



Research on the Protection and Development Strategies of Traditional Villages in Southern Jiangsu under the Background of Rural Revitalization — Taking Xigang Village, Pingwang Town, Suzhou City as an Example

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Abstract: With its strong economy and resource endowment, southern Jiangsu has always been in a leading position in the protection and development of traditional villages. But at the same time, the rapid urbanization process has also brought a series of disadvantages to traditional villages in southern Jiangsu, such as serious hollowing, declining vitality, insufficient cultural display, and lack of sustainable development motivation. This article takes Xigang Village, a provincial traditional village in Jiangsu Province, as an example to analyze the difficulties in its protection and development. This paper puts forward strategies for improving living facilities, diversifying industries to promote economic revival, inheriting culture to shape characteristic features, and stimulating village vitality. It points out the direction for the development of Xigang Village, and also provides a model for the protection and development of traditional villages in southern Jiangsu.

Keywords: traditional villages, southern Jiangsu, Xigang Village, protection, development

1. Introduction

Traditional villages are an important carrier of Chinese civilization and have profound cultural connotations. Since the 1980s, my country's urbanization process has accelerated, especially in southern Jiangsu, where the number and size of traditional villages has declined sharply. With the recognition of the value of traditional villages in the industry, the protection of traditional villages has also achieved some initial results in recent years. In 2012, my country established a traditional village protection list, and formulated the basic requirements for the compilation of traditional village protection and development planning. Over the past ten years, more than 8,000 villages have been protected. However, due to my country's complex and diverse geographical environment, diverse cultures, and unbalanced development in all aspects, the characteristics of traditional villages in different regions are quite different, and the corresponding development models are also different. Southern Jiangsu is located in the core area of the Yangtze River Delta and has great advantages in economy and culture, but at the same time it is most seriously affected by urbanization. Therefore, southern Jiangsu is one of the best areas to study the protection and development of traditional villages in economically developed areas under the impact of urbanization. At the same time, in the context of rural revitalization, the protection and development of traditional villages has a certain demonstration and leading role in my country's rural revitalization strategy.

2. Current status of traditional villages in southern Jiangsu

2.1 Overview of Traditional Villages in Southern Jiangsu

2.1.1 Unique spatial pattern and traditional features

Southern Jiangsu is known as the "Land of Fish and Rice" and "Land of Prosperity". The natural landscape is beautiful and the topography is diverse. Low mountains, hills, plains, rivers, lakes, and rivers criss-cross each other, creating a unique spatial settlement of Jiangnan water towns and villages [1]. The traditional villages in southern Jiangsu are small and scattered, and most of the villages originated from water. The basic skeleton of the village is the water system and the bridges over the water system, and the shape development basically depends on the direction, shape and width of the river. Zhouzhuang, Tongli, Luzhi, etc., typical representatives of ancient water towns in southern Jiangsu, reflect the main characteristics of settlements in southern Jiangsu, that is, built near the water, born by the water, developed by the water, and prospered with the water[2].

2.1.2 Profound cultural heritage

Ancient Chinese civilization sprouted early in Jiangsu Province, and the ancestors in the Taihu Lake Basin formed a

"land of fish and rice" with abundant products through Tangpu polder fields. The Suzhou Caoxie Mountain site is the earliest ancient rice field with an irrigation system discovered in China. It is the source of Jiangnan culture and is known as "the ruler of Jiangnan prehistoric culture".

Southern Jiangsu is an important Wuyue cultural area, with countless historical sites and legends. The oldest garden in Suzhou City, the Canglang Pavilion, was built on the basis of Wuyue gardens. There are many famous families in traditional villages in southern Jiangsu, and historical relics, poems and paintings handed down can be seen everywhere. For example, in the East Village in Xishan, Suzhou, some parts of Xu's ancestral hall built during the Qianlong period are still preserved. In addition, there are many talented people in the Jiangnan area, and it is known as the "humanities abode". Especially when the imperial examinations were at their peak in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the cultural advantages of Jiangnan were obviously superior to those in the north, as can be seen by looking up the ranking data of the imperial examinations.

