社區伙伴
Partnerships for Community Development

When Cultural Reflection Meets Agriculture

Facilitators' Notes

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Content

Preface I
The Beginning of Our Stories

Angus Lam, Programme Coordinator

Like wine that needs time to mature, these stories come from 13 colleagues based in different regions across China, who locked themselves away in the attic of a small teahouse by Green Lake in Kunming for four days in June 2016. It was the first time in a decade that we had held such an intensive session.

However, the purpose of this discussion on our eco-agricultural programme experience was not to present a 'systematic' documentation of our work nor to leave behind any kind of historical record. Instead, through bringing our voices together, we sought to present the varying practices of our team's rural community work, as well as the thoughts and ideas behind our programmes. We wanted to acknowledge and record the emotional side of each individual colleague's approach to the work – feelings that had gradually crystallised over the years. In our minds, through articulating and documenting both our work and our reflections on the work, we also refine, synthesise and theorise about our community experience. At the same time, we are integrating cultural reflection into our work and noting principles, methods and issues that need emphasis.

Reflecting on experience...

We adopted 'story/dialogue'[1] as our documentation method. It was the first time we had used this method, and we found it meaningful, enabling us to reflect on our own experiences within the process. Story/dialogue is commonly used in other disciplines as a way to record and organise varied material, often including a writing workshop[2] for practitioners to articulate the topic at hand. Facilitators and participants at the workshop then synthesise the stories, looking for insight. Depending on the need, the process might be repeated a few times for participants to discuss, assess, build up new knowledge, evaluate, and problem-solve.

PCD selected five cases that we had collaborated on, for over five years. In each case, a colleague who had taken part in working directly with that community told his/her story from a first-person perspective – highlighting "my" experience, "my" understanding, and insights "I" gained. A few note-takers recorded the stories: their role was to listen, synthesise and document insights from the dialogue. The role of the other participants was to ask

questions, compare the stories with their own experiences, and reflect on them. The workshop facilitator then conducted a second round of synthesising and summing up of insights from the previous round. Written accounts were then reviewed by an editorial group.

The team also visited three communities in Guizhou and Guangxi where PCD had supported eco-agricultural programmes in the past – the projects had closed over five years ago – the purpose being to ascertain any changes. This was also a new experience for PCD. The knowledge we gained from revisiting these communities has been significant: it enabled us to review our theory of change, and reminded us to continue to explore, practice, and revise the theory for the future.

This publication critically explores and reflects on core PCD values, principles, actions and methodologies that have been in place for several years. We do not seek to provide operational guidelines; we simply communicate the reflective process of our community experience. We reflect on the core reasons of the case stories, from the very beginning.

1 R. Labonte & J. Feather. A story/dialogue method for health promotion knowledge development and evaluation. *Health Education Research*[J], 1999

2 A. Milligan & P. Bongartz. Let's write! Running a participatory writeshop. *Participatory Learning & Action* [J], 2010 , volume 61 :201-210

Preface II
Farming Culture in the Mountains of Southwest China

Guo Jing

I began working in rural areas in 2000. The first region I came into contact with was the Tibetan area of Yunnan Province where the livelihood system is not purely agricultural. Reflecting on the discussion on farming culture from this point of departure, I have some thoughts and feelings that I would like to share with you.

Let me begin with the now well-known 'Hu Line'. In 1935, Hu Huanyong, a Chinese demographer who at that time was working at the Geography Department of the Central University, published the thesis *Distribution of the Population of China*, examining the country's population density, region by region. Using a Choropleth map, he drew a southeast-northwest line from Aihui in Heilongjiang (Heihe) to Tengchong in Yunnan. The southeast accounted for 36% of the country's land mass but was home to 96% of the population, while the northwest covered 64% but was home to only 4% of the population.

This discovery in population geography has not lost its value with the passage of time: many scholars point out that Hu's law of east-west distribution is still valid today. The main reason for the difference in population distribution lies in the differences of the natural environment, the livelihood systems, and the cultures of the peoples. American scholar Richard B. Harris, who has a long career in studying wildlife on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, continues to see the Hu Line as the divide between the agrarian and pastoral zone; this is evident in his book, *Wildlife Conservation in China: Preserving the Habitat of China's Wild West*[1].

To analyse differences between the east and west in terms of the environment and people's livelihoods, we have to revise the views mentioned above and include the areas of Guangxi, Guizhou and Yunnan inhabited by ethnic minorities – that is, the mountains of the Southwest. When people discuss China's farming culture, they often focus on the modes of agriculture practised in areas inhabited mainly by the Han people and see this as the prototype; they ignore the other numerous forms of farming culture. It could be said that the mountains that stretch across Guizhou, Guangxi and Yunnan are a special region that lies between the agrarian zone of the east and the pastoral zone of the

west. In these mountains, the main livelihood-cultural system is neither animal husbandry nor farming in the general sense. I believe that recognising this fact is a prerequisite for any reflection on the cultures of southwest China.

