

Development Strategy of Rural Revitalization from the Perspective of Social Innovation: A Case Study of “Jiyingweigong” in Xiamen

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Abstract: Rural revitalization, as one of China’s important development strategies, has attracted widespread attention in recent years. The “Jiyingweigong” project in Gangtou Village, Xiamen, takes public welfare as its core, creating a micro-ecosystem where public welfare and business interact, successfully activating the overall development of Gangtou Village. Based on the theory of social innovation design, this study summarizes the research path of social innovation design driving sustainable development of rural revitalization through the combing and summarizing of classic rural innovation cases. By applying the method of social innovation design, this study deeply analyzes the development strategy and effect of Gangtou Village. Social innovation design thinking, as one of the engines driving social change, plays a key role in rural revitalization. It is concluded that social innovation design, as a concept of transformative innovation, can systematically and reasonably address economic, cultural, ecological, and other issues in rural areas in both theory and practice, helping local areas to obtain sustainable endogenous power.

Keywords: social innovation design, rural revitalization, sustainable development, Gangtou

1. Introduction

Rural revitalization, as one of China’s development goals in the new era, has attracted widespread attention. The concept and practice of social innovation design are crucial forces driving society forward. This research focuses on the “Jiyingweigong” project in Gangtou Village, Xiamen City, aiming to deeply analyze the project’s development strategy from the perspective of social innovation design, and to reveal the role of social innovation design in rural development and its contribution to sustainable development.

The “Jiyingweigong” project in Gangtou Village takes public welfare as its core and explores a micro-ecosystem where public welfare and business integrate. This project has successfully activated the business format of Gangtou Village, forming a sustainable development model integrating society, culture, and economy, providing a noteworthy case for rural revitalization. The success of the project is a typical manifestation of social innovation design and is the focus of this study. As an engine driving social change, social innovation design provides a new way of thinking and methodology, offering more flexible and innovative strategies for social development. This research will analyze

the “Jiyongweigong” project from the perspective of social innovation, exploring its innovation both theoretically and practically.

2. Social Innovation Design and Rural Revitalization

2.1. Social Innovation Design

Social innovation design is an innovative process aimed at meeting social needs by rethinking and reshaping social relationships, processes, and systems. It emphasizes finding innovative solutions from the perspective of users and the overall development of society, contrasting sharply with traditional economic development approaches. Social innovation is a process of change in which new ideas and solutions are proposed through the direct participation of different roles, including end users, social entrepreneurs and workers, local institutions, and civil society organizations [1]. In rural revitalization, this means addressing not only the economic challenges faced by traditional rural areas but also considering challenges in community governance, cultural heritage, ecological environment, and other aspects. With its interdisciplinary and systematic characteristics, social innovation design provides a new thinking mode for rural revitalization.

(1) User participation and needs orientation: Social innovation design emphasizes the involvement of users and a needs-oriented approach, ensuring that solutions effectively meet user needs and address the practical problems and expectations of society and communities. Participatory design blurs the boundaries between designers and users, emphasizing the collective activities of participants including designers and users [2].

(2) Collaborative cooperation of multiple stakeholders: Collaborative cooperation of multiple stakeholders is crucial for designing social innovation. Community organizations coordinate residents within the community to cooperate collaboratively, pooling wisdom and strength to create innovative community service and management models [3]. In rural revitalization, multiple stakeholders such as government, enterprises, and residents are involved. By establishing cooperation platforms, all parties participate in defining problems, formulating solutions, and implementing them, allowing for comprehensive consideration of various interests, reducing conflicts, and enhancing the overall benefits of rural revitalization.

(3) Emphasis on social, economic, and environmental sustainability: Social innovation design emphasizes considering the sustainability of society, economy, and environment when designing solutions, pursuing social justice and inclusivity. Obin Murray et al. argue that social innovation design involves new ideas about products, services, and models that meet social needs and can create new social relationships or cooperation models [4]. In rural revitalization, this means not only focusing on economic development but also protecting the rural ecological environment and emphasizing social justice and equality. Through sustainable design solutions, rural revitalization is ensured to be not only a temporary prosperity but also long-term and sustainable development.

To gain a deeper understanding of the application of social innovation design in rural revitalization, this study takes the “Jiyongweigong” project in Gangtou Village, Xiamen City, as a case study. The project successfully integrates the principles and methods of social innovation design, bringing about significant changes locally. Through in-depth case studies, a series of valuable experiences and lessons are summarized, providing beneficial insights for promoting more rural revitalization projects.

