

An Exploration of the ‘Eco museum Ideal’ for Living Heritage Management under the Context of Rural Revitalization in China

- Taking a Peri-Rural Village in Xiamen City as an Example

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Abstract. Integrated heritage management has become increasingly important for both urban and rural areas, and has now been frequently used as both a philosophy and an approach to revive the decayed areas under various transitional contexts such as rapid urban expansion, economic restructuring, industrial relocation, and globalization. Recent decades have witnessed understandings of heritage value, along with shifting paradigms of urban and rural conservation doctrines. By placing urban and rural development into the ‘bigger picture’, sustainable development which aims to solve contemporary issues without compromising either what has come to us from past generations or what is passed on to future generations, has attracted worldwide attention from all levels of stakeholders. Issues associated with some conservation models have entailed social, economic and environmental conflicts to society, along with the rising tensions related to tourism, commodification, real estates, social justice. In light of the above, this paper argues that sustainable heritage conservation should highlight the value of using an integrated heritage management strategy and approach. Through exploring the ‘ecomuseum ideal’, as a usable integrated heritage management approach, this paper aims to examine its potential use in a peri-rural village in Fujian Province, China. Through a bottom-up process and the participation of various stakeholders, this case employs an eco-museum-like heritage management approach and addresses economic, social and environmental revitalization of the entire previously de-vitalized village. With the intention to examine how the ‘ecomuseum’ ideal might contribute to heritage management in terms of sustainable development, this study will employ a mixed methodology, which includes case study, field survey, interview, questionnaire and path dependency analysis. Based on the findings, this study will discuss the possibility of the ‘ecomuseum’ approach as a working tool, and its potential implications for heritage conservation and management in China will be discussed.

Keywords: integrated heritage management; eco-museum ideal; rural revitalization; sustainable development.

1. Heritage Management Approaches of Historic Quarters in China

1.1 Lifeless Heritage Management Via the ‘Mosquito Hall’ Approach in China

In Chinese cities where urban-rural development is extremely rapid, however due to the limitations of modern planning, in dealing with urban and rural heritage which are manifested as both tangible and intangible heritage, orthodox heritage conservation prefers to employing top-down approaches and implementing “hard” measures such as technical regulations without considering the impacts on local communities and individual’s everyday life, thereby often leads to social conflicts. The followings sections will discuss a mainstream top-down heritage management approach of historic quarter in China, namely ‘mosquito hall’ approach.

In contemporary Chinese cities mainstream urban conservation practices favor the ‘mosquito hall’ approach combined with “demolition” of surrounding settlements through a top-down process. In terms of the historic buildings, the listed historic buildings could be saved as lifeless museums with

the surrounding areas completely redeveloped; however, for the traditional settlements which are not listed, their common fate are to be demolished without any respects.

Nevertheless, the conditions of a historical quarter or a traditional village, decay or growth, are variably complicated and are results of many influential factors, such as political forces, economic activities, planning intervention, industrial relocation, functional change, social spatial change, accessibility obsolescence, and so on and so forth.

Furthermore, in terms of the designation method, it is also criticized for being preservation based and for highly relying on technical planning mechanisms, such as land use zoning and transportation. For instance, the strict development control in conservation area restricted the functions, uses and everyday life of some ordinary buildings within the preservation zone, which not only caused serious economic and social problems such as livelihood loss, but also were prone to change a dynamic mix-used place into a museum of tourist spots [1,2]

Accordingly, the ‘mosquito hall’ heritage approach, also called material fabric-based conservation—that is architectural preservation—has been undoubtedly criticized to have isolated historic buildings in a museum-like quality without considering the needs of locals, thus devaluing the significance of location and economic potentials.

