform and formal planning and the other dominated by local villagers’ spontaneous and informal planning practices, with the aim of determining which planning approach is more conducive to urban village development and providing references and implications for governments and planners. Two typical urban villages, Luojiazhuang and Yangjiapailou, located in plain and hilly areas in Xihu District of Hangzhou, China, respectively, and developed through formal and informal planning-dominated approaches, were chosen as comparative study cases. The rental income of local villagers, business benefits of shopkeepers, and residential satisfaction of tenants in the two urban villages were investigated to compare the development of the urban villages generated by the two planning approaches. Results indicate that although the urban village developed through the formal planning-dominated approach accomplished more intensive land development in the rapid urbanization process, its indigenous village textures were eradicated, and the urban village now faces several development issues, including a decline in housing rental income, unstable business benefits, and relatively low residential satisfaction for tenants. This type of urban village may suffer from limited development spaces and develop into a transitional community, eventually being demolished or replaced with a normal urban community. In contrast, although the urban village developed by the informal planning-dominated approach showed less intensive land development in the earlier stage of urbanization, most of its indigenous village textures are reserved, and new projects could be flexibly implemented according to the changing demands over time, realizing a steady increase in housing rental income, stable business benefits, and relatively high residential satisfaction for tenants at this stage. The findings suggest that the informal planning-dominated approach may be more conducive to urban village development.

Compared with previous literature, this study analyzed the development of urban villages generated through different planning approaches from the perspective of formality and informality and examined the influences of the government’s uniform and formal planning and villagers’ spontaneous and informal spatial practices in urban village development, providing an opportunity to reflect on the current spatial planning concepts and approaches in China. Furthermore, this article deepens understanding of the new urban–rural relationship in this stage of urbanization and proposes a new planning approach that is more conducive for today’s urban village development, providing references for
achieving coordinated urban–rural interaction at this time. Moreover, the findings of this research advocate the views that informality has the qualities of flexibility, creativity, and productivity [38] and to some extent plays a positive role in achieving urban sustainability [39], enriching the current debates on “informality” from a spatial planning perspective, calling for more attention to the organic spatial patterns and indigenous cultures preserved by informal planning practices rather than only caring about the target of efficiency in urban construction and providing policy implications for some other countries/locations engaged in large-scale urban construction pursuing high-speed development. Furthermore, the results suggest a possibility of long-term coexistence of formality and informality in cities where formality may learn from informality through means such as cultural inheritance and preservation of indigenous living styles. To more comprehensively understand the development of Chinese urban villages generated through different interactions between government-led uniform planning and local villagers’ spontaneous spatial practices, future studies will examine urban village development with other types of interactions between formal and informal planning. They will further explore how formal planning should interact with informal planning to achieve better development of urban villages through a larger number of case studies. Additionally, more diverse indicators addressing urban village development will be selected to comprehensively compare the development of urban villages through different planning approaches.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Y.W.; methodology, Y.W.; software, Y.Z.; validation, Y.W., Y.Z.; formal analysis, Y.Z.; investigation, Y.Z.; resources, Y.W., Y.Z.; data curation, Y.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, Y.Z.; writing—review and editing, Y.W., Y.Z.; visualization, Y.Z.; supervision, Y.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: The authors wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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