

Case Study Paper

# Planning Practice in Areas Beyond Megacities under the Rural Revitalisation Strategy in China

## Case Study of the New Jijiadun Village

### --A Concept of "Co-Creation Community for Rural Life"

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#### Abstract

*Under the global trends of urbanisation, rural development has posed a global challenge. As the Chinese government has continued to take invested in its rural areas, the Chinese urban and regional planners have also been presented with a series of questions: How to avoid the withering of rural communities due to urbanisation? How to build rural brands and form a new focus? How to maximize the utilisation of resources and regenerate the "hollow" villages? How to create the new ecosystem and change the rural outlook?*

*Based on the theories indicated in the books by Piro and Ganzer (2016) and Scott, et al. (2019) regarding the rural community planning, this paper uses a qualitative approach by conducting a case study of the new Jijiadun Village, describing an emerging pattern of rural life in areas around Shanghai, under the background of the Chinese Rural Revitalisation Strategy. With reference to the theories, the paper establishes the concept of "Co-Creation Community for Rural Life (乡村生活共创集群)", which refers to a new type of rural community formed by rural life enthusiasts and investors in an existing village, integrating multiple dimensions like rural homestay industry, cultural business, catering industry, organic agriculture, and family activities based on a platform built, planned and operated by an operating company.*

*Particularly, the paper explains how the Chinese planners have created the impetus for the rural industrial development based on the rural homestay industry. And it focuses on how these planners have broken the boundaries between the urban and rural areas, taking the city dwellers back to the rural and natural life while bringing vitality to the rural areas, which means to build a new path to rural innovation and urbanisation equilibrium with Chinese characteristics. Furthermore, combined with the authors' practical experience in the field of rural planning, the paper shares the models and approaches available for rural regeneration, which are applicable to rural areas and/or urban fringe seeking innovative development beyond megacities.*

#### Keywords

## 1. Background

With the development of industrialization and urbanization in China, the rural population is constantly shifting to cities, and the rural land is constantly swallowed up by cities. As the carrier of China's five thousand years of agricultural civilization, rural areas cannot catch up with China's modern development. As the carrier of traditional civilization, rural areas will fall into ruin in the process of urbanization, which is a foreseeable outcome.

As of 2017, the number of villages in China was about 2.45 million, while in 2000 there were about 3.6 million, which means a decrease by nearly 1.15 million in merely 17 years. About 185 natural villages are disappearing each day. By the end of 2018, China's urbanization rate reached 59.58 %, and China has entered a stage of integrated urban and rural development. On the one hand, rural culture is withering, and "hollow villages" keep appearing. In the meantime, the population surge has brought more stressors to human society, such as urban air pollution and living cost, making the urban living environment increasingly worse. How to revitalize the countryside, motivate people to return to the countryside, and relieve the pressure of the city, has presented a universal challenge.

In September 2018, the Chinese government released the "Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (2018-2022)", which indicated that "the rural area is a complex of natural, social, and economic features, involving multiple functions such as producing, living, as well as ecology and culture, which interacts and co-exists with the urban area, to constitute a main space for human activities together". The proposal of this strategy puts forward the requirements of implementing the rural revitalization strategy, particularly for the planning managers, practitioners and planners throughout the country, and clarifies the direction and focus of rural revitalization in China in the future.

Prior to this, the Chinese planners and cultural tourism companies had already gone deep into the rural area. In the past few decades, through rural design and construction practices, they have sought ways and methods of rural revitalization. These successful practices and cases have then been integrated into rural revitalization. Under the background of such times, it will provide a reference for the rural areas in need of development in the future.

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## 2. Observation: From Minshuku Design to Rural Revitalization

From the historical perspective, the urban-rural relations have been constantly changing with the development of modern civilization. Having gone through the stages of opposition, balance and integration, the ideal urban-rural relationship should be the integration with each other, namely, the urbanization of the rural area and the ruralisation of the urban area. The cultural penetration that occurs between the rural and the urban areas can bring the two even closer. Driven by this, rural tourism developed around the metropolis has experienced rapid growth. As these tourists come and go, the urban trends, lifestyles and public resources are gradually brought to the rural areas. In this sense, rural tourism has presented an important opportunity to promote the coordinated development of urban-rural relations.

