Sustainable Development of Rural Revitalization in Zibo Pujia Village: A Perspective on Culture-Tourism Integration

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Abstract: Traditional villages are significant carriers of China's traditional culture, with 6,819 villages listed in the Catalogue of Traditional Chinese Villages since 2012, all of high conservation and research value. However, current conservation efforts face challenges, such as a focus on conservation over utilization and difficulties in protection and use in remote areas. There is an urgent need for a transformation in the methods and techniques of conservation, and research on utilization methods is insufficient, with the core cultural values of villages not being fully showcased. Remote villages, due to inconvenient transportation and isolation, though preserving complete layouts, suffer from severe population loss and the phenomenon of "hollowing out." Thus, exploring how to protect and utilize traditional villages in the new era has become an important research topic. As the birthplace of the Liao Zhai culture, the continued development research of Pujia Village is of significant importance for deepening the understanding of the Liao Zhai culture, heritage preservation, and expanding the influence of the Liao Zhai culture both domestically and internationally. This paper, through extensive field surveys and literature collection, bridges theory with practice. Building on a review of traditional village tourism and theoretical discussions on in-depth development, it explores sustainable development pathways for tourism in the ancient village of Pujia Village.

Keywords: Traditional Villages, Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Development, Liao Zhai Culture, Pujia Village

1. Background

In the report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it was proposed to "vigorously advance the construction of ecological civilization". The construction of ecological civilization is a long-term plan related to the well-being of the people and the future of the nation. Faced with the tightening constraints on resources, severe environmental pollution, and the degradation of ecosystems, the construction of ecological civilization has been placed in a prominent position and integrated into all aspects and the entire process of economic, political, cultural, and social construction. In 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Protection, Utilization, and Inheritance of Historical and Cultural Heritage in Urban and Rural Construction", further emphasizing the importance of protecting, utilizing, and inheriting historical and cultural heritage in urban and rural construction. This has profound significance for maintaining historical continuity, promoting high-quality urban and rural construction, bolstering cultural confidence, and building a culturally strong socialist country. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China further proposed "to comprehensively advance rural revitalization, adhere to the priority development of agriculture and rural areas, consolidate and expand the achievements of poverty alleviation, accelerate the construction of a strong agricultural country, and solidly promote the revitalization of rural industries, talents, culture, ecology, and organizations". The Central No. 1 Document of 2023 and the Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan have more clearly proposed the high-quality development of rural industries and the important role of rural cultural and tourism industries in rural revitalization. The integration of culture and tourism has become a new requirement and direction for promoting cultural and tourism reform and development, especially in the protection and development of traditional villages, where culture-tourism integration projects have become an important pillar of the rural revitalization strategy.

However, in the process of rapid urbanization, China's countryside, especially traditional villages,
still faces issues such as population loss, abandoned farmland, declining agricultural production, loss of traditional culture, and deteriorating living environments. These problems highlight the imbalance and incompleteness of rural and urban development processes, making the socialist rural revitalization a key to resolving the principal contradictions in Chinese society in the new era and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the Chinese Dream. Against this backdrop, the integration of culture and tourism, leveraging regional resource advantages to promote regional cultural development, has become an important strategy. Therefore, the sustainable development of rural revitalization in traditional villages requires the support of policies, the market, and society. Through innovative design and development, it can breathe new life, deeply integrate cultural and tourism industries, and carve new paths for the cultural revival of China's countryside.

2. Research Objectives and Significance

The core goal of the rural revitalization strategy is to guide households towards comprehensive prosperity, encompassing both material and cultural dimensions [1]. In 2022, the Central No. 1 Document specifically called for the exploration and utilization of diverse rural resources across the nation, vigorously promoting the development of new business forms in rural areas, such as leisure tourism, agricultural product processing, and agricultural e-commerce. To advance the revitalization of traditional villages, it is necessary to devise corresponding development plans for rural leisure tourism, supporting households to directly engage in or participate in the management of rural accommodations and farm stay, which are characteristic of rural tourism [2]. Through the integration of cultural and tourism industries, we can achieve a deep fusion of traditional culture and rural tourism, fostering new industries and models in cultural tourism and traditional village tourism, maximizing the value of rural tourism products, deeply processing all rural resources, and truly presenting them to the world.