The difference between the farming culture in these mountains of the Southwest and that in Han-inhabited areas is not only obvious: the difference is the essence. In terms of mode of production, Han farming in the east is characterised by horticulture (intensive farming, mainly of monocrops) and livestock rearing in pens. In terms of culture, Confucian ethical system is the bond that holds the community together. Since the Ming and the Qing dynasties, the Han model of farming practice has spread from the east to the flatland areas of Guizhou, Guangxi and Yunnan, as far as Tengchong, the southernmost county on the Hu Line. The traditional modes of farming in the southwest mountains, however, have adapted to the complex local ecological environment and are characterised by multiple cropping and an integration of agriculture, forestry, food gathering, animal rearing and hunting. Compared with the characteristic monocropping in the east, the diverse character of agriculture in the mountains is striking.

Let us consider slash-and-burn agriculture. According to Professor Yin Shaoting of Yunnan University, “a zone of slash-and-burn that stretches thousands of miles” exists in the subtropical mountains, extending from southwestern Yunnan to the northern part of the Indochina peninsula – this connects to the ways of life of over a dozen ethnic minority groups, such as Yi, Miao, Yao, Dulong, Lisu, Akha, and Lahu. In the standards of the Central and Eastern agricultural production, slash-and-burn is considered to be primitive. Yet, this extensive farming actually implies a minimal disturbance of the ecological system and reflects the wisdom of integrating diverse forms of livelihood, such as farming, gathering and hunting. Slash-and-burn has gradually disappeared in the mountains of Yunnan, as Yin explains in his long-term study[2]:

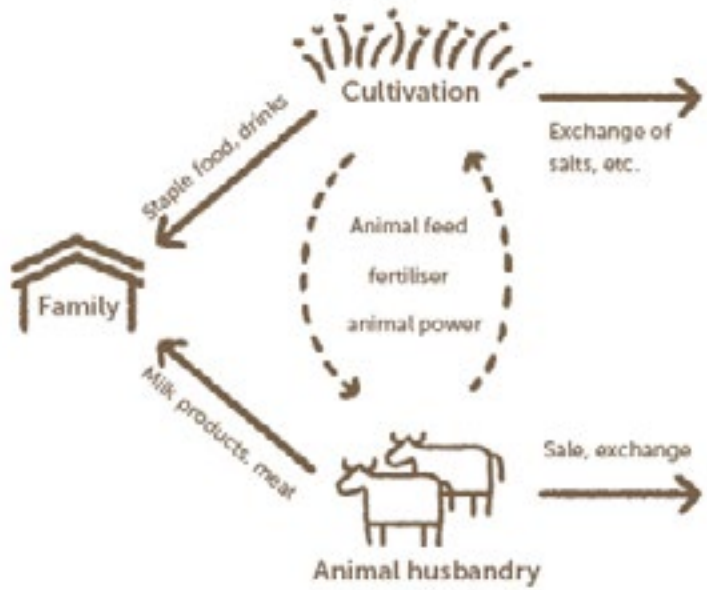
“Slash-and-burn is a form of rotational dry farming in the forest. Whether the agro-ecosystem can maintain a stable virtuous cycle depends on whether one can guarantee that sufficient forest land can be left fallow. According to studies carried out in the mountains in southwest Yunnan, if the average forest land occupied by each person is as much as 30 mu or not less than 21 mu, a normal and orderly rotational farming can be practised and the ecological system of the forest would

not break down as a result of imbalance in its use and care."

In an environment relatively isolated from external influence, the slash-and-burn practice is sustainable. However, over the past few decades, population growth and the introduction of the Central and Eastern mode of production and lifestyle are the main reasons for the decline.

Another practice to consider is the complex agroforestry production system of the Dong people. According to the study of Luo Kanglong et al. from Jishou University, the Dong used to practise shifting cultivation in the forest and grew a mix of dry crops and staple foods such as millet, corn, soybeans, yams, buckwheat and potatoes, as well as cucumber, squash, chili, carrot, radish and other vegetables. They also grew mixed varieties of watermelon, sweet potato, indigo, herbs and fruit as well as cash crops. The Dong join rivers, ponds and paddy fields, turning them into a "communicating vessel" which may support over a hundred animal and plant species. Living things considered pests and weeds by mainstream Han culture are also reared and used as resources[3].

The livelihood of the Tibetan people in Yunnan is a different story. In my study, I have found that in the dry-hot valley area of Deqin County, villagers depend completely on the water from the high mountains and the forest for their basic livelihood. In these ecological conditions they have developed a livelihood with farming and animal rearing as their core activities while also practising food gathering and forestry. Through this semi-farming and semi-herding way of life, a sustainable cycle of resources and products is formed:



If we have to explain succinctly the difference between the farming culture of the Han-inhabited regions and the farming culture in the mountains of western China, we can draw on Harris, who sees the farming culture from the central and eastern part of China developed by the Han as more human-made and more mono-cultural. In this type of agriculture, human beings and nature are clearly separated. That is why the Han have always lacked the concept of "wilderness" and have the tendency to turn everything "wild" into "domestic". Over the last 100 years, the wilderness in eastern China has been encroached upon by agricultural and industrial development. Even farming life is gradually being crowded out. Densely populated villages and large cities have replaced a large part of the wilderness. Settlement as a form of living together as a group has long become a heavy burden for the environment and for people's psychology. In comparison, peoples in the southwestern mountains have created an agriculture that is "wilder" and more diverse. With their farming culture, they maintain a close relationship with the "wilderness" through herding, hunting, gathering and worship, while having a village life at the same time.

