

# **THE COMPARISON OF THE FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION OF CHINESE ECOMUSEUMS**

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## **Abstract**

Originating from France in 1974, the ecomuseum concept has been universally acknowledged as a new paradigm for the holistic interpretation of cultural heritage, in which communities preserve, interpret, and manage their heritage for sustainable development (Instituto Ricerche Economiche E Sociali (IRES) 2004; Su 2006). Since then, many countries have taken up on this innovative concept and approach for museum development. Within twenty years, this new wave arrived in China.

Sponsored by Norway government, four ecomuseums were built in villages of ethnic minority in the Guizhou Province of China between year 1998 to 2005. This was an attempt for developing remote villages where 55 minority groups reside as well as for conserving their distinctive indigenous landscapes.

Although the concept of ecomuseum has been well adapted in many countries such as Canada, USA, Mexico, Brazil, Italy, Sweden, there seemed to have problems in its establishment within China. As initial experiments, four ecomuseums of ethnic minority in Guizhou formed the so called “the First Generation of Ecomuseum in China”(Su 2008). The three major problems identified and associated with these four ecomuseums includes: the weak linkage between ecomuseum and information centre; inadequate participation by local minority people; as well as over-emphasized tourism. Hence it has been argued that ecomuseum in China can not be applied in poverty-stricken villages where communities have no awareness of the significance of their

cultural identities in similar way like the other aforementioned countries.

Learned from these problems, twelve ecomuseums of minority ethnography have been established recently in three other provinces. They have been called “the Second Generation of Ecomuseum in China”. Among them, “1+10” Ecomuseum Project in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region presents significant improvements from the First and demonstrates the localization of ecomuseums in China, which is very much in need.

This paper starts with a brief introduction of ecomuseum concept and a detailed overview of the first Chinese ecomuseum—Suojia Ecomuseum, and then summarizes the key pertinent issues associate with the four ecomuseums in Guizhou, namely the first generation of Chinese ecomuseums. Based upon these issues, this paper then demonstrates the mechanism underpinning the ecomuseum dilemma in China. With comparison of the four pioneer ecomuseums in Guizhou, the next part of the paper describes the improvement of “1+10” ecomuseum project in Guangxi Autonomous Region as follows: 1) avoiding the ideal Liuzhi Principle; 2) more advanced professional techniques; 3) detailed site planning; 4) establishment of cooperation between the ten ecomuseums and Guangxi Ethnography Museum. These improvements successfully attempted to realize ecomuseum localization in China. The potential prosperity of ecomuseum in China was expected in the final part of this paper.

## **1.0 Introduction - Concept of Ecomuseum**

Conventionally static museums are buildings or places to keep and exhibit works of art, scientific specimens, or other objects of outstanding value (museum. 2010). Museum, as defined by The International Council of Museums (ICOM), is:

"a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which requires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purpose of study, education and enjoyment of the tangible and intangible evidences of people and their environment" (ICOM 2006)

In 1960s, "The Second Revolution of Museum" was called upon with emphasis on museums to be linked with communities (Van Mensch and J.A 1995). This "revolution" facilitated the emergence of the ecomuseum concept (Davis 1999). The actual concept of ecomuseum was coined in 1971 by Georges-Henri Rivière and Hugues de Varine, during a dinner with the French Ministry of Environment. The intention was to directly link heritage protection with the environment (Varine 1985).

In general, ecomuseum is a form of new museology (Par 2005), which is a tangible and open-air museum. Although it incorporates traditional museum techniques of collecting, interpretation, studying, exhibiting and preserving (Walter 1989), ecomuseums are different from traditional open-air museums. Hudson (1992) described that ecomuseums are more modernized and have more upgrading profiles. In fact, classical open-air museums are just the collections and relocations of buildings while ecomuseums keep collections in their original environments (Per 1986). The word 'eco' in ecomuseum comes from the Greek root '*oikos*' meaning 'house' or 'living space' and defines a museum which is for, by and about people at home in their environment (Keyes 1992). Compared with other heritage projects, the special values of ecomuseum are *in-situ* conservation, dynamic conservation, self-conservation and holistic conservation(Cai 2006).

Ecomuseum has been considered as a new paradigm for the holistic

interpretation of cultural heritage, in which communities conserve, interpret, and manage their heritage for sustainable development (Instituto Ricerche Economiche E Sociali (IRES) 2004; Su 2006). Since originating from France, the concept of ecomuseum has been well adapted in many countries around the world. Currently there are over 500 ecomuseums in the world (Davis, pers. comm.. Feb. 26, 2010). An early study by Wang (2006) shows that they are mainly located in Europe (France, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark), Latin America (Brazil and Mexico), and North America (USA and Canada).