After over decade’s nation-wide practices, this approach normally has risen the following aspects of questions: 1) will the listed heritage frozen as “mosquito halls” be self-sustain in terms of management expenses? 2) will the heritage value among historic area sustain after a large-scale demolition? 3) will the spontaneous process of socializing be interrupted by one-time mass demolition? 4) will the relocation of original residents to urban fringe areas where employment opportunities and civil infrastructures are inadequate reduce the quality of life and the affordability of cities? 5) will social replacements diminish the social values attached to the physical fabric of neighborhoods and harm the openness and inclusion in a society?

1.2 Recent Emerging Rural Revitalization Wave in China

In recent years many Chinese rural areas have witnessed the rising of rural revitalization and the calls for renaissance of traditional Chinese culture. Rural area, which was once the back-land of large-scale development, has now become the frontier for new waves of development in a national scale.

Traditional villages among rural area is the motherland of tradition and culture, which also help maintain stable social relationship. The recent rural revitalization wave has brought from outside resource, capital, stakeholders, new social relationship, etc., which has inevitably led to tourism boom, built environment change, and a verity of opportunities as well as potential conflicts. As the dual structure of urban-rural is widely accepted as a process of production of space, obviously the emerging rural revitalization in China is not only a physical process, but also a social process, and the reproduction of space [3,4]. And cultural heritage is usually the key element for rural revitalization, it is important to provide a heritage management model for rural revitalization which will help enhance both tangible and intangible cultural heritage and help initiate a sustainable development of rural areas in the long run.

Due to the limitation of ‘mosquito hall’ approach, one could ask: are there alternative approaches rather than this “mosquito hall” approach combined with a rampant change of rural area?

2. ‘Ecomuseum Ideal’ as an Alternative Approach to the Living Heritage Management?

2.1 Ecomuseum Ideal

Based on a number of UNESCO’s declarations and conventions, including the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity; the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, ratified in December 2004 by China, followed by State legislation for intangible cultural heritage being passed in 2011; the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, ratified by China in January 2007; and, the 2013 Hangzhou

Declaration: Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies, etc., Corsane et.al, [5,6] developed a working tool of 'ecomuseum ideal', which highlights a three-pillar and twenty-one Characteristics. The three pillars include :1) sense and spirit of place, 2) stakeholder involvement, and 3) malleable and flexible outlook. To safeguard the characteristics of cultural heritage, the implementation of an 'overall heritage management process model' in China is also proposed by Corsane (Fig. 1).