2.2. Rural Revitalization

Rural revitalization is a national-level strategic initiative that embodies the will of the state and runs through the entire process of comprehensively building a socialist modern country by the mid-21st century [5]. Traditional rural development faces various pressures, including agricultural structural issues, rural population outflow, and aging of the social governance system. In this context, the rural

revitalization strategy proposes the goal of comprehensively revitalizing the countryside, requiring the comprehensive use of various means, including economic development, social governance, cultural inheritance, and other aspects.

Today, as China, in a state of development, faces the overall goal of advancing rural revitalization and achieving sustainable development, the discipline of design must undergo a new culture and practice to address issues and achieve its own transformation in this field [6]. The economic model relying solely on agriculture is unable to meet the diverse needs of modern rural residents and cannot cope with the impact of globalization and urbanization. The unique characteristics of rural areas in China require that rural construction cannot simply apply some traditional development models but must explore new construction models in combination with the local conditions [7]. Therefore, the new rural revitalization strategy needs to seek more flexible and innovative approaches, and it is precisely at this time that social innovation design begins to emerge as an important force in rural revitalization.

3. Analysis of Gangtou Village Development Model from the Perspective of Social Innovation Design

3.1. Establishing Gangtou—Public Welfare-oriented Development Model

Gangtou Village is located in Houxixiang Town, Jimei District, Xiamen City, and compared to other villages in Xiamen, it does not have significant advantages. In its early days, it served mainly as a settlement area for returned overseas Chinese, with a large population of migrants, primarily focused on industry. The environment was relatively poor, lacking a deep cultural heritage. The main sources of income for villagers were working outside, engaging in business outside, and running self-owned enterprises [8]. As a typical village in Xiamen, Gangtou Village faced challenges such as inadequate children's education, economic difficulties, and resource wastage. To address these issues, the initiators of the project took a public welfare-oriented approach and created the “Jiyingweigong” project. Since its inception in 2016, the project has lasted for seven years and has played a leading role in the development of the entire village. Through social innovation, the village has transformed from a traditional rural area into a modern rural area and a popular tourist destination that emphasizes community building, environmental protection, and cultural inheritance.



Figure 1: “Jiyingweigong” Library (Image Source: “Jiyingweigong” Project Manual)

The public library in the “Jiyingweigong” project adopts a two-story structure, carefully designed layout, to meet the needs of readers of different age groups, enhancing community interaction and cultural sharing. On the second floor of the library, a warm and bright children's reading area is specifically created. This area features colorful decorations and fun furniture, creating a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere.

(1) Public Welfare-oriented Development Concept

The core concept of the “Jiyingweigong” project is “public welfare.” This concept embodies the principles of user participation and needs orientation in social innovation design, emphasizing the interests of villagers and the common well-being of the community. By making public welfare the guiding principle of the project, Gangtou Village places more emphasis on social responsibility in its development process, emphasizing the balance between economic development and community construction, environmental protection, and cultural inheritance.

(2) Integration of Social Capital

To achieve public welfare-oriented development, Gangtou Village actively integrates social capital and establishes cooperative relationships with enterprises, NGOs, universities, and other entities. Through multi-level social cooperation, the village leverages external forces to introduce more resources and innovative ideas.

(3) Establishment and Operation of the Library

An important practice of the “Jiyingweigong” project is the establishment and operation of the library. The library not only provides a place for learning and knowledge transmission but also becomes the center for community interaction and cultural exchange. By introducing the library as a public facility, Gangtou Village successfully attracts more community residents to participate in cultural activities, promoting the enhancement of community cohesion.

3.2. Establishment of Chuxin Courtyard—Creating a Compound Space to Attract Cultural Grounding

Six months after the establishment of the library, new challenges emerged: how to achieve sustainable operation of the library under the premise of public welfare? How to drive the economic development of the village? Private interests can prompt villagers who do not pay attention to the public interest to shift from passive roles to active ones [9]. The birth of Chuxin Courtyard brought Gangtou Village into a new mode and mission, creating a micro-ecological public welfare rural innovation model where “public welfare promotes business, and business contributes to public welfare.” Regarding the absorption of library culture, children have strong acceptance, but for local development, what is needed is economic development, overall awareness improvement of villagers, enhancement of the overall village environment, and capturing new demands for social development. This series of changes and the causal relationship with cultural improvement need to establish highly persuasive examples, allowing the model of increased economic income to become a direct motivation for learning and imitation.

The entire courtyard successfully integrates various formats, including homestays, international volunteer dormitories, teahouses, pottery studios, Guqin rooms, and future schools, among others. The concept of creating Chuxin Courtyard successfully bridges the model of public welfare and business interaction, realizing the primary model of new economic formats in the village, clarifying the relationship between the public welfare library and the Chuxin Courtyard format, and creating a DNA template for public welfare rural innovation, laying the foundation for future public welfare rural innovation models.