2.1.3 Prosperous rural economy

With its fertile land and traditional silk weaving techniques, southern Jiangsu has been a prosperous place since ancient times. In the 1980s, it developed a new way to develop rural industries and created the glory of the "Southern Jiangsu Model". Today, Jiangsu Province is the country with the highest level of comprehensive development in China. Province, the economic status ranks in the forefront of the country, with the help of the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta, Jiangsu's economy will rise steadily. Southern Jiangsu is the most economically developed area in Jiangsu, and it is also one of the areas with the highest degree of industrialization, modernization, and urbanization in the country. The urbanization rate will reach 82.6% in 2021, 9.2 percentage points higher than the national average (data source: Jiangsu Statistics bureau official website). In addition, the rural economy in southern Jiangsu is also impressive. In 2021, the per capita disposable income of rural residents in the five cities in southern Jiangsu will exceed the average level of the province. Take Suzhou as an example. In 2021, the per capita disposable income of villages in the city will reach 11.27 million yuan, and the per capita disposable income of rural residents will exceed 40,000 yuan. Analysis of income and expenditure of rural residents). Sufficient financial support can better protect and continue traditional villages. In areas with high levels of economic development and urbanization in my country, there are not many traditional villages, but they can be sustained with a strong government and strong capital investment. and protection of traditional villages [3].

2.2 Effects of protection and development of traditional villages in southern Jiangsu

In 2012, China officially launched a comprehensive survey of traditional villages [4]. During the past ten years, many practices have been carried out on the protection and development of traditional villages. This decade is a period of unprecedented rural construction in China and a period of great changes in rural appearance. As far as the southern Jiangsu area is concerned, experience and lessons coexist.

In 2017, the "Measures for the Protection of Traditional Villages in Jiangsu Province" was released. The document pointed out that the protection and development of traditional villages should follow the principles of giving priority to protection, taking into account development, rational utilization, and living inheritance. The policy guidance has further guaranteed a series of protection and development work such as the maintenance, development and improvement of traditional villages. On this basis, the protection and development of traditional villages in southern Jiangsu has achieved remarkable results. Among the successful cases, Luxiang Ancient Village is a high-quality and complete ancient village among the ancient villages in Suzhou City. Lugang Village focuses on protection and renovation, and pays attention to the protection of the original culture. After years of development, the overall function is still mainly residential, maintaining an antique flavor. "Priority is given to protection and development is given priority." In terms of development, the tourism transformation of traditional villages is a way to inherit and develop traditional culture, which can promote the protection and renewal of dwellings [5]. Southern Jiangsu has made remarkable achievements in rural tourism. Taking Suzhou as an example, as of 2020, Suzhou has 52 rural tourist areas above the provincial level (data source: Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio and Tourism 2020 Annual Report).

2.3 Difficulties in protection and development of traditional villages in southern Jiangsu

2.3.1 Hollowing is getting worse

Based on the strategy of urbanization and the development of small towns, in the past few decades, cities have expanded in a "spreading pie" style, and suburban villages have been annexed by towns and become part of cities. People from remote villages flocked to cities in order to escape the backward economic conditions and living environment, and rural historical and cultural relics disappeared.

The main reason is that traditional agricultural production and lifestyle are gradually being eliminated in the wave of

modernization. Compared with villages with incomplete infrastructure and supporting facilities, people yearn for urban life that is clean, comfortable, convenient, and well-resourced. Traditional culture is important, but for a family, economic support is the most important thing in life. Traditional villages often do not have enough jobs to support the lives of villagers. As a result, the young and middle-aged labor force is constantly pouring into the city in search of better job opportunities, the rural population is decreasing day by day, and the villages are highly hollowed out. There are relatively few left-behind children in southern Jiangsu. Most school-age children follow their parents to towns to study for better educational resources. The retired old people who are nostalgic for their homeland have become the guardians of traditional villages. The age structure of the rural population is seriously aging, and the folk customs and traditional culture are facing the threat of complete annihilation.

2.3.2 Lack of sustainable motivation

The rural construction work in Jiangsu Province has been carried out for many years, and the living environment of villagers has been effectively improved. However, for villagers, sound infrastructure is only a basic requirement for life, and the government's investment in rural infrastructure is more like "blood transfusion" poverty alleviation, lacking in sustainability. Rural cultural assets cannot bring continuous benefits. Villages should master the "blood-making" function to achieve sustainable development in terms of economy and ecological environment.