Pujia Village, located in the hilly area 3.5 kilometers east of Zichuan District in Zibo City, was designated as China's seventh batch of historic and cultural villages in 2019. This ancient village, with a history dating back six hundred years, is a clan village named after the Pu family, possessing deep historical, cultural, artistic, and social values. Investigating the sustainable development pathways for Pujia Village holds immense value for preserving its historical sites, passing its culture on to future generations, and achieving its long-term utilization. Currently, Pujia Village is home to over six hundred households and more than 1,600 residents, mostly descendants of the Pu family. The village primarily relies on agriculture, with the traditional economy dependent on farmland and coal mines. In 1989, the village began to invest in tourism development using funds from coal mines and a hardware factory, gradually establishing the Liao Zhai Park scenic area, making tourism the leading industry in Pujia Village. Researching the sustainable development of Pujia Village under the culture-tourism sector is significant for enhancing the economic level of local residents, improving living conditions, reducing urban-rural disparities, and promoting the comprehensive development of rural communities [3].

3. The Essence and Characteristics of Development in Ancient Village Tourism

Tourism development refers to the process predicated on the growth of the tourism industry, guided by the market demand for tourism resources, with the core focus on exploring and utilizing the tourism potential of destinations. This involves enhancing, exploiting, and improving tourism resources to generate attraction for visitors [4]. Tourism development represents a systematic economic and technical engineering effort that is planned and organized to utilize the tourism resources of a destination [5].

In-depth tourism development implies a premise of advancing the tourism industry to its fullest potential, aiming to maximally exploit and utilize tourism resources and fully harness their potential [6]. It involves a multi-faceted and multi-level market analysis, studying visitor demand, and employing modern scientific and technological advancements to artificially transform existing tourism resources. The focus is on continually excavating the essence of tourism resources to infuse tourism products with vibrant life and new energy. From the perspective of the tourism life cycle, this aims to extend the peak period and shorten the decline phase, timely introducing new, innovative, and dynamic tourism products to the market, thereby fostering the comprehensive and healthy development of local tourism.

Deep development of ancient village tourism specifically aims at sustainable development, based on visitor demand, for both currently utilized and yet-to-be utilized tourism resources. This involves an
in-depth and regenerative development approach, enriching ancient village tourism with new vitality by exploring the essence and core of tourism resources, thus ensuring these villages remain in the development's peak phase for an extended period. This approach involves analyzing the market on multiple levels and continuously introducing new tourism products to society. Deep development of ancient village tourism is crucial for extending the life cycle of village tourism, enhancing its comprehensive developmental benefits, and promoting a fully sustainable development of ancient village tourism.

Innovative development in ancient village tourism is based on fully considering visitor needs, continuously launching products that meet these demands with novelty and uniqueness. This involves productizing tourism resources through modern technological means, packaging them in a way that not only highlights the original development features but also incorporates new tourism connotations, thereby enhancing the contemporary appeal of tourism.

Derivative development in ancient village tourism is an extension based on existing foundations. It involves re-exploring and integrating tourism resources, considering the overall tourism development. This calls for maintaining and promoting existing tourism developments while designing derivative products with careful integration of new and old offerings.

High-level tourism development in ancient villages not only seeks to fully exploit the potential of village tourism resources but also to develop them in various aspects, including external appearance and content layers. This encompasses fully utilizing and expanding the cultural connotations of tourism, employing village tourism resources on multiple levels and aspects. Through scientifically and rationally designing the image of tourism spots, new and attractive tourism concepts that strongly appeal to visitors are introduced. In-depth tourism development necessitates the incorporation of advanced domestic and international tourism management experiences and models, enhancing the service level of village tourism to boost the destination's attractiveness on a higher and more comprehensive scale.