Figure 2: Map of Chuxin Courtyard (Image Source: “Jiyingweigong” Manual)

In China’s traditional concept of “public welfare charity,” public welfare and business are separate. Public welfare is about selflessness, dedication, and contribution, while business is about profitability, making money, wealth, and enjoyment [10]. Before the revitalization of the village, the relationship between public welfare and business was a crucial consideration. The project proposed the concept of “creating people’s hearts before capital.” In the early stage of village development, it slowly cultivated the public welfare consciousness of everyone. People are the soul of the village, and the awakening of everyone’s consciousness is the key to village revitalization, albeit a lengthy process. The idea of a rural innovation model centered around public welfare, driving both the village’s economy and culture, gradually became the core of the project.

3.3. Comprehensive Development—Public Welfare Driving Economic and Cultural Advancement

(1) Concept of Comprehensive Development: Comprehensive development is one of the important development concepts formulated by Gangtou Village from the perspective of social innovation design. This concept emphasizes that in the process of rural revitalization, economic and cultural development should complement each other and advance together. Through public welfare activities and projects, Gangtou Village seeks to achieve sustainable economic growth while promoting cultural inheritance and innovation.

(2) Public Welfare Driving Economic Development: Under the guidance of the strategy of comprehensive development, Gangtou Village has successfully driven the economic development of the village through a series of public welfare activities and projects. For example, by establishing a cultural and creative industry cooperative, introducing cultural and creative enterprises, and developing handicrafts and local specialty products, diversified development of the rural economy has been achieved. These public welfare projects not only increase the economic income of the village but also provide more employment opportunities for local residents.

(3) Organic Integration of Culture and Economy: Gangtou Village emphasizes the organic integration of culture and economy in public welfare projects. By creating cultural and creative industry zones and combining traditional handicrafts with modern design, the cultural resources of the village are effectively excavated and inherited. This organic integration of culture and economy not only enhances the added value of culture but also injects new impetus into the village’s economy.

3.4. Future Development—Establishing a Sustainable Micro-Ecosystem

From 0 to 1 and then to N+, a pattern that is opening Gangtou Village to the world, and Gangtou Village now has a new term: Gangtou Humanistic Rural Area. Over the five years of development, Gangtou’s endogenous power and cultural taste have been recognized by many rural construction teams in China, and excellent rural construction teams from all over the country have also come to Gangtou for exchanges. Since 2020, the Gangtou Community Center has been established, villagers’

homesteads have begun to be legally rebuilt, and the Chengfa Environmental Sanitation team stationed in the village has started environmental upgrades. A large number of village infrastructure construction and services will be implemented one after another, and the Artist Residency Program is also underway. Social innovation design has played a crucial role in the comprehensive development of Gangtou Village. Through principles such as user participation and needs orientation, social innovation design makes public welfare projects more in line with local realities and better able to address practical issues in rural economic and cultural development. This innovative design thinking provides Gangtou Village with a new model of comprehensive development and offers valuable insights for other rural revitalization efforts. Based on the concept of social innovation design, the project extends its thinking:

Adapt to local conditions, plan comprehensively, inspire people's hearts, introduce external resources, create a cultural and creative park, create a Gangtou Humanistic Village, and let Gangtou grow stronger through the participation of all villagers, let the world come to Gangtou, and let Gangtou go to the world.

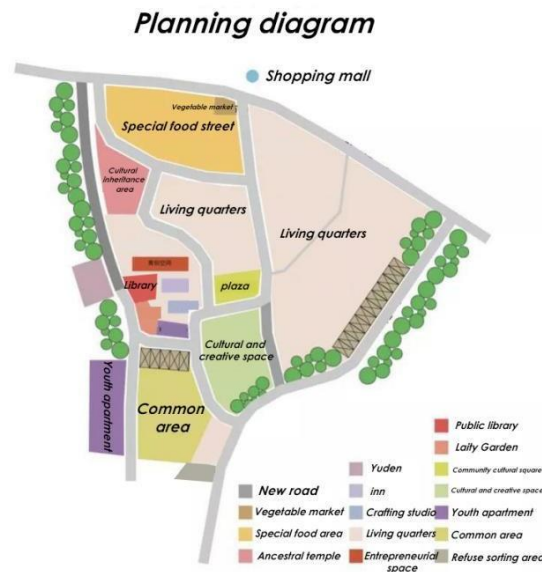


Figure 3: Comprehensive Cultural Studio Grounding (Image Source: Author's Drawing)