2.3.3 Insufficient cultural inheritance

The resource background of southern Jiangsu is superior, and the pressure of cultural protection and characteristic display is relatively high. Since the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, relying on the guidance of national policies and the superior economic conditions in southern Jiangsu, it has achieved great success in rural construction. However, the uniform planning and design and urbanization construction have caused certain damage to the original environment on which the villagers depended for survival, causing some traditional villages to lose their regional characteristics.

3. Xigang Village Protection and Development Practice

3.1 Overview of Xigang Village

3.1.1 Location and research scope

Xigang Village belongs to Pingwang Town, Wujiang District, Suzhou City. (Figure 1) is located in the center of the fertile Yangtze River Delta, south of Suzhou, on the east bank of Taihu Lake, endowed with natural resources. The scope of the case study covers the ancient village of Xigang and the surrounding Nanhenggang and Majiabang, a total of 3 natural villages of about 100 hectares, with a total of 113 households (Figure 2).

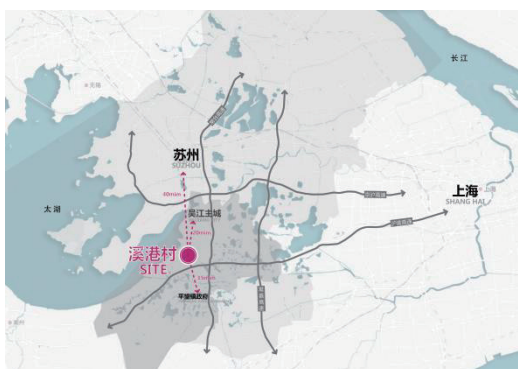


Figure 1. Location of Xigang Village



Figure 2. Research scope

3.1.2 History and Culture

The history of Xigang Village can be traced back to 2,500 years ago, and it is the same age as the ancient city of Gusu. There is a small stream flowing in the ancient village, named Jiuxi. Xigang Village was originally called Jiuxi, and Jiuxi and Shuihuagang later formed the place name "Xigang", which is still in use today. Jiuxi flows into the canal eastward through Pingwangyinghu Lake, and connects with Taihu Lake in the north. It is one of the necessary roads to enter Taihu Lake. As a result, Xigang developed (Figure 3), expanding from a small village to a market town. After several reforms of administrative divisions, Xigang became a village under the jurisdiction of Pingwang Town in 1985. But it is still a relatively large village-level market town in Wujiang.

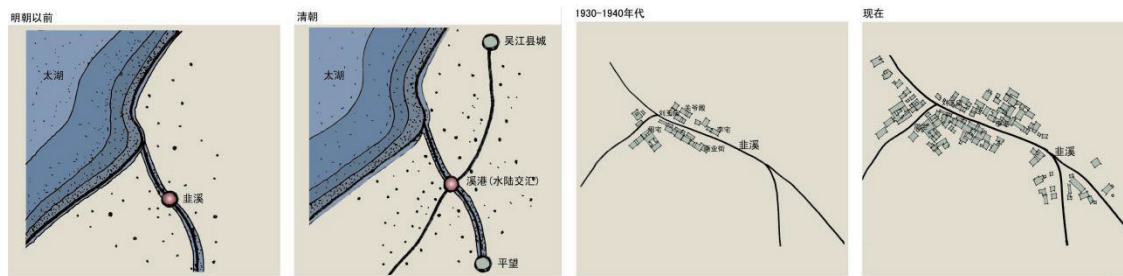


Figure 3. The origin and development history of Xigang Village
(Source: Protection Planning of Wangxigang Historic and Cultural Village in Ping, Wujiang)

Xigang Village has a long history and profound cultural heritage, and it retains the pattern and style of the Jiangnan water village. In 2008, it was designated as a famous historical and cultural village in Suzhou City, and in 2022, it was included in the list of Chinese traditional villages. This ancient village of outstanding people has produced many celebrities in the fields of literature, history and medicine: literati such as Pan Yuzhang, Wu Yan, and Pan Lei in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties once lived in seclusion here; the famous old Chinese doctor Qin Dongyuan was born here, and his former residence has now become Suzhou Cultural Relics Protection Unit. The existing historical and cultural relics in Xigang Village include the Temple of General Liu Meng, Donglin Bridge, Zhoujiating and the former residence of Baye Li (Figure 4), which are well preserved. In Pingwang's collection of books, there are also records of the Eight Scenes of Jiuxi, which reminds us of the paradise-like living conditions of Xigang in the old days. Until the 1980s, Xigang Old Street was still a scene of prosperity.