### **1.1 Definition of Ecomuseum**

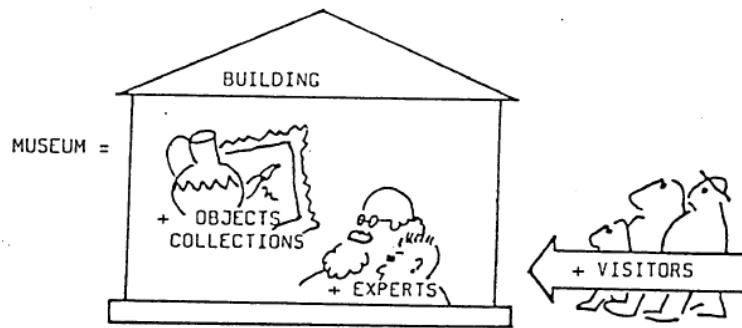
Despite this new paradigm for the emergence of ecomuseum, its ecomuseum definition remains a controversial matter for contemporary museology. In his 1980s ‘evolutive definition’, Rivière declared ecomuseum to be:

... an instrument conceived, fashioned and operated jointly by a public authority and a local population ... an expression of man and nature ... an expression of time ... an interpretation of space ... a laboratory ... a conservation centre ... a school ... (Rivière 1985).

However recent scholars such as Davis briefly defined ecomuseum as “a community-driven museum or heritage project that aids sustainable development” (Davis 2006, p. 199), while Su Donghai, China’s foremost proponent of the ecomuseum concept, commented during the *International Ecomuseum Forum, in Guizhou, China*, in 2005 that, “there is no such thing as a standard definition” (Su 2005).

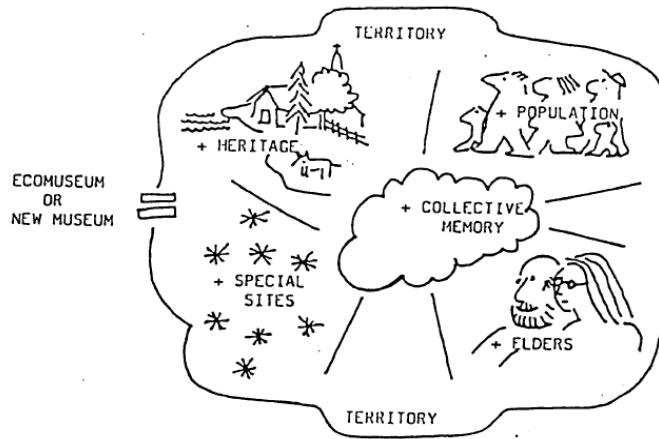
Despite these definition debates, it can be seen that there are two approximate areas of consensus. The first one lies in the difference from conventional museums (Fig. 1) = building + collections + experts + visitors and ecomuseum (Fig. 2) = territory + heritage + memory + population (Gjestrum 1992; Corsane 2005). The second agreement is that the prefix ‘eco’ means essentially human or social ecology which embraces social, cultural and natural environments shared by a community

(Rivard 1988; Davis 2005; Varine 2005). There are also two useful models of ecomuseums. Corsane's (2005) depicts ecomuseums embedded within a community and placed within an environment (Fig. 3). In contrast, Davis's (2008) 'necklace' model regards the ecomuseum as a thread to connect varied elements (Fig. 4).



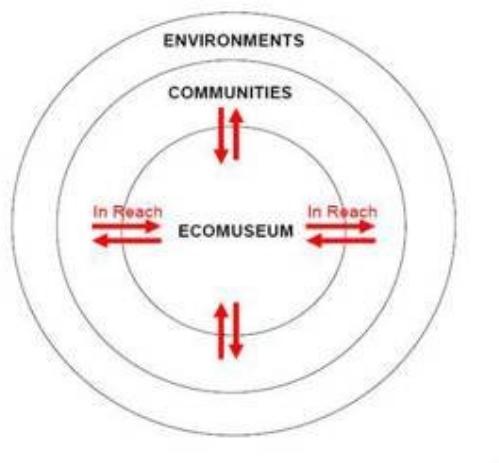
**Fig. 1 the components of museums**

Source: Adapted from Gjestrup (1992), 'Norwegian Experience in the Field of Ecomuseums and Museum Decentralization'



**Fig. 2 the components of ecomuseums**

Source: Adapted from Gjestrup (1992), 'Norwegian Experience in the Field of Ecomuseums and Museum Decentralization'



**Fig. 3 an ecomuseum must be located within its community and the local environment**

Source: Adapted from Corsane (2005). 'From 'outreach' to 'inreach': how ecomuseum principles encourage community participation in museum processes'



**Fig. 4 the “necklace” model of ecomuseum**

Source: Adapted from Davis (2008), 'New Museologies and the Ecomuseum'

## 2.0 Ecomuseum in China

Chinese ecomuseums have been around since 1998 and are closely linked to ethnic minorities and their villages. China has some fifty six ethnic minorities accounting for 8.41% of the population, the remainder being the majority Han. The minorities, each with distinctive living styles, largely reside in villages of ethnic

minority in the northern, western and south-western parts of China (Fig. 5). Most live in remote areas having little communication with urban areas. They are generally quite poor and lacking in amenities like running water and electricity. How to have these peoples access a better way of life without harming the valuable culture in their villages was a challenge for the Central and provincial governments of China in the 1980s.