## 2.1. Moganshan Program

The keen planners took the lead in investing in the rural life. In 2001, they created an ideal minshuku in a beautiful countryside in the Moganshan area of Zhejiang, China. On the basis of the existing empty houses and old buildings in the local communities, their program has managed not to destroy the original village structure and created a comfortable rural community with low-density buildings. After creating Minshuku (homestay or guesthouse) brands such as the Lost Villa and Yuanshe (Fig. 1-2), the planners have set up the Minshuku Alliance and launched the “Moganshan program”. More designers, artists, cultural scholars, and green life advocates have begun to take part in the program which has gathered a variety of themes and formats during the process. They worked together to renovate the abandoned rural public buildings in Moganshan and include more significant functions such as cultural display and art parks, rural education and training, catering facilities, and art hotels, to create China's first cultural marketplace, the “Yucun1932”, which aimed to rebuild the rural areas (Fig. 3-6). Since its launch, this innovative cultural marketplace has been attracting tourists and culture enthusiasts from major cities in the Yangtze River Delta as well as other regions of China. This program has become a symbol and benchmark in the field of cultural creation and the Minshuku or guesthouse industry in rural China; moreover, it has practically facilitated the interactions between the rural and urban areas, creating a sense of belonging for both rural and urban populations.



Fig. 1 Lost Villa in Moganshan, <http://lostvilla.cn/>



Fig. 2 Yuanshe in Moganshan, <http://xband.club/>



Fig. 3 Folk culture exhibition hall in YuCun 1932, <http://travel.qunar.com/youji/7048720>

Fig. 4 Minshuku college in YuCun 1932, <http://travel.qunar.com/youji/7048720>



Fig. 5-6 External view of YuCun 1932, <http://travel.qunar.com/youji/7048720>

## 2.2. Songtsam Model

Along the Dian-Zang line (Yunnan-Tibet line) in China, there has been an innovative tourism model, namely, the “hotels+tourism” model by the Songtsam Hotel, which integrate varied themed hotels into the tourist spots. In 2000, Pema Dorje, a TV producer, established the Songtsam Hotel after he left Beijing and returned to his hometown, a rural region in Tibet. Since then, he introduced a modern model of hospitality operations, designing and creating more comfortable hotels based on the traditional Tibetan buildings in the rural Tibet. In the past ten years, dozens of Tibetan-style hotels have been created along the the Yunnan-Tibet line (Fig. 7). Geographically, each hotel is connected to the fields, canyons, snow mountains, lakes and forests on the Tibetan Plateau (Fig. 8-9); Culturally, each of them is connected to Tibetan temples, villages, arts and crafts, as well as the local cuisine. These hotels can be set as separate tourist destinations; or they can be integrated into a travel loop.

Songtsam will continue to build more hotels along the Dian-Zang line, known as the world’s most beautiful road. It intends to rebuild the “the Ancient Tea Horse Road”, and form a world-class tourist route. The Songtsam Series Hotels have not only attracted more tourists to come to the rural Tibet, but also put a focus on maintaining the local cultures and traditions by recruiting local employees. Trip Advisor has ranked Songtsam as the top 25 hotels in China for nine consecutive years. The attraction of cultural tourism comes from the culture itself, and the rural revitalisation will be enabled with the cultural revitalisation in the rural areas.





Fig. 7 The map of Songtsam Yunnan-Tibet line, <https://www.songtsam.com/>



Fig. 8 Songtsam in Tacheng, Tibet , <https://www.songtsam.com/>

Fig. 9 Songtsam in Shangri-la, Yunnan , <https://www.songtsam.com/>

The success of the Moganshan program is due to the professional sense of the planners; and the success of the Songtsam model cannot be separated from its respect for culture. What is common is that they both have initiated urban-rural interactions and introduced the urban civilization and industrialization into the rural areas. While recreating the rural life, the rural spirit will also relieve the increasing pressure of the urban areas. They put forward the concept of rural ecological circle and promotes a model integrating production, life and business that can be a virtuous circle and create value.

