

RESEARCH PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Changing Cultural Landscapes—A Case Study on Minority Villages in Southwest China

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Landscape is a continuously changing historical process, the manifestation of human activity on the earth's surface, and it is interwoven with the economy, culture, politics, and social life. China not only owns vast land but is also home to up to 56 different ethnic groups. Each group's unique culture displays externally as a unique landscape, which is evident in the specific geographical environment of each. But rapid economic development and significant societal transformation have had a huge impact on the ethnic cultural landscape. Several difficulties need to be overcome to ensure a healthy interaction between the landscape and the development of the economy; this is a process which requires the cooperation of different participants. Though some experiments have been carried out in China, most village landscape protection measures have not yielded the anticipated results; on the contrary, large numbers of valuable minority villages' cultural landscapes are disappearing rapidly as a result of modernization.

This research project started with an assessment of the current landscape conditions through field investigation, video recordings, semi-structured interviews, and document collection. Thereafter, I investigated and classified the landscape elements and collected fundamental information about the village environment, village setting and layout, traditional architecture, historical environmental elements, intangible cultural heritage elements, historical village documents, and administrative documents for three Tujia riverside villages in the mountain area of Enshi City, Hubei Province. The aim of this research is to trace and summarize the reasons for these conditions with regard to function, economy, technology, and society.

Landscape is neither static nor repetitive; the changing landscape is a result of the dual function of nature and humans. Improving the current situation of minority villages' cultural landscapes is a complicated process which requires strict regulation in terms of economy, society, and materials. This is necessary to establish an effective reconstruction plan. The vital aim is to appeal to the people, for only the participation of the people can revitalize the landscape's vitality. The plan designed for this aim includes the screening of reasonable economic development methods, the construction of related materials, and the establishment of effective communication and transmission channels. This project will contribute towards the transformation of the current situation of traditional countryside landscapes in China.