**Fig. 5 the distribution map of the ethnic minorities in China**

Source: Author

The attempt to establish ecomuseums in these villages was influenced by the Chinese government's recognition that previous attempts to open up rural areas and minority cultures for tourism and economic benefit resulted in failure (Davis 2006; De Varine, pers. Comm., Feb. 2010). Under all these dilemmas, ecomuseum, as an educational tool for people to know how to correctly understand, respect, utilize and develop their cultural and natural heritage, is expected as an ideal solution (Fang 2008).

The initial group of ecomuseum, four in total, was established in Guizhou, with financial sponsor from a Sino-Norwegian agreement, academic support from Norwegian Musiologists, as well as specialists of the Chinese Society of Museums (Corsane, Murtas et al. 2009). Pre-construction workshop and field visits were held in Norway to help ethnic minority people to have some preliminary understanding of

ecomuseums (Myklebust 2005). The main outcome of these programs was Liuzhi Principle which outlines as follows:

- The people of the villages are the true owners of their culture. They have the right to interpret and validate it themselves.
- The meaning of culture and its values can be defined only by human perception and interpretation based on knowledge. Cultural competence must be enhanced.
- Public participation is essential to the ecomuseums. Culture is a common and democratic asset, and must be democratically managed.
- When there is a conflict between tourism and preservation of culture the latter must be given priority. The genuine heritage should not be sold out, but production of quality souvenirs based on traditional crafts should be encouraged.
- Long term and holistic planning is of utmost importance. Short time economic profits that destroy culture in the long term must be avoided.
- Cultural heritage protection must be integrated in the total environmental approach. Traditional techniques and materials are essential in this respect.
- Visitors have a moral obligation to behave respectfully. They must be given a code of conduct.
- There is no bible for ecomuseums. They will all be different according to the specific culture and situation of the society they present.
- Social development is a prerequisite for establishing ecomuseums in living societies. The well-being of the inhabitants must be enhanced in ways that do not compromise traditional values.

This Principle demonstrates a sympathetic manner with respect to local people, their customs and beliefs (Davis 2006; Davis 2008). This is claimed to be the core ideology for the cooperation between Norway and China. It illustrates the relationship between economic activities and heritage preservation -- the latter should always be given priority. Since then, Liuzhi Principle has been recognized as a "compulsory" guideline for Chinese ecomuseums as well as other ecomuseums focusing on

sustaining minority culture (Myklebust 2005; De Varine, pers. comm., Feb. 2010).

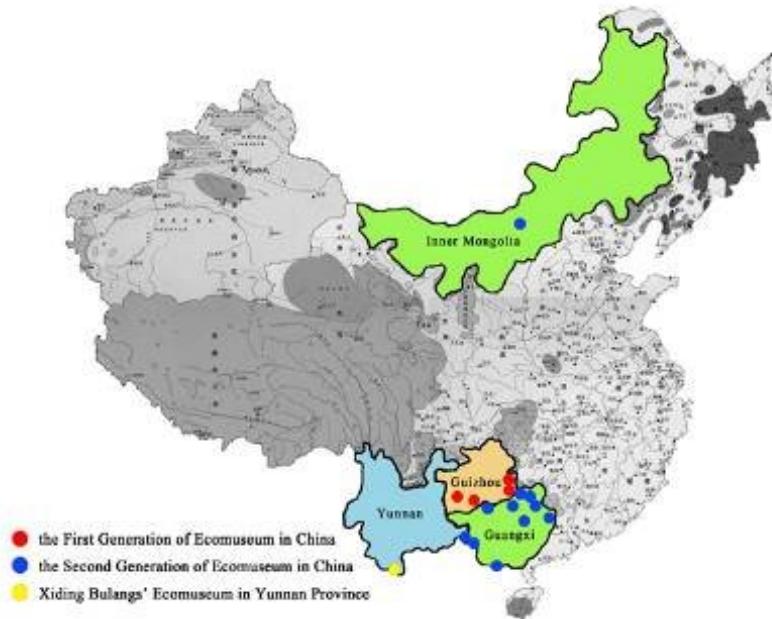
Today there are fourteen ecomuseums in China (Table 1). They are being categorized into two "Generations" by Su (2008; Su 2008) who is the promoter of ecomuseum ideas in China (Fig. 6). He seemed to have intentionally excluded the ecomuseum in Yunnan Province, established in 2005, because this ecomuseum has a very different administrative power (Su 2005; Su 2008). Su (2006) has earlier suggested a further analysis to this different administrative process.