Temple of General Liu Meng



Donglin Bridge



Zhou Family Hall



Li Ba Ye's old house

Figure 4. Historical and cultural relics of Xigang Village

3.1.3 Protection and repair situation

Before the 20th century, people's awareness of historical and cultural protection was relatively weak, and they paid more attention to the construction of infrastructure. Xigang Village did not formulate a protection plan until 2008. Fortunately, the traditional pattern and style of the village have been continued, and there are still some historical buildings left, but the cultural inheritance is still insufficient.

Since the 1980s, the development of Xigang Village has roughly the following stages. In 1985, the highway from Pingwang to Xigang was opened to traffic, which had a great impact on the business of Xigang, and it has declined since then. In 2006, Xigang Village improved the infrastructure and public service facilities in the village. At the same time, the cooperative medical building was rebuilt, the small town farmers' market was newly expanded, and a new stadium was built using the open space in front of the village committee and the original primary school site. The village environment has been improved. In 2008, the Xigang Historical and Cultural Village Protection Plan was formulated. It is proposed to protect cultural relics protection units, historical buildings, historical relics and historical environmental elements, to maintain the original height, volume, appearance, image and color, etc., to maintain the original spatial pattern, street and river network and other historical landscape characteristics. At the same time, a construction plan is given to improve the interface of roads and rivers within the protected area, and slightly repair the facades of buildings along the street (Figure 5). In 2009, Jiangcheng Avenue was completed and opened to traffic. This main road running through the north and south of Wujiang River has become an opportunity for the development of Xigang Village. As people pay more attention to traditional villages, Xigang Village has repaired several historical houses in recent years, and continued to improve infrastructure, building the Xinan Auditorium, day care center, public toilets, etc.



Figure 5. The current situation of Xigang Village

3.2 Predicament of protection and development of Xigang Village

3.2.1 Declining Popularity

There is a folk saying that "there was Xigang first, and then Pingwang". Historically, Xigang was a large market town equal to Pingwang Town. After the merger of townships, Xigang was owned by Pingwang, and the road from Pingwang to Xigang was opened to traffic. The traffic benefits of Jiuxi waterway weakened, and the business of Xigang Old Street plummeted. After being impacted by urbanization, the aborigines continued to be attracted to cities, resulting in serious population loss. Today, the basic pattern of Xigang Old Street is still there, the traditional style of the countryside is still there, and many cultural relics and historic sites have been preserved, and reasonable construction has been made to the style of the ancient street, but it is still sparsely populated. The map of prosperity in the south of the Yangtze River that once "gathered merchants on the shore, and hundreds of boats competed under the bridge" is hard to find. Like most traditional villages, Xigang Ancient Village has serious problems of hollowing out and aging.

3.2.2 Weakened industrial vitality

The flat terrain of Xigang Village provides conditions for the development of the village, and there is a large area of farmland around, so agriculture is one of the important industries of Xigang. Before the 1980s, business in Xigang Village was prosperous, and now there are only a few shops left to meet the daily needs of the villagers. After the 1980s, affected by the "Southern Jiangsu model" of the township, a small number of textile industries developed. The overall industrial structure is dominated by production, supplemented by secondary and tertiary industries. Xigang Village belongs to the modern agricultural area in the industrial planning of the town, and belongs to the rural sightseeing group in the tourism planning, but the construction has not been implemented.

3.2.3 Insufficient display of culture

Xigang Village has a long history and profound cultural heritage. In 2008, Xigang Village was announced by the Suzhou Municipal People's Government as a famous historical and cultural village. In the same year, the plan for the protection of famous historical and cultural villages was formulated, the protection scope of 6.35 hectares was determined, and protection requirements were given for specific cultural relics protection units. In 2022, Xigang Village was included in the list of traditional Chinese villages. This only means that Xigang's historical and cultural relics are well protected. Although it has a long history, cultural excavation is weak, and intangible cultural heritage is hard to find.