### 3. Experience: “Co-Creation Community for Rural Life (乡村生活共创集群)”

Rural tourism is changing because of the involvement of cultural creation and guesthouse development. Specifically, rural tourism has been shifting its focus from traveling to vacationing, featured with scale development, ecological environment protection, emerging business mode and rural construction. However, these forms of business are fragmented and scattered. So the question is how to integrate them as a whole and present a replicable model of rural revitalisation.

In February 2017, the Chinese government released the concept of “ecological pastoral complex”, which can be expressed by a formula, namely: “agricultural science and technology + agricultural production + agricultural tourism + agricultural culture”. The

ecological pastoral complex includes three industrial sectors of agriculture, cultural tourism and real estate.

Based on the successful experience of the Moganshan program and the support of national policies, the XBAND Group (xband.club) has been trying to explore new ways of rural cultural tourism development. As an operator of rural pastoral complex, it has tried to renovate the traditional villages in rural or suburban areas where the residents have mostly migrated to the urban areas, by developing the boutique homestay clusters that are well equipped with facilities like amusement park or playground for children, coffee shops, restaurants, handicraft workshops, outdoor sports, specialized retail stores. In the meantime, the surrounding environments like farmlands, forests and waters are undisturbed while developing these vacation destinations in the suburbs to serve tourists from the urban areas. Such an idyllic complex project usually covers an area of several hundred acres and has a business area of 5,000 to 50,000 square meters. It is positioned as a Co-Creation Community for Rural Life (乡村生活共创集群), also known as the “ideal village”.

### 3.1. Project Overview

As the first practice of the “ideal village”, the Jijiadun Village has the outstanding geographic advantages with convenient transportation since it is east to Shanghai, the most famous international metropolis in China, and west to Suzhou, the famous historic and cultural city. As the first “ideal village” practice place, Jijiadun Village has convenient transportation and obvious location advantages. It is east to the international metropolis Shanghai and west to the historical and cultural city of Suzhou. It is a scarce resource due to its connection with Shanghai, since the transportation from Jijiadun to Shanghai takes less than one hour (Fig 10). The Jijiadun Village has taken a typical pattern of Jiangnan Water Township, with abundant natural resources and tourism resources (Fig. 11-12).

The Jijiadun Administrative Village covers an area of 1.7 square kilometres and consists of two natural villages. To be specific, there are 142 houses in the Jijiadun Natural Village, with a construction land area of 5.7 hectares. Since most of the residents in the village moved to towns and cities, the village was nearly empty. The government has relocated the remaining households at the end of 2014 upon their consent, and the land of the village has been state-owned. Instead of adopting the traditional approach of returning farmland to the forestry, the local government decided to develop the village with limited capital by collectively using the land, focusing on cultural tourism and attracting people to the village, so as to revitalise the village and the neighbouring areas.