**Table 1. The List of Chinese Ecomuseums**

Location	Opened	Name	Protected Ethnic Minority
Guizhou Province	1998	Suojia Ecomuseum	Miao
	2002	Zhenshan Ecomuseum	Buyi
	2004	Longli City Ecomuseum	Han
	2005	Tang'an Ecomuseum	Dong
Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	2004	Nandan Lihu Ecomuseum	White-trousered Yao
	2004	Sanjiang Ecomuseum	Dong
	2005	Jingxi Ecomuseum	Zhuang
	2007	Liantang Ecomuseum	Kejia
	2008	Dawen Ecomuseum	Heiyi Zhuang
	2009	Antai Ecomuseum	Miao
	2009	Changgangling Ecomuseum	Han
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	2001	Olunsum Mongolians' Ecomuseum	Mongolian
	2006	Xiding Ecomuseum	Bulang

Notes: Jinxiu Ecomuseum for Yao ethnic minority is included in "1+10 Ecomuseum Project" of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, but it is only in the preparation stage.

Source: Author



**Fig. 6 distribution map of the 1st and 2nd generation of Chinese ecomuseums**

Source: Author

### 3.0 Guizhou Ecomuseums--The First Generation of Ecomuseum in China

The First Generation of Chinese Ecomuseum consists of four ecomuseums, namely: Suojia Ecomuseum, Zhenshan Ecomuseum, Longli Ecomuseum and Tang'an Ecomuseum in Guizhou.

#### 3.1 Suojia Ecomuseum

##### 3.1.1 Background

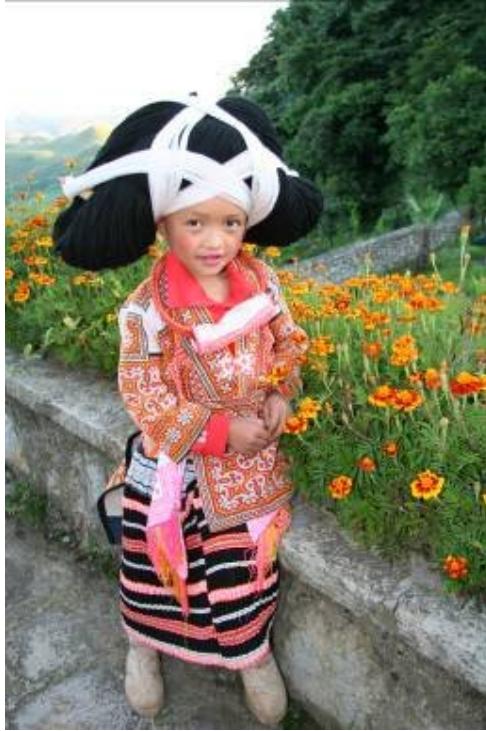
Suojia Ecomuseum was the first ecomuseum in China and in Asia. It was opened in 1998 and compassed twelve villages in Suojia Town, Liuzhi District for minority group of Miao (Fig. 7). Miao is one of four largest ethnic minorities in China and half of the Miao population is in Guizhou. Qing Miao, as the smallest branch of Miao, founded in Liuzhi District, has a 4,000 population in remote mountainous villages. Qing means forest --- this minority group was a tribe once lived in forest

(Fang 2008). This group of people holds traditional democracy, an ancient and distinctive culture of their language, houses, weaving skills, unique music, marriage, sacrifice ceremony, dance traditions as well as long ox horns worn by the women at festivals, weddings and other special occasions by elaborate hair-pieces made of wool (Fig. 8).



**Fig. 7 map of Suojia Ecomuseum**

Source: adapted from Documentation Centre of Suojia Ecomuseum



**Fig. 8** young girl in Suojia Ecomuseum wearing traditional costume and hairstyle

Source: author

### ***3.1.2 Bilateral objectives – heritage conservation and poverty alleviation***

Up until 1990s, these twelve villages in Suojia Town had been isolated from outside for 200 years (An 1997). Without the impact of outside world, these villages demonstrate a cultural integrity with its unique landscape and a manor economy. Also they make their clothes from planting cotton, weaving cloths, dye them and embroider them. Meanwhile, the 4,000 population in Liuzhi District is the only Qing Miao people in the whole world (An 1997). It is of great significance to conserve this village landscape through ecomuseum approach. However, the local people have no awareness of the value of their heritage. For example, Norwegian museologists were very excited to see the rural culture when they visited Longga village in 1998, however, the villagers did not know which part of their property was a treasure (Hu 2000). When Norwegian museologists told local people that their old loom was a treasure, the local people laughed and could not believe that their old belonging was so valuable (Su 2006). Under this circumstance, a compulsory stage for ecomuseum

to conserve heritage is to raise local people's consciousness and confidence, and pride of protecting their culture.

In addition, without connection with exterior world, the Miao villagers had been suffering from poverty for a long time — their living standard is even below the domestic average level. So the other task of Suojia Ecomuseum is to open up these areas for poverty alleviation (Hu 2000).