4. The Principles and Procedures of Ancient Village Tourism Development

The development of ancient village tourism must ensure that the ecological environment and overall landscape of the ancient villages are not damaged. When developing and transforming tourist attractions in ancient villages, as well as constructing new tourism products and facilities, care must be taken not to adversely affect the overall appearance of the villages.

Ancient villages are historical and cultural heritages. In the process of their in-depth tourism development, it is essential to protect the local original appearance and authenticity, achieving protective development. Therefore, in the context of sustainable development, when considering the development of ancient village tourism, emphasis should be placed on restoring the historical environment of historical villages and maintaining their unique individual characteristics. The focus for well-preserved ancient buildings is on the maintenance and protection of the structures; for those with original appearances but minor damages to building doors, windows, carvings, or walls, the principle of "restoring the old as it was" should be emphasized, focusing on their repair. For ancient village buildings that are mostly intact but in poor condition and severely damaged, reconstruction or comprehensive refurbishment should be undertaken. Additionally, the environmental rehabilitation of ancient villages should be emphasized, managing the environmental order of ancient village-style and the "modern" residential properties of affluent farmers.

The development of tourism resources in ancient villages should be based on high-level strategic research to ensure coherence and consistency in the deep development implementation. When formulating specific tourism plans, a regulated and sound system and policies should serve as the foundation, fully reflected in the government's management system while ensuring the practicality and operability of the development management. The development of ancient village tourism implies maintaining and continuously enhancing the future development capabilities of ancient villages, through moderate and rational exploration and development of ancient village tourism resources. This not only meets the current tourism demand but also satisfies the interests and survival needs of the residents of ancient villages, both now and in the future, inheriting the culture of ancient villages, protecting the villages and their surrounding environments, and achieving the sustainability requirements of ancient village tourism resources, economic development, and social progress. In the development and utilization, and construction of ancient village tourism, attention should be paid to
investigation and research, comprehensive planning, and highlighting the architectural style, artistic quality, cultural interest, aesthetic style, and folk customs of ancient villages, thereby creating a distinctive personality and strong attraction.

The development of ancient village tourism aims to achieve certain economic benefits while also considering social and environmental benefits. Tourism development activities must not come at the cost of damaging society and the environment; otherwise, it could lead to a decline in the environmental quality of tourist destinations, wastage of tourism resources, and social unrest, negatively affecting the sustainable development of local tourism.

Tourism resources are pivotal to tourism development, which should initially be predicated on an analysis of the geographical location and market advantages of ancient villages. It involves a comprehensive understanding and evaluation of its tourism resources, taking an integrated approach. The objective is to grasp the types, abundance, features, quality, origins, structure, and distribution of the ancient village's tourism resources, providing an objective, quantifiable, and scientific evaluation to serve as a reference for the in-depth development of ancient village tourism.

The survey of tourism resources can be conducted through field investigations, and the collection, analysis, and summary of documentary materials. The evaluation of tourism resources, based on the results of the survey, is integrated with the requirements for the development and utilization of tourism resources. This involves qualitative and quantitative assessments of the tourism destination's resources, including the value of resource elements (appreciation, recreation, historical culture, scientific art, rarity, scale and depth, and likelihood, completeness, etc.), resource influence (reputation and influence, suitable seasons or scope), and environmental protection and safety along with their environmental development value, spatial combination characteristics, and visitor capacity, etc. Based on this, reports on tourism resource surveys and resource evaluation summaries are compiled.

The feasibility study of in-depth development projects is to demonstrate whether the tourism resources involved in the project have development prospects and whether they possess the necessity and feasibility for development. The feasibility study is founded on extensive, in-depth field and market research, scientific evaluation of tourism resources, and an objective assessment of other relevant factors. It involves studying the current tourism resources and market demand trends, as well as scientifically analyzing and predicting development conditions and investment risks. Tourism resource development is an economic and technical activity requiring a feasibility analysis to investigate whether tourism development conforms to the principle of economic benefit, has profit potential, and can produce positive impacts in terms of social and environmental benefits, and whether the development technology meets national standards. If the project is feasible, it moves to the next phase; otherwise, a new project will be redefined.