When discussing China's conservation policy for the western part of the country, Harris criticises policy makers for thinking from the Confucian standpoint and from the perspective of the farming populations in Han-inhabited regions. For example, the household responsibility contract system in the pastoral zone, animal rearing in pens, and plans to settle nomadic herders, are ways of attempting to build an agricultural society in the rangelands. In fact, many policies carried out in the mountains in the Southwest have failed. The reason is that state policy is mostly in the hands of the farming people who have more connections with globalisation – the Han. NGOs active in public welfare in western China are mostly from the Central and Eastern China. That is why, if we do not make an effort to learn local knowledge and to listen to the views and standpoints of the local people, we might easily end up adopting the Confucian "horticultural agrarian" way of thinking.

Summing up the lessons I have learnt over the years, I am acutely aware that learning about the diversity of farming cultures in the southwest mountains is the point of departure for a reflection on our own motives and actions. This kind of reflection cannot be carried out by shutting ourselves up to ponder mistakes. Instead, we must interact with local villagers and learn from each other; over the last ten years, PCD has been striving

in this direction, especially in its initiative to work alongside local communities and to reflect on ecological agriculture. It is the local people themselves who will solve local problems. What society is faced with today is actually our own confusion as we are confronted by environmental and psychological conflicts brought on by the expansion of cities and capital. People who leave the city and go to rural areas in the Southwest always hope that they may draw the strength to live from the "wild" world.

1 Richard B. Harris. *Wildlife Conservation in China: Preserving the Habitat of China's Wild West*. M. E. Sharpe Inc., Armonk & London, 2008

2 *Collection of Yin Shaoting's Academic Papers,* Yunnan People's Publishing House, pp 61, 2015

3 Luo Kanglong, Wang Xiu. "A Discussion on the Value of Dong People's Ecological Wisdom for Maintaining Local Ecological Security", *Guangxi Ethnic Studies,* No. 4, 2008

Guo Jing

Professor Guo Jing, with a PhD in ethnic history, is a former researcher of the Institute of History, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, focusing on cultural anthropological studies such as ritual performance, visual anthropology, and cultural diversity conservation. Now retired, he has served as a consultant for PCD, including programmes on cultural reflection in Deqin in Yunnan, Da Hua Miao Cultural Exchange in Kunming, and Baiku Yao Community Livelihood in Nandan, Guangxi. He has published more than 15 books, including *The Pilgrims* (Photo Report), Yunnan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2009; *Where Do the Immortal Crane Land—Making Pilgrimages while Traveling*, Publishing House of Minority Nationalities, Beijing, 2006; and *Community Educational Practice on the Cultural and Biological Diversities of the Naxi, Akha and Tibetan Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan* (as Chief Editor), Yunnan Technology Publishing House, 2006.

ASPIRATIONS

ENVISIONING LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT

Rethinking Agriculture in Everyday Life

> *By incorporating cultural reflection into our ecological agriculture work, we adopt a perspective that goes beyond the functional dimension of traditional knowledge. Our aim is more than cultural conservation: what is more important is to develop the inner values that contribute to decisions made in community actions, and to rethink our everyday life by placing it in the social contexts of different periods of time.*

We started to work in southwest China in 2002. In these past 16 years, the development of China has been synchronised with globalisation. As the environmental, social and economic situation of the country has become increasingly complex, in what ways can rural communities continue their paths of sustainable living? How best can PCD work with the communities in this endeavour?

In the 1980s and '90s, most rural development work in China focused on poverty alleviation and the provision of basic services, such as education, health, water and sanitation. Since 2000, community development work has become more diverse. More partner organisations are broadening their focus areas from livelihood issues to the overall quality of rural life; ecological issues have become more prominent, particularly in the ways they intersect with agriculture, which is the basis of rural life.

The interconnectedness of farmers with nature, with all living beings, and with their inner selves is often embodied in indigenous peoples' farming knowledge, practice and culture. This has inspired us to explore integrating ecological agriculture and cultural reflection as the subject of this publication, and our initiative to document and refine our rural work experience. On one hand, we aim to enhance our capability in working with

communities. On the other, we want to demonstrate the vital role that ecological agriculture plays in the life of a sustainable community: this publication is one way to share these experiences with other rural community development workers.

Restoring the links between agriculture, ecology and culture

Agriculture not only provides people with food, it is our cultural bond with nature. Through the centuries, agriculture and farming stabilised our food supply and have provided the conditions for humans to form settlements and to live securely, together. Community cultures which had close links with ecology and with agriculture were then formed. Agriculture, on which rural communities depend for their self-reliance, has multiple functions, including cultural inheritance: for generations, it has provided unique and powerful ways of practising sustainable living.