4. Rural Revitalization Towards Social Innovation Design

4.1. Based on the Social Innovation Development Strategy of Gangtou Village

Gangtou Village established the “Collecting Brilliance for the Public” project, transforming from an economically and culturally backward rural area into a cultural industry park and a popular tourist destination. Since the inception of the project, it has actively advocated for and implemented the social innovation development strategy, making it the core driving force behind rural revitalization. In the rapid development process of China's social economy, there are also aspects of unbalanced and insufficient development. Social innovation design can contribute to the sustainability of areas such as urban-rural economic interaction, rural cultural revitalization, enterprise entrepreneurship and innovation, and community service improvement [11]. Through innovative design concepts and the integration of social resources, rural comprehensive development is promoted, achieving economic, cultural, and social prosperity together. Sustainable rural revitalization requires the full integration of resources from all parties, and social innovation design plays a crucial role in this process. Social

innovation design reconstructs new social systems by re-establishing the connections between social roles to address issues that traditional models cannot solve [12].

(1) Application of Social Innovation Design in Village Planning: In the development of Gangtou Village, social innovation design has become an important part of village planning. By adopting innovative design methods such as user participation and design thinking, village planning is more closely aligned with the needs of residents. This innovative design concept makes village planning more flexible, able to adapt to changes in demand at different stages of development, providing a solid foundation for rural revitalization.

(2) Win-Win Model of Public Welfare and Economy: Gangtou Village has successfully advocated for a win-win model of public welfare and economy. Through the initial “Collecting Brilliance for the Public” public welfare library project, local businesses were activated, promoting economic development and prosperity. This model breaks through the traditional economic growth mode and emphasizes sustainable development, providing a viable development path for other rural areas.

(3) Cultivation and Growth of Cultural and Creative Industries: In the practice process of Gangtou Village, efforts have been made to cultivate and expand the cultural and creative industries. By introducing artists’ residences, homestays, experiential halls, and handicraft workshops, Gangtou Village has successfully created an attractive cultural and creative industry cluster. This initiative not only protects local culture but also provides unique development opportunities for the cultural industry.

(4) The Concept of Community Co-Construction and Sharing Runs Through Development: Gangtou Village consistently emphasizes the concept of community co-construction and sharing. By involving volunteers, enterprises, and schools, among other stakeholders, a community ecosystem of joint construction and sharing has been formed. This concept has garnered broader social support for social innovation design and propelled the comprehensive development of the village.

(5) Integration of Knowledge, Technology, and Experience Across Boundaries: Social innovation design in Gangtou Village’s practice integrates knowledge, technology, and experience across boundaries. Through cooperation with universities and enterprises, not only do university volunteers participate in the co-creation process, but design concepts and technological means are also introduced during construction layout planning, making social innovation progress more scientifically and systematically. This interdisciplinary integration provides new impetus and ideas for rural revitalization.

(6) Exploration of Sustainable Development Paths: Guided by the thinking of social innovation design, Gangtou Village has actively explored paths to sustainable development. Through comprehensive planning and practices at various levels such as economy, society, and environment, Gangtou Village has achieved initial success in rural revitalization. A sustainable future is a collective future, and design can effectively drive social sustainable change [13]. This path provides beneficial experiences for other rural areas and demonstrates the application of social innovation design in the field of sustainable development.

5. Conclusion

Through in-depth research on the “Jiyingweigong” project in Gangtou Village, Xiamen, this study summarizes the development strategies for rural revitalization from the perspective of social innovation, as well as the specific practices in Gangtou Village. In the context of globalization, strengthening cooperation and exchanges with international organizations and rural communities in other countries, and drawing lessons from international successful experiences, can collectively promote rural revitalization. Utilizing digital technology to promote rural informatization construction, enhance village governance and service levels, and achieve the sustainable development of digital villages. Further tapping into rural cultural resources, deepening the development of cultural

and creative industries, creating more influential cultural and creative brands, and injecting new impetus into rural economies. Promoting the training of young talents: strengthening the training and introduction of young talents, inspiring the younger generation to participate in rural revitalization enthusiastically, and promoting the optimization of rural talent structure. Promoting the transformation of agricultural production towards green and organic methods, achieving a virtuous cycle between agricultural economy and ecological environment.

After China proposed the rural revitalization strategy, it is hoped that in the next 15 to 30 years of rural revitalization, rural public libraries can be deeply involved. Subsequently, instilling the spirit of “for the public” into the hearts of every participant in construction, enabling the masses to embrace this public spirit and jointly engage in the great cause of rural revitalization. In this way, the spiritual outlook and cultural level of the Chinese people will be further enhanced. With 70% to 80% of China’s land and villages being rural, if every locality can develop comprehensively in this way, and embed the public spirit into every ordinary village’s revitalization to avoid capital monopolization, then China’s rural areas will step onto the world stage in the future, shining brightly once again.

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