### ***3.1.3 Activities and Programs***

Ecomuseum should be based upon local people's agreements. However, in Suojia villages, it will be a long way to make local villagers truly understand and accept the concept because they were purely expecting financial benefits from ecomuseum approach. It was stated that until villagers got real benefit from the ecomuseum, for example, until their living condition had improved, they could then accept the ecomuseum idea (Su 2008). Therefore, the first step of Suojia Ecomuseums was to bring piping water and electricity to the villages as well as to construct roads to connect the villages with the cities. Then a school and medical service was established in the village. In addition to bettering living conditions, a workshop named as "The Memory of Qing Miao" was held during the early years of this ecomuseum, respectively in Liuzhi District and Norway, proving the opportunity for local people to communicate with Norwegian and Chinese museologists, in order to make local people obtain the knowledge of the significance of local culture and the meaning of ecomuseum.

An Documentation Centre was constructed at the beginning year (Fig. 9). Suojia Ecomuseum is a fragmented museum holding this hub and surrounding environment --- houses, streets and the living ways of the local minority people. The Documentation Centre provides orientation and working areas for volunteers, supplies with meeting services, stores tangible culture, collects cultural memory, exhibits the history of cultural development, and has been a research basement for cultural

information documents (An 1997; Hu 2000; Davis 2006). Local architects involved in the construction of Documentation Centre tried to make sure that the Centre was built with same style and material like the other original buildings of the village. In addition to the Centre, a square was constructed for local performance such as festival celebration, dance and singings. The visitors are free to roam through the old village, meet with local people, appreciate local culture and buy souvenirs.



**Fig. 9 documentation centre of Suojia Ecomuseum**

Source: author

As ecomuseum is for *in-situ* exhibition, it is important to reserve the original tangible culture. For example, the old trees in Longga Village had been registered for key protection, ten wooden houses had been consolidated and long-term maintained (Fig. 10). The local architects involved in the repair and maintenance of the local residential houses because they have traditional skills, which helped to keep authenticity of the houses.



**Fig. 10 the 1,000-year old house is renovated with the original style and materials**

Source: adapted from Su (2005), 'China Ecomuseums', p. 33

As ecomuseum is not a tool to freeze a landscape to a certain historical age, but allow evolution and reasonable change, it is inevitable that the traditional culture will change when local people are exposed to new things. There is a substantial contradiction between local people's awareness of the significance of their culture and heritage conservation in Chinese poor villages --- if the local people have no idea of the heritage values, they may destroy their heritage items sooner or later; but if they understand the value of these items, they will sell the heritage to visitors because they do need the money for a better life (Maggi and Huang 2007). Under this condition, it is essential to investigate and record the history and culture of this region before the culture totally changes. Such data bank has been constructed by a multidisciplinary group in Suojia Ecomuseum, during 2006-2009. The changes of economy, architecture, costumes, festival, music, education and other aspects has been all investigated and recorded(Fang 2010).

### ***3.14 Outcome of the project***

Suojia Ecomuseum, as initially planned, is a tool for government to conserve the cultural heritage whilst boosting the economy. The fact is that, after ecomuseum was constructed, dramatic changes have taken place in Longga village. Normally,

there are two models of changes. The first one is villagers' active change because of their instinct adaptability to the natural and social environment. For this change model, the right for choosing and controlling the change belongs to the villagers themselves. The second model is passive change which can even be called the re-construction of culture.

As far as stated by Fang (2008), the changes of villages after the ecomuseum establishment belong to the second category. She explained that after ecomuseum establishment, the traditional lifestyle has been thoroughly "broken", which can be proved in the following aspects: 1) the physical space was changed because of the availability of electricity, road, piping water and access to the outside world; 2) the traditional agricultural production was replaced by mechanic mode; 3) the traditional culture relic has been disappearing; 4) the culture become pure exhibition and performance to visitors; 5) the depopulation happened especially for the younger generation. Fang (2008) believed that all these changes were caused by experts and government who made the villagers be exposed to the globalization. With the impact of the outside world, they saw the backwardness of their culture and the advance of exterior culture. Consequently, they are no longer proud of their culture but feel inferior. This indeed accelerate their alienation from their old traditions to the modernized life (Fang 2008). Fortunately, it is undeniable that Suojia Ecomuseum did bring great benefit to local people. Living standard has been promoted for villager with the provision of pump water, electricity, school and medical facilities.

### **3.2 The Problems of the First Generation of Chinese Ecomuseums**

After the establishment of Suojia Ecomuseum, three other ecomuseums have been opened in Guizhou Province, for three other minority groups, forming the first generation of Chinese ecomuseums. They share the same aims, activities and outcomes of Suojia Ecomuseum.