On the whole, project sites of our rural work have strong traditional cultural roots, and a relatively strong sense of community. More than a decade ago, PCD incorporated ecological agriculture into its programme foci and began a comprehensive engagement. Working with our partners and local communities, we employed different entry points and various incentives. Theories and concepts such as ecological health, community supported agriculture (CSA), participatory appropriate technology development, and sustainable livelihoods were introduced as we explored eco-agriculture practices. From these precious experiences, we realised that with a single mode of intervention, the initiatives would become isolated from everyday community life and would, in the end, fail to maintain agriculture as the pillar of life.

Later, we adjusted our core strategies and approaches by reviving the links between agriculture, ecology, and community culture. Using traditional wisdom as the cornerstone, we have advocated developing local food systems that strengthen the resilience of the community, enhance the community's knowledge of agro-ecological systems, and support sustainable, everyday life practices. This process has provided a strong basis for our subsequent efforts to reinsert cultural perspectives into our ecological agriculture initiatives.

At the same time, we have gained experience in facilitating farmers in acquiring local ecological farming skills. The building of exchange platforms has also helped farmers gradually become aware of the need for diverse

markets with different forms and principles, and to gain confidence in operating them.

Developing the inner values behind actions

Because of PCD's objectives, southwest China has always been the focus of our rural programmes. The rich biodiversity and the diverse farming cultures of the ethnic minorities converge to form a unique regional feature: the coexistence of diverse farming civilisations. This reminds us that when we promote ecological agriculture in the community, we must not look at it only from the current configuration and state of development of agriculture. Instead, we must observe and reflect on the changes in agriculture from a historical perspective to make sense of all the contributing factors, including changes in culture, policy, ecology, and the impacts of modernisation and urbanisation.

We believe that for a community to survive over time, it must have resilience. A healthy, resilient community has the capacity and the mechanisms to come up with responses that meet its own needs. The most important task of a community facilitator is to revive the public cooperative mechanisms, encourage the community to find their own solutions, support them in their actions, and accompany them in their growth. Since a community is situated in a dynamic social environment, community members should be encouraged to analyse their problems from a long-term historical perspective, not attempt to address them by focusing on a single particular entry point in time. With cultural reflection, we can transcend the current issue at hand, revisiting and consolidating the inner values that contribute to decisions made in community actions, and rethinking our everyday life by placing it in different social contexts over different periods of time. We must also identify the impacts of modernisation on agrarian cultures, and other crises that may have affected the community: this will enrich our understanding of the multiple functions of agriculture.

A Reflection on Life, a Reflection on Development

> *Our purpose is to not create an image of an 'exotic' other... when we go through a process of cultural reflection with a community, we reflect on our own culture at the same time.*

What is cultural reflection?

In the field of community work, when the word 'culture' is used, the first thing that likely comes to mind is that development workers should maintain a level of sensitivity to the local culture. This is indeed the golden rule. It is a lesson learned from failed cases, such as when local people refuse to accept the grand plans of outsiders; it is also a fundamental work attitude expected of community workers.

At the same time, in specific areas such as agriculture or ecological conservation, understanding a community's culture has its practical purposes. In these contexts, 'culture' tends to refer to local and traditional knowledge. A community project that adopts local knowledge is more readily accepted by the community: it puts local resources to good use, guarantees that the project approach is more appropriate, and it tends to be more effective and more sustainable.

However, it is rare to see 'culture' being put forth as a subject to be considered, especially as it is conceived in the concept of cultural reflection. It sounds vague and appears to have nothing to do with community work,

which tends to mean finding practical solutions to solve specific problems.

We admit that the term 'cultural reflection' as we coin it does not adequately communicate what is meant. Also, the term may have different meanings in different social and cultural contexts. However, since there has not been much discussion on culture in community work and there is also a lack of experience in this area, we are not able to find the appropriate term or language to describe what we want to do. We decided to give our own meaning to the term through our actions.

For PCD, it has been a journey of learning from using the terms 'cultural sensitivity' and 'indigenous/traditional knowledge' and then adopting 'cultural reflection' for our theory of change. The journey can be traced to our initial intention and our search for ways and methods to practise sustainable living.

Cultural wisdom—the cornerstone of a sustainable community

In our cross-regional community work, which concerns the cultures of various ethnic minority peoples, we are acutely aware of the unique wisdom of each community. The wisdom grows out of the distinctive local context. The traditional wisdom of each community has guided people in their ways of life: how they conduct themselves on a daily basis, and how they relate to each other and to nature. Thanks to the wisdom passed down through the generations, communities have grown with resilience and have been able to live in harmony with the ecological environment. That is why many communities and villages, which have been in existence for hundreds of years, have been able to survive all sorts of challenges and changes over time.

However, we have witnessed that this diverse cultural wisdom is being brushed aside with modernisation and replaced completely by mainstream values, such as individualism, market domination, consumerism and encroachment on nature. Both urban and rural community life have become more uniform, vulnerable, and unsustainable with the loss of strong local characteristics and the uniquely diverse cultures.