3.3 Xigang Village Protection and Development Strategy

People are the main body of culture and the main driving force of development. Retaining and attracting people is the key to realizing the sustainable development of traditional villages. What the villagers pursue is a better life, that is, sufficient economic resources, high-quality public services, and a beautiful living environment. These are the goals that traditional villages need to implement. Therefore, the protection and development of traditional villages must be promoted by use, the value of villages other than culture should be tapped, rationally used, and talents should be attracted to return. Based on the multi-industry combination of culture and tourism, Xigang Village creates jobs to improve the economic level, improve the supporting facilities of the ancient village, shape the characteristic style, highlight the characteristic culture, shape the cultural pride of the villagers, and stimulate the internal motivation of rural development.

3.3.1 Perfect living facilities

Traditional villages need to retain their original features, and the villagers living in them have a growing need for a better living environment. The equalization of basic public services is an important measure to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas, and it is an important criterion for judging whether a village is livable [6]. On the basis of protecting traditional villages, the lives of villagers should be better improved so that the protection of traditional villages can be more

relied upon [7].

Xigang Village respects the principle of ancient village protection when upgrading its infrastructure, and maintains the overall spatial pattern. The colors are mainly black, white and gray, and cultural symbols of Xigang are appropriately added, such as adding village logos, graffiti on the ground, and painted walls. Most of the public buildings in Xigang are reconstructed from the original buildings, including the Neighborhood Center, Countryside Station, Liugeng Xueshe, Xiangxian Museum, etc. (Figure 6). After the renovation, the buildings still maintain the Soviet style. Among them, the nostalgia station provides a resting place for villagers who are busy with agricultural production while creating a space for leisure activities. There is a rest and activity room inside, which can be used for villagers to rest, chat, drink tea, play chess, and connect with each other. The Neighborhood Center provides a multi-functional activity venue, creating an activity center integrating leisure, entertainment, fitness, culture and learning, and enriching the spiritual and cultural life of the villagers.

3.3.2 Diversified industries promote the prosperity of the ancient village economy

Industrial prosperity is the cornerstone of rural revitalization and the main driving force for sustainable rural development. However, the development of the industry needs space to carry. The area of Xigang Ancient Village is only 6.35 hectares, including a Jiuxi River and dozens of buildings on both sides, and the carrying capacity is very limited. Therefore, Xigang Village has extended the planning scope to the surrounding 3 natural villages, covering about 100 hectares. It is conducive to the comprehensive development of industries into regional linkages, so as to achieve industry complementarity.

The industrial planning of Xigang has realized the linkage of three industries. In terms of the primary industry, with the help of the rich farmland resources of Xigang, high-standard farmland has been built, and rice and rapeseed rotation have been implemented on a large scale to provide two seasons of farmland. In terms of the secondary industry, on the basis of high-efficiency agriculture, increase agricultural product processing enterprises and enrich the types of industries. In terms of the tertiary industry, integrate the superior pastoral natural scenery of Xigang Village, the simple and unsophisticated customs of the village, and the Jiuxi River full of water town style to create an agricultural tourism system that organically combines "village, pastoral, and characteristic culture". In the southern part of the village, it is based on the development of efficient agricultural industries, with agricultural sightseeing, farming experience, and farmhouse leisure activities as the highlights. Relying on the city-level protected cultural relics Donglin Bridge and General Liu Meng Temple on the banks of the Jiuxi River as the core, the "historical and cultural experience" of the concept of farming, studying and research is created around the old house of Li Baye and the Zhou family hall. Planning a number of rural sightseeing themed loops with different experiences, linking the greenways and tourism resources along the Taihu Lake, the long-term Yunpu Bay, and the greenways on both sides of the Taipu River, becoming the foothold between Wujiang City and Pingwang, linking the surrounding areas, creating a "Country Field Tour".