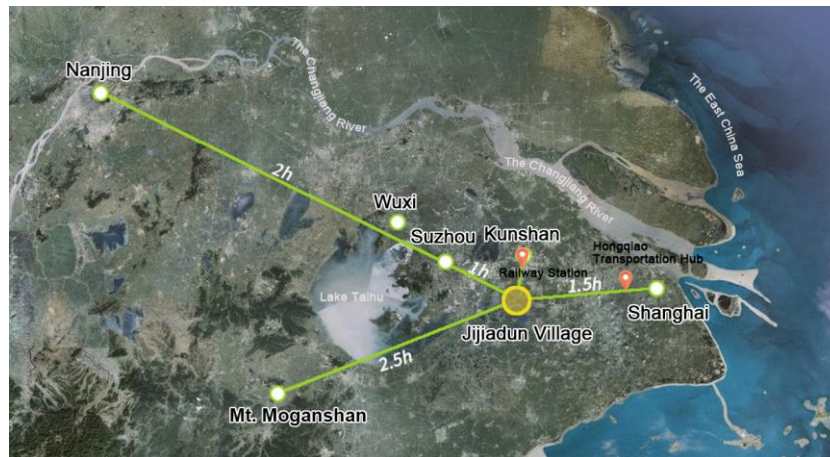


Fig. 10 The Location Map of Jijiadun Village

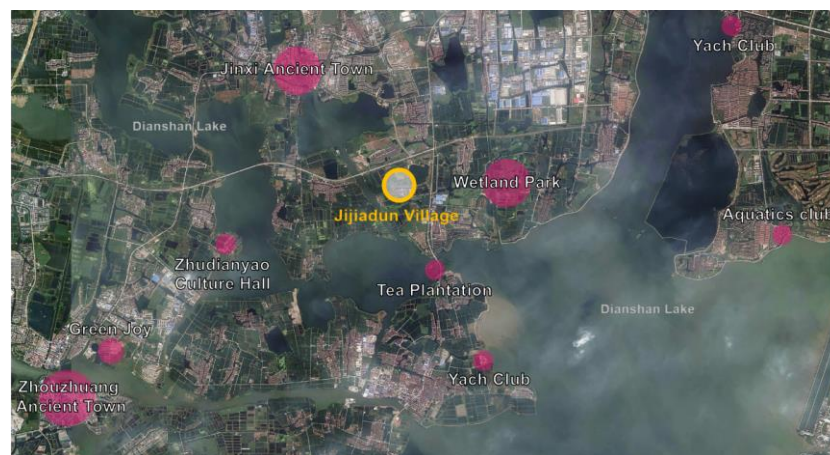


Fig. 11 The Micro-location Map of Jijiadun Village



Fig. 12 Aerial view of Jijiadun Village, Xband.club

### 3.2. Project Planning

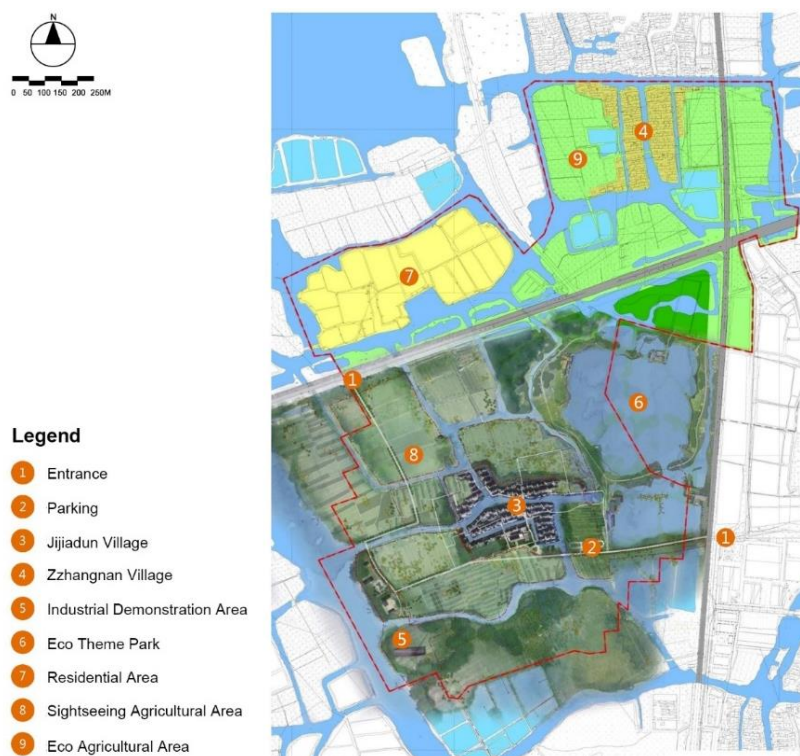
As for the “Planning of Jijiadun New Rural Life Project in Jinxi, Kunshan”, at the level of overall planning, it has integrated the existing conditions and the regional resources, to maintain the existing water township pattern and pastoral landscape as well as present the unique local features. According to the plan, the Jijiadun Village will be the core area, around



which there are eight functional areas, including: the rural industrial demonstration area, the sightseeing agriculture demonstration area, the theme ecological park, the residential area, the Zhangnan Featured Village and the ecological agriculture demonstration area (Fig. 13).

residential area, the Zhangnan Featured village and the Eco agriculture demonstration area. The local government undertakes the infrastructure construction of the surrounding supporting sections and core areas, and the township accompanying cultural brigade conducts overall planning and design, project investment, investment construction and operation management for the core area (Jijiadun Village). The local government is responsible for the construction of supporting infrastructure in the core area as well as the surrounding functional areas, while the XBAND Group is responsible for the overall design and planning of the core area (namely the Jijiadun Village), attracting businesses and investment for the project, as well as operations management.