This is why PCD believes that only by relearning and appreciating the traditional culture of a community can a sustainable community life be rebuilt, especially in

rural areas where practices of the community's wisdom and values are rooted in farming. We want to embark on a journey of reflection with the community, a process through which the community can consciously affirm its principles and values and choose a sustainable way of life. Communities in different cultures have different ways of expressing what sustainable living is, demonstrating all sorts of possibilities and providing each other with a lot of inspiration, support and encouragement.

Culture is holistic and cannot be separated into parts

The first question to face: what is culture, or more precisely, what is community culture? One would probably list out everything, tangible and intangible, related with the life of production for a community, from clothing, food, shelter and transport, to knowledge and handicrafts, modes of production, custom and habits, social organisations and systems, religious faith and spirituality, and more.

However, culture is like a box in which there are all sorts of things. We cannot use the reductive method and take out something saying that this represents the whole box. Can we look at the contents one by one and then add them up? Will that help to explain the culture of a community?

The word 'culture' in the term 'cultural reflection' is this box. What is its shape? Is it round or square? What is its colour? What is it made of? How does it feel when you touch it? It is these core values of a community culture that hold the elements of the culture together.

Within this box of community culture is all that has been transmitted from the ancestors and which the local people receive and recreate. It is the products of the collective memory, the knowledge and the experience of a people in specific time and space. It is what each person belongs to, yet each generation and each person has a different experience of and different feeling about it. As such, only community members can describe their own box, their community culture, and the description is a constant process of narration and affirmation.

With cultural reflection, we attach importance to every part that makes up the community culture. Every handicraft, every bit of knowledge, and every ceremony or festival has its inner value and embodies

the everyday life wisdom, thoughts and feelings of the local people. It is the shared knowledge, experience and feeling that create a sense of belonging in the community. These build the shared identity of the community and connect the soul and heart of the community with their ancestors and nature.

Cultural reflection is a dynamic process

For PCD, cultural reflection is not conserving culture for its own sake. Culture is like a river that keeps flowing and changing. It is holistic and dynamic. It cannot be reduced to and represented by any one of its elements, nor can it be fixed in any original form. If anyone seeks to keep a culture completely unchanged, they are climbing a tree to catch a fish and their effort will be in vain.

The growth and development of a community culture is a dynamic process. There is no need to insist on preserving the form of a culture and to resist change. What is important is to revive and strengthen the mechanisms of transmission, to understand the culture in the community, and to ensure its vitality. The motivation to revive a community's culture should come from the community itself and the main goal is to maintain the community. It is in this way that people gain a sense of pride and ownership in their community.

Cultural reflection is about the past, present and future

With cultural reflection, one reflects on and questions one's development outlook. Whether in a traditional community or a modern society, there is a narrative that explains the meaning of life, the essence of human relationships, the relationships between humans and nature, and the role of humans in the universe. Modern mainstream societies tend to use scientific knowledge and technological progress to interpret the story of

NEW CONCEPT

What do we mean by cultural reflection?

In cultural reflection, we explore with a community the value systems behind its culture. We encourage the community to rediscover its culture, to understand the core values hidden in it, and to use the core values to support themselves in making principled choices for the future development of the community.

humans and to shape our worldview; individualism is encouraged and revered, and people are taught to believe in competition, unlimited growth and to dominate nature. Nowadays, in the face of our worldwide ecological crisis and various social problems, many scholars have suggested that it is time to take a new look at the history of humans in the last 500 years. We need to have a new narrative to understand the meaning of life and to understand our role on this planet.[1]

Indigenous and traditional cultures have been marginalised by modernisation. Yet, ways of harmonious co-existence between humans and with nature can be found in many of these lost cultures; these ways of living were diverse expressions of pursuits for a meaningful life, which is what humans strive for. Can we face up to the voices that have been forgotten by modern society, and learn from these voices the wisdom that is often lacking in contemporary society? Cultural reflection can be a useful guide.

We must understand that the culture of every era, place and community has its positive aspects that nourish life, and its negative sides that are simply adhering to a hollow form. In what we call cultural reflection, we want to unearth and reaffirm in our own

culture and in other cultures the essence that attaches importance to individuality and community, that emphasises harmonious co-existence between humans and nature, that encourages mutual help between people, and that promotes innovation and self-reliance. It is in this sense that cultural reflection is important, if not imperative. It is also beautifully versatile: it can be implemented in any community – rural or urban, ethnic minority or mainstream. We can all reflect on our culture.

1 David Korten. *A new story for a new economy: to find our human place in a living universe. http://davidkorten.org/the-new-economy/which-story/*

Passing on Traditional Wisdom

Chatchawan Thongdeelert

> *What do we pass on?*
>
> *How do we pass it on?*
>
> *It's not only the content, not only knowledge, but it goes to the core.....*

Traditional Wisdom – An overview

The traditional wisdom that generations had built up for ages is about to disappear, bit by bit. The current generation, which lives in the age of television, radio, video, newspaper, computer and internet, is under the influence of Western culture. It is as if our younger generation is being engulfed by a storm, bringing modernity and consumerism throughout Thai culture. It can seem impossible to avoid.