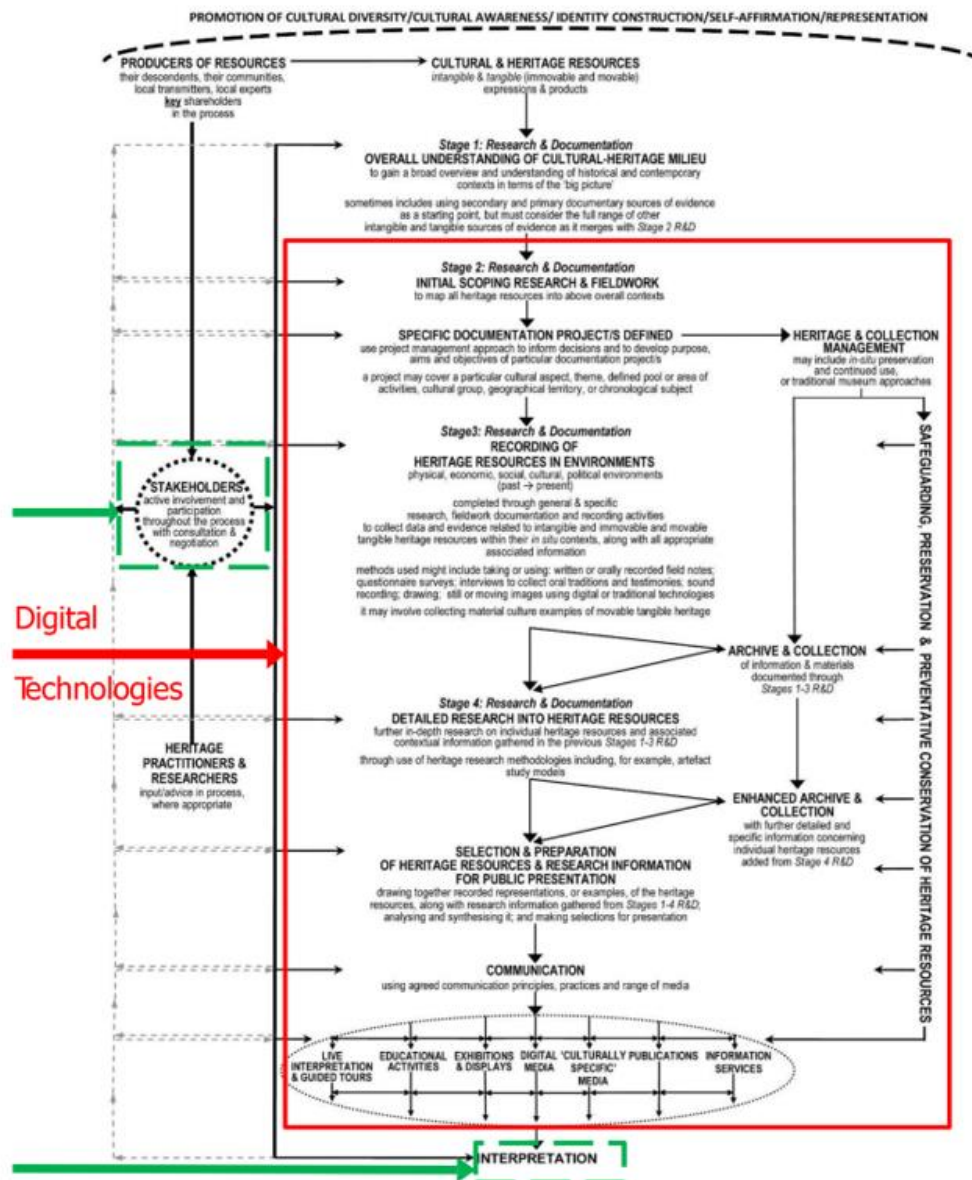


Figure 1. The overall heritage management process model developed by Gerard, Corsane.

In general, 'ecomuseum ideal' highlights a holistic approach for cultural heritage management, especially in rural areas. Firstly, in terms of objects, it promotes preservation, conservation and safeguarding of natural and cultural heritage resources in situ, with equal attention given to both tangible and intangible heritage resources. Secondly in terms of process, the ideal covers both spatial and temporal dimensions, which means that a diachronic focus rather than synchronic focus is addressed, for example an ongoing platform of documentation is recommended, and the management of change is thought to be crucial. Thirdly, with regards to inclusiveness, this ideal promotes participation of stakeholders from different parts and research involvements from various interests, and an inter-disciplinary research is recommended [6].

2.2 Current Research and Practice of "Ecological Museum" in China

In China, scholars have been researching and exploring the theory of ecomuseum in recent decades, covering many subjects such as museum science, management, anthropology, cultural heritage, and so on. The current research focus mainly includes the following four aspects: 1) theories, 2) models and methods, 3) practices, and 4) extension of dimensions (Fig. 2).

Theoretically, Jin [7] argues that, the ecomuseum, is an idea, not a fixed pattern, hence should suit local conditions; Yu & Liu [8] believe that the application of architectural research methods and perspectives into the field of ecomuseum would facilitate conservation measures and the achievements of sustainable development goals.

In terms of models and methods, Jin [7] also emphasizes that China's ecomuseum practices should seek to its establishment philosophy for the localization process; Pan [9] addresses that the roles of government, experts, institutions and local people in the constructions of the ecomuseum need to be changed and integrated; Wang [10] suggests that planning should be holistic, while operation managements should promote a role switching; Tong [11] proposes a community participation model ,namely "local residents + government + experts + museum workstations + tourism development companies + travel agencies".