The core issue of the in-depth development mode of tourism resources is the development direction of the tourism resources at the destination. The development mode should be determined based on the characteristics of the tourism resources and market demand. The resource development mode for ancient village tourism represents a strategic management strategy.

5. Challenges in the Tourism Development of Pujia Ancient Village

For a long time, the development of Liao Zhai culture tourism has focused on Pu Songling and Liao Zhai culture, as well as literary works, while overlooking Pujia Village, the ancient village that can inherit the historical context and embody the roots of Liao Zhai culture. This oversight has led to significant lag in both the protection and development of Pujia Village. Pujia Village, where Pu Songling was born, lived, wrote, and was buried, is intrinsically linked to him and serves as the root and source of Liao Zhai culture. Pujia Village, a typical Ming and Qing dynasty-style village, with its ancient and quaint residential architecture and simple folk customs, deeply attracts tourists. It represents a cultural landscape, thereby supporting the overall tourism atmosphere of the area and playing a crucial role in establishing the tourism image of Pujia Village and enhancing the tourism experience.

Overall, the buildings in Pujia Village still maintain the appearance of the Ming and Qing dynasties, with a long history. However, they have also been eroded by time, with various degrees of damage to the architectural framework and structure. The ancient walls that have stood for many years are almost gone; the North Gate "Jingzheng" is severely damaged, the South Gate "Kuiyang" has been demolished, and many ancient buildings have collapsed entirely or partially. Some are merely architectural shells
but have become "dangerous buildings"; others have been demolished and rebuilt into modern residences. This situation is mainly due to the long-term emphasis on the protection of Pujia Village's historical appearance, prohibiting local residents from renovating or rebuilding their homes, and not allowing new constructions within the ancient village. Emphasizing protection without development will inevitably prevent the improvement of local residents' living conditions in the long term, exacerbating the contradiction between village preservation and local residents, leading to the decay of the entire village, and thus counterproductively affecting the preservation of the ancient village.

Currently, the management and operation of Pujia Village's two major tourist attractions are divided between two different organizations: the Pu Songling Memorial Hall, managed by the Zibo City Culture Bureau, and Liao Zhai City, developed and operated by the tourism development company owned by Pujia Village. These two attractions operate independently in tourism development, construction, and day-to-day management, lacking a unified system for comprehensive tourism in Pujia Village, failing to coordinate with each other. Presently, there are issues of thematic repetition between the two scenic areas, similar development content, and a lack of joint tourism products. Without systemic and mechanism reform, the in-depth development of Pujia Village's tourism will further intensify the contradictions in the management system. Therefore, it is crucial to streamline the tourism management system, elevate this issue to the government agenda promptly, and achieve a union of the three tourist spots: Pujia Ancient Village, Liao Zhai City, and Pu Songling's former residence, thereby promoting the in-depth development of Liao Zhai cultural tourism.

Currently, Pujia Village's tourism development focuses solely on attractions, with insufficient development in tourism-related facilities such as dining, lodging, and shopping, leading to short-stay, sightseeing-oriented tourism. Visitors have limited consumption options and cannot deeply experience the essence of Liao Zhai culture. Consequently, tourism revenue is limited to ticket sales from scenic areas, and tourism development has not fully stimulated the village's and the region's economic growth.

Pujia Village boasts a rich heritage of material and intangible cultural heritage. The ancient buildings are private property accumulated over generations by the residents, and Liao Zhai culture, as a cultural heritage, belongs to both the entire society and the descendants of the Pu family and villagers of Pujia Village. However, due to the villagers’ limited knowledge and lack of opportunities to participate in tourism development and operation, the income from the two tourist spots goes to government departments and enterprises, respectively. While local villagers have made significant sacrifices and efforts to protect Pujia Ancient Village, their minimal participation in tourism development means they have gained little from the conservation and tourism development efforts. Conversely, the protection of the village's historical appearance has brought many inconveniences to their daily lives, and their living conditions and environment have not improved accordingly. Therefore, in the in-depth development of tourism, it is necessary to establish a scientific and equitable benefit distribution mechanism to ensure that the costs and benefits of Pujia Ancient Village's tourism development are reasonably and evenly distributed among the government (departments), enterprises, and local villagers.