This change is happening everywhere, from big towns to tiny villages in the mountains.

The culture which our parents and grandparents have been holding up is beginning to become outdated and the new generation is less and less interested in it. The passing on of the traditional wisdom from one generation to the next is about to vanish.

At the same time, development which leads to development in the whirl of consumerism is experiencing collapse: a natural resource decline, a human resource decline, an economic decline, and a societal decline. This is making us reconsider 'social culture' more and more. In the first place, development that gives importance

to local culture and local wisdom is a valuable social investment – it can lead to self-sufficiency and sustainability.

Now, concerning Thai society in all its diversity – rich and poor, mainstream and ethnic minority – if it is necessary to pass on traditional Thai knowledge, we have to go back and ask ourselves once more:

What do we pass on?

How do we pass it on?

It's not only the content, not only knowledge, but it goes to the core – what is this core in the context of conveying local traditional wisdom?

Learning about nature and the wisdom for life

The settlement of communities in different locations is of great importance. People depend on their experience and knowledge, much of which has been passed on for many generations. This is the knowledge about suitable sites, about building houses and towns so that all community members can live contentedly and peacefully. So, there have to be natural resources, water sources and sufficient forest, and the site also has to be safe from natural dangers such as flooding, storms and landslides.

To be a good settlement site, the flooding must not be able to reach it and storms will not tend to blow through. According to Feng Shui, there must be mountains behind, a river in front, and alongside there should be land that can be cultivated.

There has to be enough land so people can reclaim fields and plantations. There has to be enough water to consume and for daily use, and furthermore, enough for irrigation. At the same time, the forest is a source of the "four means of livelihood": for wood in order to build a house where people can live and which protects them from sun and rain, for natural foods in their diversity, for herbs which can be used to cure illnesses and soothe pain, and finally for plants for the sewing and weaving of clothes and for wooden utensils for use in daily life.

After the community has taken root and people have started to conduct their lives in this very place, the learning about the natural resources and environment in that area starts and is carried on over time. There

is experimenting – sometimes it goes right, sometimes it goes wrong, sometimes it goes in harmony with nature, sometimes it causes discord between humans and nature. Sometimes this learning demands a whole lifetime.

All these lessons and real-life experiences link together and become the different parts of the community's traditional knowledge.

The parts of this knowledge which constitute an important foundation are the deep and detailed understanding of the ecosystem around the settlement site, the understanding of the nature of the earth, the water, the forest, the plant and animal species, and the relationship to the seasons of the years and the changes which they bring with them.

The understanding of the order and the laws of nature means that the community understands that they are part of nature and that they must rely on and support it. The community can be compared to a fish, and nature to water – the two cannot be separated.

From this understanding and consciousness, the community builds up its belief systems. Incorporated in these systems is the philosophy of respect for nature, and they include laws on how to make use of things from nature and how to cure diseases. This shows itself in the appearance of 'souls of nature', that is, the spirits of the water, of the field, of the land, guardian spirits, forest spirits, mountain spirits, spirits of the dam... If nature is to be 'used', the spirits are always informed.

Every year, the community holds a festival as a gift to the spirits, thanking them for letting the community use the area's natural abundance. At the same time, they ask the spirits for forgiveness that they have intruded into nature. All this happens in a modest and humble manner. These laws reflect the knowledge of how to use and how to care for nature in a sustainable way.

The learning of life and the wisdom of living together

In the community itself, there has to be a way of living together for each aspect of life. This means helping each other when building a house, when producing something, when transplanting seedlings and reaping rice, or when holding a house occupying ceremony, an ordination ceremony for novices or monks, weddings

and funerals, merit making ceremonies, temple festivities and other gatherings.

This mutual help is built upon the basis of 'being related to each other', like being brothers and sisters connected by respect and love for another. The community has built up laws concerning the 'grandfather spirit' and 'grandmother spirit' who are the ancestral spirits of the respective group of relatives. When a member of one group of relatives holds a festivity or ceremony, these spirits will be told. Everyone in this group of relatives will come and help. When a member is seriously troubled by something, ancestor spirits will also be informed, and other members will come and try to help solve the problem. And even if there aren't any of these events happening, group members will come together annually and 'feed' the grandparent spirits: every member will join this ceremony. This is an opportunity to meet and talk, to give advice, to exchange amenities, and to strengthen bonds among everyone.

Apart from the ancestral spirits that are the 'axis' of these bonds among brothers and sisters (and other relatives), there is also a belief at the community level, giving everyone a sense of being one community. This is the belief in 'village spirits' – every village gathers once a year to perform a ceremony for these guardian spirits of the village.

Local wisdom – the root of sustainable development

Looking at the Thai way, as well as traditional Thai wisdom, I see the foundation of sustainable development being with the diversity of the peoples, with life alongside nature, with respect for and the reliance on nature, and a simple and self-sufficient way of living whereby people help each other.

The passing on of traditional knowledge therefore has to start with learning about nature throughout the country, about the historical development of the respective inhabitants, and about the knowledge transmitted in each of the respective regions.