With regards to practice, Duan [12] proposes that the intervention of external forces in the construction of ecomuseum should be based on an exact respect to the principal status of community residents; Zhang [13] thinks that the ecomuseum has more development prospects than rural tourism for the protections and developments of the cultural landscape of villages; Yin [14] points out some practical dilemmas and future directions of the two practices of ecomuseum and ethnic cultural ecovillage; Zhong [15] believes that the development goals of the ecomuseum in the short term should give priorities to consolidate and summarize the current achievements.

In addition, both Zeng [16] and Pang [17] advocate that heritage conservation should be given priority under the guidance of the ecomuseum theory, so as to establish a balance between protection and development; Yu and Liu [8] believe that the introductions of architectural research methods and perspectives into the ecomuseum can effectively improve the protection effect of traditional rural settlements' cultural heritage.

In general, from the literature review of current research of the above scholars, it can be seen that the ecomuseum not only has developed certain theoretical discussions in China, but also has led to varieties of practices, which has a very wide application prospect in the fields of villages and heritage protections. Nevertheless, the current research generally adopts the qualitative research methods, which lacks the quantitative studies of indicators. These above researches mainly discuss the prospects, and put forward the request, which are short of the model demonstrations and practice examinations. At the same time, as the wave of "rural revitalization" has recently emerged in China, the explorations of this emerging field with angle of ecomuseum remain still few.

Facing increasingly severe rural problems and contradictions, the fields of architecture and planning have been criticized to failed to propose systematic solutions, just as scholars have pointed out that it is necessary to introduce architectural research methods into the ecomuseum. How to effectively use the ecomuseum model in the process of rural revitalization to promote the holistic heritage management and sustainable development in rural areas through rural revitalization is topic with academic interest and practical value.

The following case is to explore the potentials whether the 'ecomuseum ideal' and the 'overall heritage management model' could be adapted to the heritage management and sustainable development of traditional Chinese villages.