In 2005, The *International Ecomuseum Forum* was held in Guizhou, with the

sponsorship from Chinese Society of Museum. It was the very first international meeting on ecomuseums in Asia. As well, it was the first conference appearance of the Chinese ecomuseum at an international stage. A post-conference visit was organized to the four ecomuseums in Guizhou. According to the conference attendants' comments, the first generation of Chinese ecomuseums presents some common problems.

Firstly, the tie between Documentation Centre and the surrounding environment is weak. In Norway cases, Documentation Centre is local people's spiritual sustenance that they put their most cherishable collections in the Centre(Su 2006). It was expected that the Chinese Documentation Centre could work in the same way -- to be multi-functional as an exhibition and collection room for tangible culture, a library for archiving and storing references, a meeting room for ecomuseum participants, a laboratory for academics researchers and an orientation centre for visitors. However, in reality, the Documentation Centers are far from expectation. For example, in Zhenshan Ecomuseum, the content of the exhibition is not adequate to reflect the Buyi culture; it has been more regarded as a recreational place for tourists' gathering (Qiu and Yang 2009). In Suojia Ecomuseum, villagers regard the information centre solely as the ecomuseum rather than conceiving their living village as part of the museum (Liu, Liu et al. 2005). In Longli Ecomuseum, the architectural style of information centre is not compatible with the environment(Myklebust 2005). There should be more efforts to make the Information Centre to play its multifunctional role in the ecomuseums.

Secondly, there is a lack of participation by local minority people. In Guizhou ecomuseums, there are hardly any examples of ecomuseum establishment campaigns led by local residents as was the case in France. As observed by foreign experts, all the works of the ecomuseum are under the control of government and scientific advisors, while the local villagers are forced to accept the ecomuseum activities (An 1997; Yin and Wu 2009). This dilemma goes against the international ecomuseum

principle of being community-based. The Luzhi Principle which should be the leading ideology of all Chinese ecomuseums, in fact is extremely difficult to be applied. Local people have inadequate confidence or ability to be the curator of their ecomuseums, because of their lack of understanding of their heritage value and ecomuseum approach as well as their long-term suffering from poor living conditions. For example, the minority people in Suojia Ecomuseum are living in a poor environment (Fig. 11). So they really care more about how to leave this poverty-stricken area for modernized cities rather than conserving this landscape.



**Fig. 11 some local people's houses are purely made of wood and grass, without any renovations**

Source: author

Thirdly, tourism is over-developed. Ecomuseums, as originated in France, are always built for community development. This is the same for Chinese ecomuseums. The Norwegian representatives have concluded that people should not be separated from their cultural heritage. Instead, they should have the opportunity to create a future based on it (An and Gjestrum 1999). They perceive that ethnic minority people should be entrusted to use their cultural resources to pursue sustainable development via tourism. Indeed, after the establishment of the ecomuseum, with the impact of globalization, the local people consequently have got to know that their tangible

culture was quite valuable. Under their financial pressure, they became more inclined to sell their culture to the visitors. For example, in 1998, when Norwegian delegates visited Suojia Ecomuseum, the local women chased them for a long way in order to sell their belongings (Su 2006). This happened again in 1999 when French experts arrived (Hu 2000). It has been argued that first generation of Chinese ecomuseums, have been initiated primarily to boost tourism (Liu, Liu et al. 2005; Dong and Zhai 2007), because the focus of these ecomuseums transfers culture to mere exhibition and brings a loss of authenticity of cultural heritages (Davis 2006).

### **3.3 The Controversies of the First Generation of Chinese Ecomuseums**

Further to the aforementioned problems, there are controversies that are associated with the ecomuseum feasibility in China. In developed Western countries, ecomuseums are initiated by local community and run in a democratic way. It can be said that the landscape conservation is more achievable in developed countries where population numbers are stable, standards of living are high, and people are able to hold on to landscape aesthetics derived from the past (Logan 2005). However according to Zhang and You (2009), they described that the ecomuseum concept as a special by-product of the western post-industrial era, and cannot be applied in Chinese under-developed villages. This Western "local and democratic" initiative is difficult to implement in developing countries including China due to factors such as: population explosion, individual ambition to raise standards of living, as well as shared by people and governments, and so on. These factors provide a less favorable context for the protection of traditional forms of production and hence cultural landscapes.

These factors also helped to explain the problems that the First Generation of Chinese ecomuseums were facing. These ecomuseums were built in the villages for ethnic minority where the living conditions, economy, educational and social developments are lagging far behind the average domestic level. As well, the minority people have little understanding of their traditions and cultures. Facing this dilemma, conserving a living environment imbued with cultural memory through community

participation is simply not realistic. To address these factors and to make Chinese ecomuseum successful, Su suggested that:

'The concept of the ecomuseum can only flourish through a process of localization. Each ecomuseum can only prosper in response to its own particular surroundings, which are linked to national, societal and local practicalities and must co-exist with development endeavours' (Su 2008 p. 38).