The project has adopted an innovative model that consists of entering with scattered capital, development of rural complex, and reconstruction of the cluster community. It tries to integrate and reuse the collective assets and resources in the rural area; in the meanwhile, it also tries to integrate the abundant social resources, absorbs the intellectuals and technologies from the urban areas. Based on the capability in planning and development, the professional operations management, and the diverse financing channels, the project aims to realize the coordination of investment, construction, and operations.



**Fig. 13 Master Plan of Jijiadun Village, Planning of Jijiadun New Rural Life Project in Jinxi, Kunshan**



In the core area (Jijiadun Village), through the analysis and calculation of the current situation, 121 households were retained on the basis of the 142 houses, and the other 21 households were returned for agricultural land. The planned construction land area is 4.92 hectares (Fig. 14-15).

The planning has comprehensively evaluated the houses retained in the core area, and make overall arrangements according to the needs of the construction stage and the development needs of the resident business. The houses that basically meet the development needs of the layout are reserved, while structural reinforcement and decoration are planned as needed. For houses that do not meet the needs, renovations will be carried out within the scope of their original house sites.



Fig. 14 Homestead Utilization Analysis Diagram, Planning of Jijiadun New Rural Life Project in Jinxi, Kunshan



Fig. 15 Core Area Plan of Jijiadun Village, Planning of Jijiadun New Rural Life Project in Jinxi, Kunshan

### 3.3. Business Model

An innovative model, namely the “1+X” cultural and rural model of the Jijiadun Co-Creation Community (Fig. 16) has been developed:

1: Taking the business of the hotel as the core, it has integrated varied functions such as the cultural business, themed restaurants, leisure experience, organic agriculture and other functions of cultural tourism, so as to form a complete cluster of cultural tourism.

X: It stands for a specific theme related to the rural cultural tourism, such as education and training, exhibitions, art performances, etc.