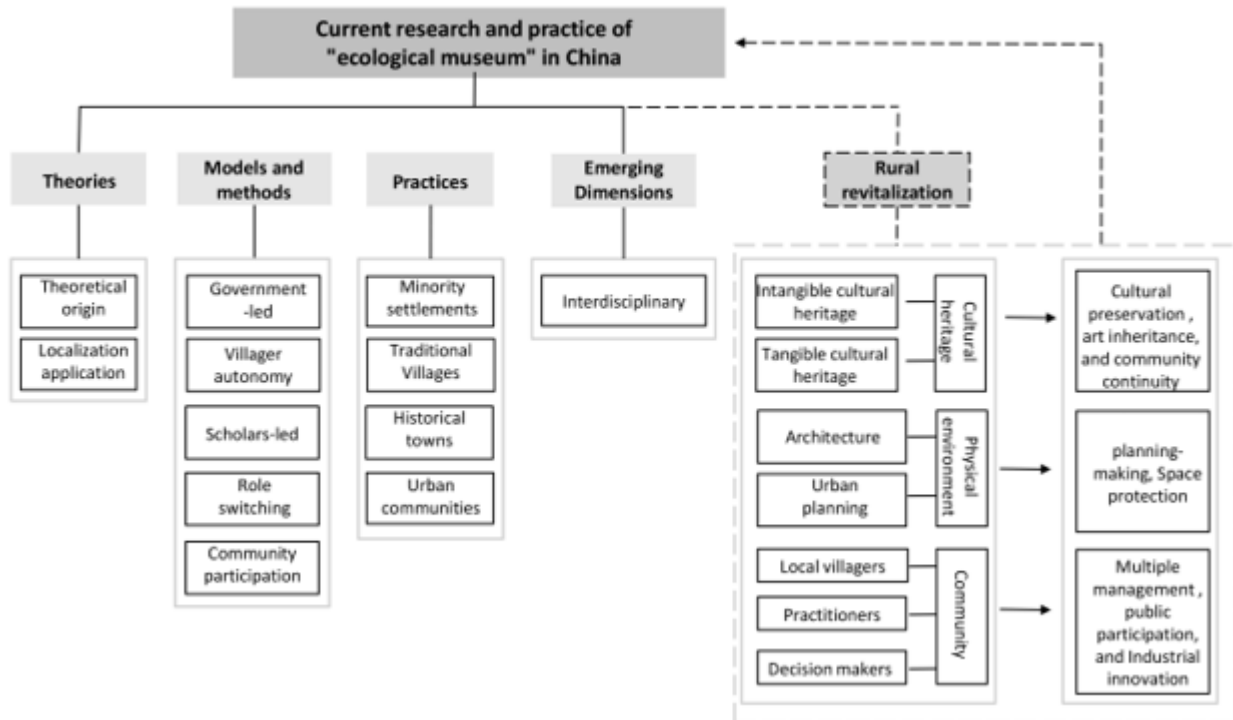


Figure 2. Current research and practice of "ecological museum" in China



Figure 3. An overlooking of Yuan-qian SHE

3. Case Study –The Development of “Yuan-qian SHE”

3.1 Brief Introduction

Located near the western fringe of Xiamen Island (Hai-cang District is to the west of Xiamen Island.), Yuan-qian SHE (SHE —“社”, the smallest unit of villages. Yuan-qian SHE and six others constitute the administrative village of Qing-jiao.) is a semi-rural historic village (Fig. 3,4). With its ancestors migrating from northern China and settling down here in Song Dynasty, after hundreds of years, Yuanqian SHE is also known as its co-ancestry, with over 90% of its residents sharing the same family ancestry, which is Yan (颜).



Figure 4. The location of Yuan-qian SHE

Due to geographical advantages, villages in southern Fujian, including Yuan-qian SHE has been closely bonded with Taiwan. In Ming Dynasty, a famous pioneer who was from Qing-jiao Village, namely Yan Siqi embarked on a journey to Taiwan, and was called “the earliest founder of Taiwan”³(开台王, meaning the king who founded Taiwan). Accordingly, the subsequent bridging of workforce, material, and culture has established a strong and close connection between Taiwan and Qingjiao Village, to which Yuan-qian SHE belongs.

In addition to the north of Yuan-qian SHE, at the foot of the mountain of Yuan-qian SHE, there exists a famous temple called “Ci-Ji East Palace”, the temple of Mercy and Favor for the healing God of Wu-Tao (吴焄), the worshipping of whom ranks as the second civic beliefs among the region of the Taiwan Strait. As a tradition, the nearby villages, including Yuan-qian SHE used to be professional in traditional Chinese herbal planting.



Figure 5. Tangible heritage of Yuan-qian SHE



Figure 6. Traditional local food craftsman

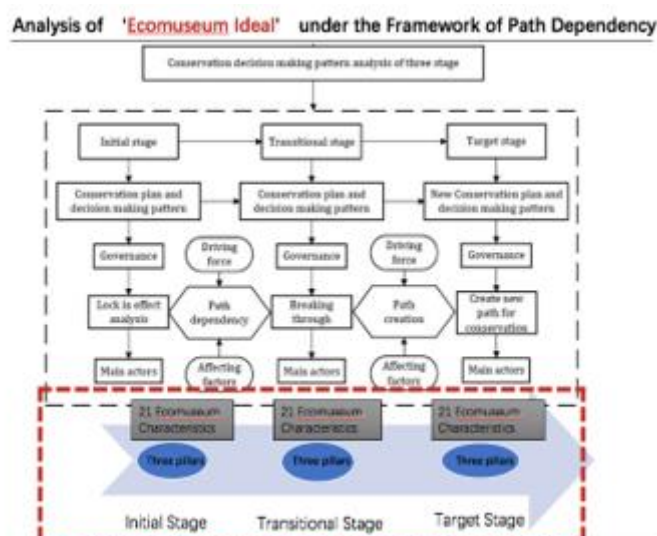


Figure 7. Analysis of ecomuseum ideal under the framework of path dependency

Based on the above characters, Yuan-qian SHE has been stably evolved in history and developed incrementally in both tangible and intangible values. For example, after long-term stable evolvement, Yuanqian-SHE has formed its own characteristics, rich in both tangible and intangible heritage. In terms of tangible heritage (Fig. 5), there are several traditional ancient mansions and temples for ancestors and local Gods; in terms of intangible heritage, there keep traditional festivals such as torch festival, folks show of operas, festival for the aged people, etc., traditional local food such as a local cookie, namely green sticky rice pancake (青团), a traditional extra thin noodle (Fig. 6), and the traditional planting and irrigating skills.