The construction of something new must, when learning about the potential of the local wisdom, help to preserve this wisdom, it must help to support it and furthermore, the new things coming in must be chosen carefully, so that they suit the conditions of the respective regions.

The standardisation that is brought by modernisation and globalisation is one important factor which is destroying the local wisdom of different areas in Thailand.

The promotion of the government policy 'one product - one district' has led to a kind of a 'local wisdom brand'. Sending these products for competition on the market is certainly unsustainable: the original 'form' is usually changed and adjusted for marketability.

But to really reach the core, the beautiful philosophy of passing on values and local wisdom in a constructive way has to be supported. This can lead to genuine sustainability and a beautiful and stable future. This is how traditional knowledge and wisdom can really manifest themselves.

Chatchawan Thongdeelert

Chatchawan from the College of Social Management in Thailand, has been a mentor to PCD in many ways, particularly in matters of cultural reflection and sustainable living. Communities in Thailand and China face similar challenges brought on by modernisation, and he stresses the core values of local wisdom and mutual help as being essential in rebuilding community resilience, a useful reminder for community facilitators. This article is extracted from his original article "The passing on of culture of wisdom".

THOUGHTS

EXPLORING CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORKS

Both Theory and Practice Matter: When the Theory of Change becomes a Programme Approach

> *PCD works with local communities and various groups to reflect on the unsustainability of mainstream development from a cultural perspective. Our aim is to revive the connection between our inner selves and nature, and for this bond to become the mainstay of our exploration of sustainable living. At the beginning, due to our limited experience and to the limits of our terminology, we could not describe more specifically what sort of exploration and learning process it would be. We could only take the path step by step through practice and slowly turn our theory into a programme approach.*

The balance between theory and practice

When we first introduced the cultural perspective into our community work, we were actually approaching it functionally: how to use the concept to facilitate our practice. For example, when exploring the relationship between sustainable livelihood and traditional knowledge – in particular traditional farming practices and methods – we viewed them as ways of tackling the overuse of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Forest conservation, traditional medicine, and community supported agriculture were also entry points to respond to the challenges of market-oriented development and consumerism. Culture was not an organic part of the PCD programme, and there was little reflection from a so-called cultural perspective.

It was standard practice and common sense to respond to the practical needs of the community at the initial stage of a programme and to see the response simply as an entry point. However, we frequently and inevitably became trapped in complicated technical issues such as cultivation methods and building construction processes. We would soon lose our direction, and the sense of cultural reflection was forgotten.

Since we did not clearly grasp the concept of cultural reflection at the initial stage, it was inevitable that we, our partner organisations and local communities alike, would often see the importance of traditional knowledge in everyday life in terms of its market value or its use in natural resource management. A major challenge of facilitation from a cultural reflection perspective at this initial stage was how to facilitate a community to draw on its own unique cultural perspective to reflect on its decisions of everyday life, and to meet the community's practical needs at the same time.

Apart from programmes using cultural reflection from this practical perspective, there were also theory-driven programmes that posed challenges.

For example, when we learn about the history of a community, exploring its traditional mores and the spirit of mutual help, we ask ourselves how the values can be lived out in everyday life. How can the values help address problems at hand? How do the values manifest as practices of sustainable living? How do the values guide one to live in harmony with nature? These actions cannot be planned beforehand and must be the result of the community's reflections and inner motivations. They might, therefore, be something beyond the programme's imagination and not take place, in the form of what we understand, as definable elements of a 'development project'.

Small is beautiful

Even with these limitations, PCD's programmes using cultural reflection as an entry point slowly began to show some unique features. For example, in terms of funding input and geographical area covered by a single project, the scale was relatively small, and programme funds were primarily used for training of facilitators.

NEW CONCEPT

Cultural reflection is about focusing on the process

Life is dynamic and holistic. We cannot represent it by inserting it into a programme framework. We try to be open-minded, and instead place the programme focus of cultural reflection within the programme process. In doing so, we at least seek to prevent ourselves from adopting the conventional approach of measuring results in terms of expected output. We stress that the community must be the main actor in programme activities and that the actions should bring about reflection.

In other words, we attached more importance to training than to completed activities. We adopted this approach to prevent the community response from being too resource- and outsider-driven, with little or no momentum to sustain efforts in the long run.

Under this kind of programming, PCD's rural work was mostly community-based and exploring the connection with nature, which is often embedded into a community's culture. Apart from early programmes focusing on training researchers, the villagers themselves were the main actors in most community-level cultural reflection programmes.

Cultural reflection as framework of analysis: From livelihood to everyday life

Initially our programmes focused on livelihoods, but we expanded the cultural perspective to consider other parts of life, such as traditional medicine, forest protection, and community education. Inspired by Chatchawan Thongdeelert, an educator and veteran community worker from Thailand, we tried to reach a fuller understanding of community life through the four aspects of culture: belief/worldview, production knowledge and skills, social organisation and systems, relationship with nature and resource management. (See article: "Thoughts and Practice: The Capacity Building of Cultural Reflection" on p.210.)

