Protection and Development Strategies for the Native Landscape of Dong Villages in Guangxi

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Abstract. The development and inheritance of the native landscape of Dong villages in Guangxi are embracing new opportunities as well as threats under the impact of accelerating urbanization. Therefore, the thoughts on the status quo and future development approaches of the native landscape of Dong villages in Guangxi and the conclusion of strategies for improvement and what to inherit as it evolves might provide references for the construction of “Beautiful Village” and “Guangxi of Magnificence”.

Keywords: Dong Stockade, Vernacular Landscapes, Protection and Development

1. Introduction
Native landscape is a compound landscape which involves “landscape of agricultural production” and “landscape of agricultural life” where the natural conditions, production and life are all intermingled. The regional customs and cultures it delivers cannot be expressed in any artificial environment. The native landscape of Dong villages is the result of Dong people’s culture and wisdom throughout the history. It is a product of the interaction between Dong people and the natural habitat in which they live and it evolves and repairs itself over time. The research on the native landscape of Dong villages may provide references for contemporary landscape design and improvement.\(^[1]\)

2. Advantages of the Native Landscape of Dong Villages

2.1. Interconversion between Natural Landscape and Ecological Economy
Even though the urban infrastructure nowadays is becoming complete, it brings indifference and solitude with all those soaring skyscrapers and plazas.\(^[2]\) As a matter of fact, people rarely relax themselves from study and work after they go back home. As a result, it is the top one choice for people to go to places that are natural and villatic to relax both physically and mentally.

Guangxi is featured with its distinctive natural landscapes, and it is where many ethnic minorities call home. Such unique native landscapes of different peoples are formed thanks to the interconversion among regional and ethnic features as well as local natural scenes. The landscape of Dong people is one of the symbols, and it has been attracting tourists as an ecological tourism resource.

Dong people prefer to build their villages in the back of mountains where rivers are close and fertile soil is accessible.\(^[3]\) Their preference actually demonstrates how they attach importance to
natural elements. Hence, the space layout of a village reflects how the native landscape is created to a great extent. On the one hand, the blessed natural environment around villages promotes the formation and development of the native landscape; on the other hand, native landscape may integrate with the surrounding natural environment and provide a remarkable place for Dong people to live. Tourists are not just visiting the nature around villages, but they also go to gazebos, antiphonal singing sites and places where crops are dried and stored. Such micro landscapes in villages are not only a part of locals’ life and entertainment of tourists, but also a part of the local ecological landscape, allowing tourists to blend in and improve local economy at the same time.

2.2. Integration between Cultural Landscape and Ecological Economy

Traditional Dong cultural landscape is one of the important parts of traditional Chinese culture. It demonstrates how Dong people developed in different social background of different times.[4] All the traditional skills, architectures, customs and festivals are of great cultural and research values. For example, the tenon-and-mortise works seen in buildings such as drum towers and shelter bridges as well as how a village is arranged can provide good references for future mountainous cities.

Dong people have some of the most distinctive customs, many of which, as well as their traditional skills, are considered as cultural heritages. Dong’s experiential education is becoming a new trend favored by many, as in reshaping the life events of Dong people, including farming, wedding, and cuisines into something for tourists to experience. They not only educate people regarding the local cultural landscape, promote cultural inheritance and development, but also strengthen villagers’ sense of belonging and understanding of their own culture, driving local economic development.

3. Issues in the Development of Dong’s Native Landscape

3.1. Interconversion between Natural Landscape and Ecological Economy

In the 20th century, traditional Dong villages in Guangxi pretty lived in isolation and self-sufficiency.[5] They had their own set of lifestyle and customs. As economy boomed, their contact with the outside world increased and came with more and more options. As a result, the original village systems were severely damaged.

For example, some villages chose to build houses with bricks and concrete, which are safer, more convenient and comfortable, but they look ajar from traditional buildings. Some villages chose ore mining and lumbering for economic purposes, but the natural environment was compromised. In some villages, most young people went out for work and their elders and children are left behind, and the villages become less energetic over time, which means less development opportunities.

3.2. Insufficient Sustainable Development

Traditional Dong villages in Guangxi are mostly located on hillsides and close to waters, ensuring self-sufficiency. So, natural environment and ecology were important to villagers, creating such a sense of idyllic beauty. But, it is also the same reason that led to their isolation from the outside world.

The environment of some Dong villages was severely damaged due to rainfall, erosion, flooding, landslide as well as excessive deforestation and we failed to make it up. As urbanization proceeds, the traditional villages have lost their original appearance.

3.3. Featured Cultural Elements Being Assimilated

Guangxi is the home to many ethnic groups, but many villages are isolated from each other due to the undulating topography, leading to rich ethnic cultures and customs. Dong’s culture has distinctive features since it barely made contact with others being isolated.[6]

Traffic becomes convenient and diverse with the booming economy, and Dong villages in Guangxi are making closer contact with the outside world. As a result, villages are embracing the outside cultures since they are no longer satisfied with their own lifestyle. As time goes by, their features are being assimilated. Even though the villages are seeing economic development in a short term, their
own features are disappearing over time. So, many customs and festivals will be only found in textbooks. Therefore, it is necessary to protect and develop the native landscape of Dong.