3.2 Development Path: from Demolish-Led Real Estate Development to Revitalization-led Rural Sustainable Development.

The development path of Yuan-qian SHE could be investigated in 3 states from the starting of its peri-urban development mode: the initial stage, the transitional stage and the targeting stage. In particular, the heritage conservation activities and decision-making process could be examined from an angle of place management, in term of the following how decision making could be made analyzed in the following processes (Fig.7):

3.2.1 The Initial Stage, the Transitional Stage, and the Target Stage.

After worth the end of the Cultural Revolution, the people's commune system (the highest level of administrative hierarchy in rural China (1958-1983), which is constituted by the production team and production brigade. The communes owned land and adopted an egalitarian distribution of income.) in villages was largely disbanded in early 1980s, and Village Committee became the basic administrative unit in administrative villages. The production team and production brigade were replaced by the household contract responsibility system (An important rural land reform starting from 1980, which divides the land property right as the ownership and management right.). Yuan-qian SHE has developed instantly and steadily in 1980s and early 1990s within the stable rural system.

As has happened in many Chinese peri-urban areas, during the rapid urban expansion period, huge profit could be achieved through the one-time transactions of pieces of land, which has short-term benefits to many sectors, including local government, developers, and villages to be relocated, etc., hence becoming a strong lock-in effect in the decision-making system.

Due to the lock-in effect, many traditional villages have been demolished as the entire land was to be acclaimed for urban development in new urban planning in a top-down process. In terms of the historic buildings, the listed historic building could be saved with the surrounding areas completely redeveloped; however, for the traditional settlements which are not listed, their common fate could be demolition without any respects.

Nevertheless, with the extension of urban development from Xiamen Island towards its surrounding motherland, the village is now continuously affected by many surrounding development projects. As can be seen as a common phenomenon, priorities have been gradually given to land economy led development mode in many peri-urban development cases. Starting from late 1990s, with the rapid urban development, Yuan-qian SHE's development witnessed a series activities of land expropriation and construction in surrounding agricultural areas, such as construction of an express way—Maqing Road, the construction of factories along the highway, the rapid development of real estate, etc. In 2008, the Master plan for Haicang District (2004-2000) is issued, in which Yuan-qian SHE and surrounding areas would be designated into a new sub-district—Hai-Cang Industrial Port New Town. In 2013, the Hai-Cang District initiated the Regulatory Plan of Hai-Cang Industrial Port New Town (临港新城片(05-12A) 控制性详细规划, made by Xiamen Branch, China Academy of Urban Planning and Design. Website: [http:// www. xmgh. gov. cn/ zfxxgk/ zfxxgkml /ghfags/ 201312/t20131210_40645.htm](http://www.xmgh.gov.cn/zfxxgk/zfxxgkml/ghfags/201312/t20131210_40645.htm)), in which Yuan-qian SHE would be designated in a land use permit (05-12A) to accommodate the expansion of urban development and the relocated villagers of the surrounding demolished areas, hence the land use of Yuan-qian SHE would be changed to for residential uses and public service facilities (Fig.8). Accordingly, the village will be demolished completely as suffered by many other villages, which could be seen as a strong influence of the lock-in effect in the decision-making process of the initial stage.