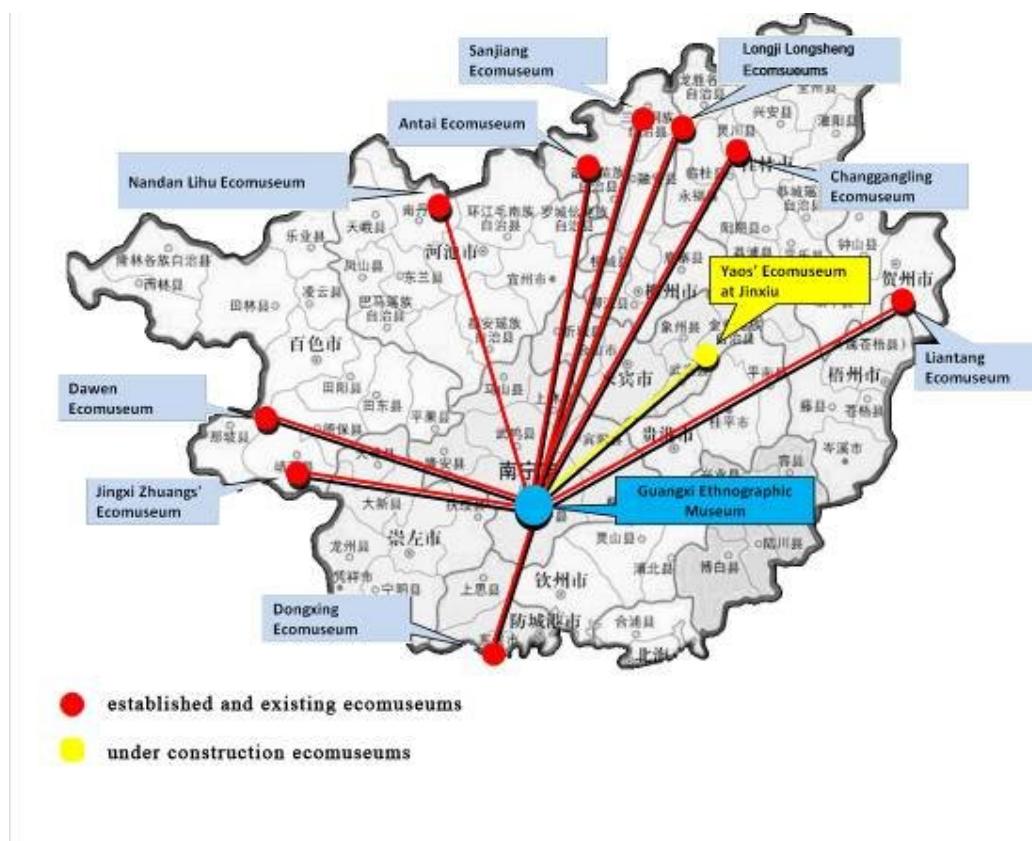
He expressed that the ecomuseum concept is too advanced for local people and is impossible be initiated by them. Instead he suggested that the Chinese government and advisor play an important role in the beginning stage (Su 2006). Su described in details (Su 2005) that the first stage of the ecomuseum localization is 'cultural consignment' which allows government and advisors to be the 'agent' culture to lead the ecomuseum establishment because the government and the advisors are the only persons who have the knowledge of ecomuseum concept, whilst the minority people have no awareness of concept as well as their culture. Ecomuseums simply are not feasible without the support and coordination of government and advisors. Su also deems that until villagers have an understanding of what an ecomuseum constitutes and the significance of their culture, namely when they become the real owner of their culture, can an ecomuseum be firmly sustained. He believes that the process from "cultural consignment" to "cultural autonomy" to be the normal process for Chinese ecomuseum establishment. This idea of localization is well demonstrated by the Second Generation of ecomuseum established in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region which has been highly praised in China.

#### **4.0 The “1+10” Ecomuseum Project in Guangxi Autonomous Region**

##### **-- The Second Generation of Ecomuseum in China**

In 2003, three ecomuseums were established in Guangxi Autonomous Region—Nandan Ecomuseum for Yao people, Sanjiang Ecomuseum for Dong people and Jingxi Ecomuseum for Zhuang people. Based upon the existance of these three ecomuseums, a “1+10” Guangxi ecomuseum project was proposed in 2005 with plans

to open seven more ecomuseums. This project is under the Five-Year Plan of Development (2006-2010) of Guangxi Autonomous Region. It is a combination system of one centrally located traditional museum called the Guangxi Ethnography Museum with ten surrounding ecomuseums (Yin and Wu 2009) (Fig. 12). They were developed with specialists' assistance from Guizhou, Chinese Society of Museums, and Guangxi Ethnography Museum. The Guangxi Ethnographic Museum provides professional assistance to the surrounding ten ecomuseums. In return, the ten ecomuseums are used as the research laboratory and offer specimen for the central ethnographic museums. Based upon the lessons learned from the First Generation of Chinese ecomuseums, this Guangxi "1+10" ecomuseum system is reported as successful in ecomuseum localization in China (Wu and Lu 2006).