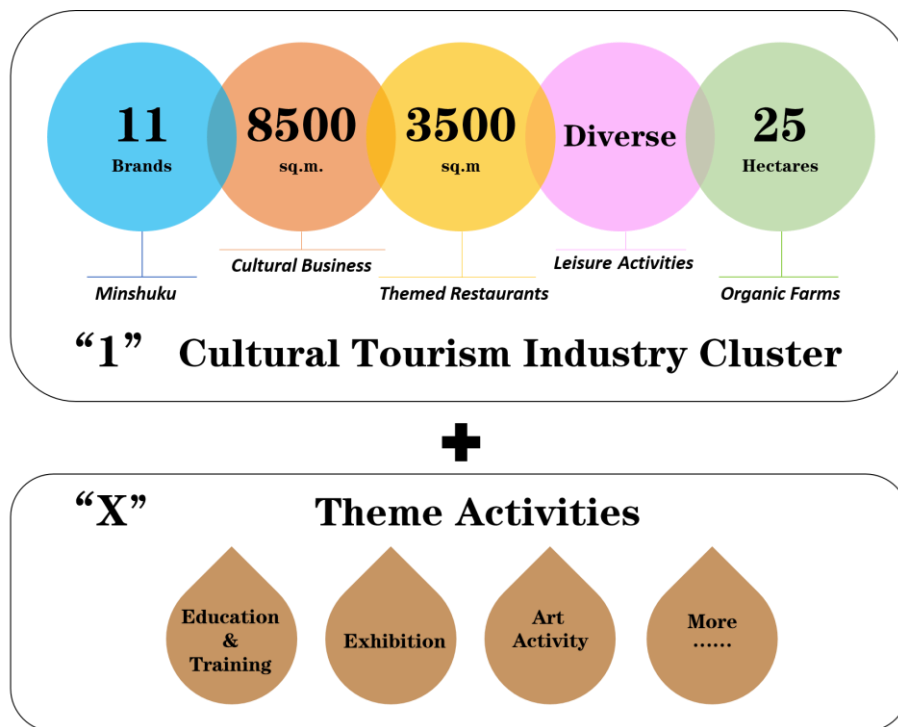


Fig. 16 Model Canvas of the Jijiadun Co-Creation Community

On the basis of revitalizing the rural collective stock assets, this model introduces the cultural tourism of diverse features to redevelop the Jijiadun Village and reuse its resources, so as to improve the living environments and infrastructure in the rural area, which would again attract and guide the local residents to return and invest themselves into the construction and operations management of the rural tourism. At the same time, the project can upgrade the rural tourism industry from the three basic stages of agritainment (rural entertainment), sightseeing tour and family trip; the upgraded rural tourism is also known as the rural tourism 4.0, namely, the Co-Creation Community for Rural Life. Further, the project has a purpose of attracting attention to the rural areas and attracting people to return, which tries to facilitate those aware of the new rural lifestyle concept to invest in the rural areas, and enrich the operations of the Co-Creation Community for Rural Life, ultimately revitalise the rural areas.

### 3.4. Development Status

At present, the first phase of Jijiadun Village has been completed and has operated 7 branded homestays with 180 rooms in total. Successively, it has attracted the entrance of varied businesses, such as pottery, woodworking, handmade ships, café, restaurants and natural farms. In the village (Fig. 17), there have been a series of themed activities successfully held, such as the Rural Life Festival, the Field Music Festival, the Parent-Child Summer Camp, and the Water Market, which have attracted abundant new villages from Shanghai and its surrounding areas.

With the continuous improvement of the infrastructure and the continuous construction of the village, the Jijiadun Co-Creation Community is expected to have a maximum flow of 3,000 people per day after the completion of the overall development, including 500 hotel guests. Generally, the annual number of tourists is expected to achieve 300,000.

As part of the exploration in rural revitalisation, it has made adequate achievement. The XBAND Group regards the Co-Creation Community for Rural Life as the ideal village, which has been promoted in many rural areas in China as a replicable, promotable and sustainable rural development mode.



Fig. 17 Post-construction Photo of Jijiadun Co-Creation Community, Some of the photos are from Xband.club

## 4. Conclusion Rural Revitalisation Outlook

From the Moganshan Program to the Jijiadun Co-Creation Community for Rural Life, the emerging industrial and business modes like Minshuku, rural tourism, cultural creation and others have blurred the boundary between the rural and urban areas. The urban and rural lifestyles and cultures have integrated with each other, which are not limited by their



geographical features. The exploration of the emerging modes will influence and inspire the planning for the rural revitalisation in the future. The planning for rural areas should not be limited to traditional landscaping, but take more perspectives, to focus on the local environments and conditions. According to the practices and cases demonstrated above, there are several recommendations for rural revitalisation.

#### 1) Cultural Reconstruction and Rural-Urban Integration

Focus on culture and explore the distinctive features of the local area, to maintain the strengths and overcome the weaknesses. Establish the cultural creation platform, to attract external talents and young labourers to return to the rural areas and form their new rural cultures. Facilitate interactions and bonds between the original residents and new incomers as well as the integration between the urban and rural lifestyles, so as to gradually shorten the distance between the urban and rural areas.

#### 2) Spatial Planning with Rural and Pastoral Landscape Maintained

The uniqueness of a rural area from its spatial dimension and arrangement carries the humanity and memory of the local rural life. The planning should abandon the external biases and respect the originality of each rural area. On the basis of the unique rural and pastoral landscape of a specific rural area, it is recommended to use low-density buildings to maintain the intimacy and affinity of the rural area, and create a rural community of ecological vitality.

#### 3) Resources Integration and Modular Development

Integrate internal and external resources and establish the industrial platform of rural recreation to motivate the development of the tertiary industry and promote the overall value of the rural lands. Meanwhile, the rural areas can facilitate modular development of the rural cultural tourism, to rapidly revitalise the rural areas with the well-developed operation modes and customer groups.

#### 4) Planning Oriented, and Multi-party Coordination

Use planning as a means of regulation, to comprehensively integrate the industries and establish feasible models of rural development featured with scientific layout and orderly construction, as well as optimized rural environments. Establish an interactive mechanism that involves the government, enterprises, planners and local residents, using the quality platform and advanced concepts from the external parties to satisfy the local needs and guide the local development with characteristic industries.

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