3.2.2 Transitional Stage(2013-2015)

The transitional stage witnessed the slowdown of real estate development starting in 2013 and the launch of “Collectively constructing a beautiful Xiamen” movement (共同缔造,美丽厦门—A movement initiated by local government to encourage public participation and community involvement to enhance further development in 2014.) in early 2014. With the process of transitioning from a top-down management to the collective governance, institutional change encouraged participation from bottom-up. Along with the decentralization of power from municipal government to district level, villages have been given opportunities to conduct pilot projects.

In Hai-Cang District (Hai-Cang District has 21 administrative villages in total.), five pilot projects of New development mode for villages were to be selected under the circumstances of “Collectively constructing a beautiful Xiamen” movement” by end of 2014. Once selected, certain funds from local government would be gained to facilitate further development.

According to the Regulatory Plan, Yuan-qian SHE will be demolished, hence not in the potential lists of Hai-Cang district as the site of the three pilot projects. Although redevelopment with mass demolition and relocation was widely adopted by many other villages, a group of young people in Yuanqian-SHE did not give up to save their village from demolition. They volunteered to join the competitions for the selection of pilot projects in March 2014 and many more young people quit their jobs in town and came back to support. After eight months' collective efforts, they successfully saved their homeland and hence transferred their development path in January 2015.



Figure 8. Land-use change of Yuan-qian SHE

In brief, this transitional stage also saw the breakthrough of the lock-in effect in decision making by the efforts from bottom up, which could be elaborated as the following aspects: the awareness of heritage among local people, the consciousness raising of participation, the capacity raising of negotiation and collaboration among stakeholders, the environment improvement, the restoration of eco-system particularly the water system, the creative opening up of collective spare land for urban vegetable field (UVF), the successful leasing of UVF at high profit, the reuse of historic buildings, the emergence of self-organization—Jishengyuan Farmers cooperatives by young farmers, the design of tourism program and educational program, etc.

Noticeably the professional assistance from the institutions played an important role in guiding and educating local people. A professional community planner from Taiwan is invited by local government to facilitate in community involvement and participation in the process. In addition, planners from Xiamen Branch, China Academy of Urban Planning and Design worked with local residents and negotiated their development plan.

Given all the collective efforts, on 12 January 2015, Yuan-qian SHE was announced as the first “Pilot Village” under the “Collectively constructing a beautiful Xiamen” movement by Hai-Cang District. Accordingly, Yuan-qian SHE has been saved from demolition, and a conservation plan (Fig. 9) is made for this village in order to save its heritage value 9 (Conservation Plan of Yuan-qian SHE, made by Xiamen Branch, China Academy of Urban Planning and Design, Jan 2015.), including tangible and intangible heritage, such as historic buildings, natural resource and traditional skills.

In this transitional stage, local governments, local residents and institutions actively participated in the conservation of a place, overthrowing the previous top-down decision-making outcome, creating a new path for their development mode, building the weakening conservation awareness and negotiation capacity, enhancing their social, economic, and culture needs. This stage successfully challenged the prevailed profit-led top-down redevelopment pattern, and largely contributed to reshaping heritage value and constructing development target for the following stage.

3.2.3 Targeting Stage (2015-): The Pilot Village in the Platform of Fujian-taiwan Ecoculture Village

In the conservation plan of Yuan-qian SHE, it has been clearly stated that the historic value, including tangible and intangible values are to be conserved via planning tools. The local government of Hai-Cang District assured that the territory of Yuan-qian SHE would be saved and funds for infrastructure improvement would be invested. In addition, Yuan-qian SHE could put itself in the platform of Fujian-Taiwan Ecocultural Villages and attract investments from Taiwan and mainland China.

From January 2015, plenty of collective efforts have been conducted to achieve these targets, as could be briefly introduced as following aspects:

The investment from Taiwan for traditional food, pottery class, and horticulture; the standardization of management system under the Jishengyuan Farmers Cooperatives, the further development of facilities and infrastructures, the opening up of collaborative business platform of farmers in Fujian province, the establishment of Youth Base for Creative Industry along the Straits, the foundation of the Youth Educational Practice Base of Fujian province, the establishment of Sustainable Rural Development Practice Base of Xiamen University, etc. (Fig. 9).