**Fig. 12 the "1+10 Ecomuseum Project" in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region**  
Source: Author

## **5.0 The Analysis of Improvements of Guangxi “1+10” Ecomuseum Project**

By harnessing and critically analyzing information from multiple sources, the researcher provides the following in-depth summary as "the four aspects of improvements". Researcher believes these aspects contribute to the success of the Guangxi “1+10” Ecomuseum Project:

**1) Avoiding the ideal Liuzhi Principle:** While the objectives are almost the same between the first and second of Chinese ecomuseums, the main difference is that the former stuck to the Liuzhi Principles and not the latter. Liuzhi Principal advocated “The people of the villages are the true owners of their culture” or “Culture is a common and democratic asset, and must be democratically managed” as its slogan. These slogans are impossible to achieve because the local people are too poor to appreciate the value of the ecomuseum concept. For example, they would like to sell their properties for subsidizing their living. Hence, it is necessary to lower the "ideal" expectation so that it becomes a “not-too-heavy” burden and is more appropriate for Chinese villages. It is anticipated that the ecomuseum in China will reach maturity after 20 years. It is the researchers believe that Liuzhi Principle will work effectively then.

**2) More advanced professional techniques:** It was known that the Guizhou ecomuseums were poorly equipped for their Documentation Centre. For example, as mentioned before, the collection in the Zhenshan Documentation Centre is too simple to reflect Buyi culture. Although the "1+10" Guangxi ecomuseums still use the structure of “documentation centre and surrounding village”, they renamed the centre as “exhibition centre” so as to emphasize its function of exhibiting culture (Wu 2007). Not only that the staff of Guangxi Ethnographic Museums guides the exhibition of the surrounding ecomuseums (Wu and Lu 2006), more advanced and professional techniques are also being used in the centers, which helps to raise the standard of each

centre equals to a traditional museum. Furthermore, a multi-disciplinary approach is adopted in the "1+10" ecomuseum system. A group of ethnologists, archaeologists, museologists, historians, and local historiographers and so on participated in the on-the-spot investigation, theme study and feasibility report, to ensure the ecomuseums are being built professionally.

**3) Detailed site planning:** There was a lack of site planning, as well as architectural planning for the Guizhou ecomuseums. For example, the architectural style of information centre of the Longli Ecomuseum is not compatible with the environment (Myklebust, 2005). However there has been substantial detailed planning for the entire "1+10" ecomuseum system in Guangxi. For example, it has a sound process of landscape architectural planning, which includes conceptual plan, investigation of heritage values with corresponding conservation strategies, local involvement or activity plans, planning and relationship between ecomuseums. As well, the improvement of local living condition and the survey of local aspiration were also implemented.

**4) Establishment of cooperation between the ten ecomuseums and Guangxi Ethnography Museum:** It was evident that there was no cooperation between 1st generation ecomusuem with other traditional museums. However there has been emphasis on the development of a stable and long-term cooperation and outreach relationship between the ten ecomuseums and the Guangxi Ethnographic Museum. For example, the surrounding ecomuseum villages are used as research laboratory for experts of central Guangxi Ethnographical Museum for field studies. The ethnographical museum tracks the development of ethnic communities and collects samples of cultural heritage at the ecomuseums (Rong 2005). They share the same information network (Wu 2007). This cooperation and mutual-active mode is innovative in China.

## **6.0 Conclusion: Potential Prosperity of Chinese Ecomuseums**

Unlike the Western concept of ecomuseum, which is based on initiatives from local communities and runs in a democratic way, on contrary the Chinese "version" of ecomuseum has been uniquely created for sustainable development in poor rural areas, which is guided by government, advised from experts, and participated by local people. Now it is generally accepted this three-party management structure is Chinese own way of ecomuseum. As seen from the aforementioned four aspects of improvement, the Guangxi ecomuseum system is a successful example in adopting the Western ecomuseum concept with the localized Chinese minority conditions in mind. This unique integration has been named by scholars such as Su (2008b), Weifeng Wu (2007), Weibin Wu & Lu (2006) as the "Chinese Own Ecomuseum Models" or the "Ecomuseum with Chinese Characteristics".

Mentioned earlier, Chinese ecomuseum should go through the process from cultural consignment to cultural antinomy (Su 2008). According to Hu (2005) this process from cultural consignment to cultural antinomy contains three stages-- an initial stage, a transition stage, and maturity stage. However, De Varine warned that this process could be long because of the explosion to large-scaled tourism (quoted in Su, 2006). It is anticipated that this process will take at least two decades for ecomuseums to be successfully sustainable in China. Contemporarily, some industrial museum are using ecomuseum principles and the practice are spreading to urban areas of China(Su 2008). The future of Chinese ecomuseums is potentially prosperous and needs to withstand the test of time.

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