4. Principles of the Protection and Development of Native Landscape

4.1. Authenticity Principle
The authenticity of native landscape is its most fundamental principle. The authenticity here refers to the original native landscape, as shown in Fig.1. The environment here was originally preserved without any later transformation. In the *Nara Document on Authenticity*, a variety of approaches and methods are suggested to expand our vision so that we could respect the diversity of cultures and heritages to the maximum extent as we protect them.

The fundamental function of the native landscape of a village is that it meets the demands of villagers’ life. But an increasing number of villages are now altering their landscape in the name of modernization for short-term benefits brought by tourism, such as applying coating on newly built architectures that resemble old ones, and ignoring the living habitat of other creatures while constructing roads, leading to excessive exploitation and deterioration of their landscape, and hence the loss of authenticity.

![Fig.1 Rural landscape of Dong](image)

4.2. Regional Principle
It means that the landscape of a region is unique and irreplaceable. Native landscape was restricted by local environment as it formed and developed, but it also led to distinctive Dong landscape. Being regional means that every single village has its own climate, layout and different sets of customs and cultures. Therefore, the creation and protection of Dong’s native landscape have to be based on the historic and cultural perspective of the region so that the regional characteristics can be carried on for every village.

4.3. Cultural Principle
Historical culture is the soul as a landscape constructs itself for it is delivering cultural messages to people visually. The costume patterns, stone tablets, memorial gates and sculptures of Dong people are all conveying their own historical culture.

Guangxi is the home to a variety of ethnic groups which are different yet related. The native landscape of Dong is diverse and it is affected by several foreign cultures during different times, so it incorporated the features from the central plains, highland and lowland, which are all manifested in local folk dwellings. So, such elements can be factored in when constructing Dong’s native landscape in order to express its cultural diversity.

4.4. Systematic Principle
It means that a set of complete methods for implementation is required as we construct and protect the landscape for systematic and well-planned implementation serves as the guaranty for its construction. A number of aspects have to be considered as we protect and develop the native landscape of villages, including the village layout, roads and architectures as well as folk customs and festivals. The internal planning of a village has to coordinate with the surrounding natural environment and never work for quick success.

5. Strategies for the Protection and Development of Native Landscape

5.1. Making Ecological Culture Popular

The native landscape of villages requires maintenance and popularization of ecological culture. Thus, it is essential to strengthen propaganda and diversify it. Schools play a fundamental role in making the idea of ecological culture popular.\[9\] Education on ecological awareness, development and innovation can be facilitated and ecological culture can be fostered by building eco-friendly schools. Media play a backbone role, and they shall advocate green culture and oppose against the “black culture”. Non-government organizations and community-based organizations play a positive role and ecological organizations shall be encouraged and ecological communities shall be built, making Dong people proactively practice ecological awareness and create a stable and effective climate of ecological culture.

5.2. Making Ecological Industry Dominant

When the native landscape of Dong villages are sabotaged, ecological landscape is compromised first and it leads to deteriorating living conditions for villagers, causing chain reactions against their customs, festivals and all kinds of events. Moreover, their ethnic culture would ultimately weaken and even vanish as a result. Ecological environment and ethnic culture are important conditions for economy and we shall spare no efforts in ecological development as we protect and develop, and never ignore ecological development. Ecological industry is eco-friendly, sustainable and low-carbon.\[10\] We shall lead our economy with ecological industry and turn from black development to green development, linear development to sustainable development as well as high-carbon development to low-carbon development.

5.3. Making Ecological Environment a Landscape

The attraction of local landscape of Dong Village lies mainly in its superior ecological environment and unique regional temperament, as shown in Fig.2. How to lift the ecological environment to native landscape? The key lies in the combination of science and art. We shall combine ecological science and ecological art to support the landscape construction, making “the beauty visible”.\[11\] Not only do we have to protect and develop the beautiful countryside, but also build an image and culture of their own so that tourists could appreciate the landscape as well as the customs of Dong people.

![Fig.2 Dong rice paddy landscape](image-url)
5.4. Making Ecological Resources an Economic Driver

Ecological, environmental and climate resources shall be seen as economic resources to be exploited, protected, distributed and utilized. The ecological resources of Dong are not only one of the major elements of their native landscape, but the core of regional economic development. Whether we are able to turn “green mountains and clear waters” into “mountains of gold and silver” is a matter that determines how the green and sustainable development of Dong villages goes. The villages will become typical villages of beautiful ecological environment and booming economy once their ecological resources start to drive their economy, and this is the actual purpose of this paper as well.

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