Figure 9. Conservation plan of Yuan-qian SHE

Undoubtedly Yuan-qian SHE is now not only targeting for economic development and social well-being of its own, but also for the dissemination of Southern Fujian culture, as well as for the pilot incubation platform of mass entrepreneurship and innovation in Fujian province.

4. Analysis : Using “Ecomuseum Ideal” Model to Analyze the Heritage Management Process of Yuan-qian SHE

Through exploring the ‘ecomuseum ideal’, with its three pillars and twenty-one guidelines [6], as a usable integrated heritage management approach, the following section aims to examine its potential use in Yuan-qian SHE, and to evaluate its validity to develop a sustainable heritage management mode based on the case study of Yuan-qian SHE.

4.1 Examining ‘Three Pillars’

According to Gorsane, et.al. [6], ‘sense and spirit of place’, ‘stakeholder involvement’, ‘malleable and flexible outlook are the three pillars of the ecomuseum ideal. In the case of Yuan-qian SHE, the local residents have been very cautious about their identity as the descendants of Yan Siqi, about their geographical advance to lie at the foot of Qingjiao Temple of Mercy and Favor, about their tradition, and about their natural resources, etc. it is obvious that the sense and spirit of place have been paid enough attention in the conservation process. In terms of stakeholder involvement, diverse stakeholders have been actively involved, such as local community group-Jishengyuan Cooperative group, local government, NGOs, institutions, businessmen from Taiwan, and Young college students, etc. More importantly, though diverse in stakeholders’ categories, the dominant group in decision-making process is the local community group, which to a large extent, has contributed to a localized heritage management. In regard with the flexibility of implementation, different with many top-down place management processes, any decision is very negotiable among the members of local community group and delegates of aged people, hence being largely responsive to, and also ‘shaped’ by, the specific local contexts and local needs.

4.2 Exploring the Twenty-one Characteristics

A survey was conducted to explore how the place management of Yuan-qian SHE could meet the characteristics of the ‘Ecomuseum Ideal’ in order to evaluate the development process of Yuan-qian SHE.

According to the survey of 2016, which was developed according to the indicators of the twenty-one characteristics [6], it demonstrates that the development management process of Yuan-qian SHE has been quite matching to the quality of ‘ecomuseum ideal’ model.

In aspects of most of the indicators which include cooperation patterns, heritage representativeness, inclusiveness and diversity, multiple participation of heritage documentation, localized characteristic of ecomuseum, balance between safeguarding heritage and economic development, and sustainable tourism, a majority of up to 80% of the interviewee have positive feedbacks.

Nevertheless, with regards to the following indicators, including decision making patterns, involvement of stakeholders, the multiple participation of research group, and the extent to which every households could share the advantages of development, the feedbacks are complicated and need further examination and discussion in the next step.

5. Conclusion

Sustainable heritage conservation should highlight the value of using an integrated heritage management strategy and approach. So far, Yuan-qian SHE has achieved success 10 (Yuan-Qian SHE received many honors and was even visited by many senior officers from the central government and has been included in the special edition of CCTV-4 “《记住乡愁》”), and adopted collective methods to manage its change. Nevertheless to ensure that the existing community will be socially, economically, and physically resilient in the long run, the holistic and comprehensive development model and management approach are required to guide its future practices, especially in the context of rural revitalization.

It has been proved from the path dependency analysis that the awareness of community identity and the establish of community organization which truly are active had played a fundamental role for Yuan-qian SHE to develop towards a more sustainable way. In conclusion, the potential of applying ‘ecomuseum’ ideal as a working tool to living heritage management in the context of rural revitalization has been explored. Nevertheless, to be fully qualified according to the standards of ‘ecomuseum’ and to enhance the development quality, some of the missing characteristics based on ‘ecomuseum ideal’ should be addressed in further decision-making process, and through a larger sample of case studies.

Acknowledgements

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