6. Implementation of Development of Tourism in Pujia Ancient Village

The Zibo Municipal Party Committee and the Municipal Government have always placed a high emphasis on the development of the tourism industry, creating a favorable policy and social environment for the rapid growth of the tourism sector. The social, economic, and environmental benefits brought by tourism have become increasingly evident, with a notable enhancement in the quality and competitive ability of the tourism industry. This has laid a solid foundation for a leapfrog development in the deep tourism development of Zibo.

By building a cultural tourism product system comprising six major cultural elements—Qi culture, Cuju football culture, Liao Zhai culture, among others—Zibo aims to establish a well-structured, logically arranged, fully equipped, high-grade, and market-effective cluster of tourism projects and an industrial system. This enhancement of the comprehensive competitiveness of tourism intends to transform the tourism industry into a crucial strategic pillar of Zibo’s socio-economic development, positioning Zibo as a nationally renowned and competitive tourism destination. Undoubtedly, this presents a favorable opportunity for the in-depth development of tourism in Pujia Ancient Village. Capitalizing on this opportunity, it is essential to delve into its rich tourism resources, innovate in-depth development strategies, integrate effective tourism resources, develop tourism products thoroughly, and innovate in the operational and management models of tourism resources. By refining management practices, the goal is to achieve a comprehensive enhancement of tourism in Pujia Ancient Village,
elevating the quality and prestige of tourism.

Currently, Pujia Village tourism has established a foundation and gained recognition. Pu Songling’s Former Residence and Liao Zhai City have developed to a certain scale, influencing the provincial tourism market and becoming a pillar tourism product of Zibo. In recent years, several Liao Zhai-themed festival activities have been developed, including the "China Zibo International Liao Zhai Culture Tourism Festival" during the May Day golden week, and the "China Zibo Liao Zhai Culture and Arts Fair," "Liao Zhai Folk Song Contest," and "Liao Zhai Folklore Storytelling Contest" during the National Day golden week. Over the years, these initiatives have gradually established a tourism structure featuring "One Famous City, Two Major Bases, Three Major Markets, Four Major Landscapes, Five Circular Routes, and Six Major Parks."

The development of Pujia Village tourism mainly revolves around Liao Zhai culture, focusing on Pu Songling’s Former Residence and Liao Zhai City. However, the six-hundred-year-old Pujia Village itself has seen less development. There is significant potential for in-depth tourism development in Pujia Village, such as exploring the unique style of Pujia Village, the ancient architectural complexes of the Ming and Qing dynasties in northern China, and the development of ancient village and hometown projects.

Zibo enjoys a unique geographical advantage, situated at the junction of the central Shandong mountains and the northern plains, with Tai Mountain to the south, the Yellow River to the north, and close to the coastal cities of Qingdao, Yantai, and Weihai to the east, and Jinan to the west. As a critical transportation hub in Shandong, with thorough railway connections and extensive road networks, transportation is convenient. The Ji-Qing expressway crosses the city from east to west, enhancing accessibility to all districts and counties within the city and establishing the main framework of "high-speed Zibo." A comprehensive "three verticals, three horizontals" inter-regional and "six verticals, nine horizontals" municipal arterial road network has been fundamentally completed, significantly improving the accessibility of scenic areas.

The connotation of Pujia Ancient Village is immensely rich. Through a comprehensive understanding of the tourism resources of Pujia Ancient Village and exploring the unique features of its tourism resources, we can understand the current demands of Zibo's tourist market and the level of tourism development. Centering on Liao Zhai culture, tourism in-depth development projects are determined along two main themes: the village itself and its historical roots. The village's development mainly includes restoration projects of the village's outline and layout, focusing on ancient Sophora trees, the temple from the twenty-fifth year of the Daoguang Emperor, the Guandi Temple, the Huaye Tactical Headquarters Memorial, and the Mi Family Alley. Development projects related to the historical roots mainly include the Pu family ancestral hall, the Pu family ancestral house, Ying Zhong Society, and "He Sheng Hao."