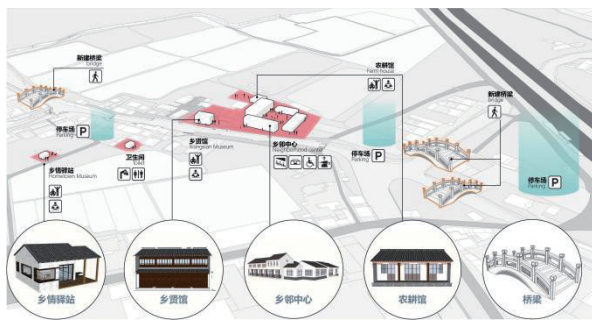


Figure 6. Public service facilities planning of Xigang Village

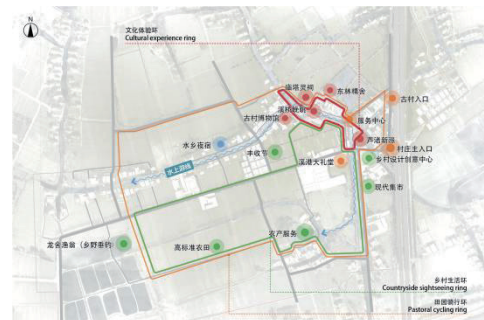


Figure 7. Tourism planning of Xigang Village

A comprehensive experience tour line (Figure 7) is planned to connect the three core areas of Xigang Living Room, Ancient Village Theater and Farming and Reading Night Park, so that tourists can experience the unique flavor brought by the countryside. The Jiuxi waterfront tour allows people to immerse themselves in the rich cultural atmosphere of the historic village, and the rural life tour takes people to experience the daily life of rural labor.

3.3.3 Shaping a characteristic style and highlighting a characteristic culture

Xigang Village was born because of Jiuxi. Today's Xigang still has many cultural relics left by the ancestors, and there are records of "Eight Scenic Spots of Jiuxi". Pingwang traditional folk customs are also reflected in Xigang Ancient Village, such as Pingwang Yangge, Pingwang lantern riddles and various traditional snacks. Through the excavation and inheritance of traditional culture, Xigang Village uses historical buildings as the carrier, farming, studying, research, and cultural exhibitions as the content, and uses water towns for overnight stays and themed activities to create a farming and reading that is

highly integrated with ancient village life and modern industrial life. Rural residence (Figure 8).



Figure 8. The effect of the overall planning of Xigang Village



Figure 9. The effect of the ancient village market in Xigang Village

Xigang combines cultural inheritance and industrial planning to develop the tertiary industry, create a life experience theater in Xigang Ancient Village, realize in-depth cultural experience, and feel the rural life different from the city. Xigang Village has reshaped the "Jiuxi Part of the "Eight Scenes" includes Luzhu Xinzhang, Gucun Bazaar (Figure 9), Liugeng Xueshe, Donglin Jingshe, etc. In addition, the traditional farming culture is displayed through the farming hall, and agricultural knowledge is popularized. Tell the stories of celebrities through the Xiangxian Pavilion, gather the stories of local celebrities in Xigang Village, use the Xiangxian Wall to display local sages from all walks of life, restore the residences of local celebrities in proportion, and reproduce the lives of Xigang villagers in the Ming and Qing Dynasties Life scenes, open-air cinemas can make visitors feel like they are in that era.

3.3.4 Stimulate rural vitality

The sustainable development of the countryside depends on a steady stream of new forces, and the return of villagers is the key point of a virtuous circle. Villages can attract villagers to return to their hometowns to live and live by improving the living environment and cultivating local feelings. By formulating relevant policies to attract talented people from the countryside to return to their hometowns to start businesses, and to provide comprehensive assistance to those who are willing to return to their hometowns for development. Through scientific planning of industrial development, attract social capital to empower the countryside. At the same time, it draws on the experience of Japan's "Regional Revitalization Cooperative Team" in supporting agriculture and South Korea's experience in the "Return to Farmers and Villages" program to attract talents to return to their hometowns for development, and to bring professional technology and new construction concepts to the countryside.

Adhere to the people-oriented principle and increase the participation of villagers. Do a good job in popular science education and policy publicity, and improve the overall quality of villagers. In terms of rural construction, listen to villagers' opinions, guide villagers to actively participate in the specific affairs of daily rural governance, arouse villagers' sense of responsibility and mission as masters, and encourage farmers to voluntarily participate in rural revitalization construction.

4. Conclusion

Xigang Village has completely jumped out of the traditional model of protecting traditional villages for protection. Under the premise of protection, it actively explores new ideas for rural revitalization. Through strategies such as improving living facilities, diversifying industries to promote economic revival, inheriting culture to shape unique features, and stimulating village vitality, the goal of rural revitalization will be gradually realized. In the context of the country's vigorous implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, the protection and development model of Xigang Village has a typical demonstration and leading role for the entire southern Jiangsu region and even other relatively developed regions in the country.

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