The in-depth tourism development planning of Pujia Ancient Village is based on market research, encompassing both general and detailed plans for tourism development, guiding the overall tourism development plans and implementation. Tourism planning serves as a government guide for developing and managing tourism, an essential tool for deep village tourism development, landscape protection, attracting external funding, and tourism marketing. Tailoring to the unique tourism resources of Pujia Ancient Village, the plan specifies the protection, restoration, and renewal of tourism resources based on their types and characteristics, drafting specialized protection and development plans. For example, protecting ancient village buildings not only requires drafting protection plans but also detailed technical specifications for aspects like the exterior image, roofing style, color usage, and outdoor advertising.

In-depth development focuses on enhancing the layout of development projects, optimizing the project structure, complementing tourism facilities, and perfecting the tourism functions of the ancient village. Leveraging the tourism resource advantages of Pujia Ancient Village, leisure and cultural projects specific to the ancient village are developed, with emphasis on developing cultural projects around the village and historical roots. Relying on the profound historical and cultural resources of Liao Zhai culture, efforts are made to develop Liao Zhai culture, unique cultural experiences, and ancient village tourism, making ancient village tourism a hotspot.

A unified management and development institution for Pujia Ancient Village tourism—"Pujia Ancient Village Tourism In-depth Development and Management Committee"—is established. This committee, led by Zibo's Culture Bureau and in collaboration with the Zichuan District Government of Zibo and Hongshan Town Government, operates jointly with the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Zichuan District, Zibo. The committee unifies the management, planning, coordination, and
supervision of all tourism resources related to Pujia Ancient Village.

During the in-depth development process of Pujia Ancient Village tourism, the interests of the villagers must be fully considered, ensuring that they benefit economically from the tourism development and achieve the goal of “investment by enterprises, benefits for the whole village.” Therefore, it is proposed to adopt a “Company + Households” tourism development model for ancient village tourism. In the initial stages of China's tourism industry development, a government-led model was an inevitable choice, and the in-depth development of Pujia Ancient Village tourism is no exception. Initially, a "governmental company model" is adopted, meaning the government forms standardized, formal tourism development enterprises according to the "Company Law," implementing corporate operations.

First, the government establishes a tourism development and management company through asset assessment and capital verification, separating the management, supervision, and operation rights of tourism. The government primarily oversees and monitors the tourism development company, which is responsible for operational management, operating independently and bearing its profits and losses. As tourism development deepens and the management of tourism advances, government investment and individual/community contributions alone cannot meet the growing needs. More social financing is required for in-depth tourism development, necessitating a transition to standardized market-oriented, corporate operations. As the market scale of ancient village tourism development expands and tourism management mechanisms are refined, corporate operations enter an efficient and rational trajectory, transitioning to a mature tourism market. At this point, the governmental company model progresses through asset restructuring, government share sales, and shareholder exits, moving towards complete market operations and establishing a fully marketized joint-stock company.

Lastly, strengthening talent development is crucial in the management process of in-depth development of Pujia Ancient Village tourism. Improving the quality of local tourism managers and frontline staff is essential. Tailored policies are developed based on the actual development of local tourism, emphasizing the introduction of mid-to-high level tourism administrative talent responsible for local tourism planning, scenic area construction, operational management, marketing, regional folk culture, and tourism product (souvenir) development, ensuring that the introduced talent is effectively retained and utilized. Training a professional, sustainable development-focused tourism management team proficient in business, management, and operations across various specialties optimizes the professional knowledge structure of tourism managers. Efforts are made to cultivate outward-looking tourism management professionals proficient in foreign languages to enhance the development of international tourism markets. Training is intensified for local tourism departments and frontline staff in related service industries, implementing commitment systems and competitive appointment systems to improve the service level and quality of the tourism industry. Cooperation with tourism research departments in provincial institutions is strengthened, consulting and training in management, planning, and marketing by hiring experts. Establishing employment relationships with colleges and universities offering tourism programs actively attracts outstanding tourism graduates.

References