This analysis helps reveal the multiple functions of agriculture in the life of a community. Farming is far more than just a productive activity. As a way of life, it embraces cultural activities, religious rituals, the transmission of knowledge and innovation, social interactions such as exchange of labour, resource management, health and nutrition, social mores, an outlook on life and death, and the education of future generations.

Cultural reflection as a programme approach: From everyday life to community building

We also began to use cultural reflection as a key programme approach for community building. The learning, discovery and affirmation of shared knowledge, stories, common experience, and wisdom help reinforce a people's identity and solidarity, and enable members of the community to feel a sense of belonging to the place where they were born and raised.

Community-based research is an instrumental approach: we facilitate villagers to research the culture of their community. The goal is to support them to develop independent thinking, to engage with community affairs, and to gain an in-depth and multi-dimensional understanding of these affairs which might then motivate them to serve others. This community-based research is not conducted by or for outsiders. Instead, it draws villagers' attention to issues which are common to them and allows different opinions to surface.

The research is a process that repeats itself, a regular mechanism. Through the research, villagers learn about topics that concern the community, making observations, talking with different groups of people and different communities, and collecting various kinds of information. They then analyse the information and come up with new findings. The villagers essentially become community facilitators and share what they learn with the community through activities such as film screenings and storytelling to stimulate collective discussions and to expand the communal process of learning and reflection – with this catalyst, new actions can arise.

We observe that this community-led research – undertaken in both rural and urban areas – increases people's interest in issues such as ecological conservation, kinship history, old trees, and old streets. The

research opens up myriad discussions on biodiversity, habitat, gender equality, and truth-seeking spirit –then leads to self-initiated actions, such as conserving the forest, restoring the traditional landscape, preserving old crop varieties, and changing consumption behaviours to reduce the use of resources.

We see that cultural reflection can often inspire action. The possibilities are many. The actions of one community can have ripple effects through to other communities, be they in the same region or at some distance, but of a similar cultural background. When members of different communities meet and interact, their learning and reflection can go even deeper and further.

Application of the Cultural Reflection Framework of Analysis at the Programme Level

> *Cultural reflection is a perspective and analytical framework for sustainable living that embraces cultural values. It provides an outstanding thinking tool with which facilitators and communities can understand how cultural values are embodied holistically in the community, both past and present. The framework can also help visualise a future wherein the core values continue to support the community through innovative methods developed by villagers.*

In the field of community development, some useful tools have been developed for facilitating discussion with community members. However, sometimes facilitators can overlook the community values that underlie the tools, and stress the technical tasks at hand, such as making diagrams and filling out forms. The values and effectiveness of these tools therefore has been undermined. This is why facilitators must remember that they must practise cultural reflection with flexibility. It is also important to be aware of the integral value of the four aspects of culture which the framework embraces and to explore with the community how such holistic viewpoints can be manifested.

In the past, when accumulating our experience with cultural reflection in different initiatives, PCD had combined learnings from local facilitators and Chatchawan Thongdeelert, our mentor to cultural reflection. Through applying the framework, we found it critical to acknowledge the four aspects integrally. This would give us a sense of the core values that each community holds – they differ from community to community.

We draw on our experience from PCD's Yunnan Programme to introduce some possible ways of applying the cultural reflection analytical framework.

Application in the choice of programme sites

Sites for poverty alleviation programmes in rural areas are often selected with reference to the geographical area (such as high and cold areas, areas of mid- to high-elevation, and areas of low elevation) or economic conditions (such as low-income, middle-income and high-income communities). PCD seeks to have a comprehensive experience in rural work, so we choose to work with communities of different cultural backgrounds. Our programme experience can also contribute to exchanges between communities of different cultural backgrounds so that they may learn from each other.

In Yunnan the cultural reflection framework has been applied in the selection of the programme site: three types of communities have been considered:

1. Communities which have a formal religion, such as the Tibetan, Bulang, and the Han in Dali region. (The Han in Dali region are believers of the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, with Taoism playing the dominant role.)

2. Communities that practise animism, such as the Akha and the Lisu.

3. Communities in which the importance of culture and religion has faded, such as Han communities on the plains or around county seats. We raise several questions: How has the community passed on its community spirit over time? How has the community been run as a whole?

Needs assessments at programme sites

Needs assessment is a process to enable understanding of a community's characteristics and resources. In the past, rural development work was mostly about poverty alleviation; therefore, the poverty alleviation framework was commonly used to collect information about the community, such as population size, economic income, farm size, and main cash crops.

However, the cultural reflection framework looks at a community from different perspectives:

1. Structure of population: total population; size of surnames/clans; number of young people.

2. (Ecological) Land use: The size of the forest collectively

owned by the community (size of the community micro-reserves, forest watersheds, collectively-owned economic forest or others); family-contracted forest, family-contracted but collectively-managed forest, size of farming plots for staple food, size of farming plots for cash crops; collectively owned farmland or infrastructural facilities (such as schools, buildings for collective use, and religious venues) , iconic buildings or venues of cultural or historical significance.

❸ (Social) Collective activities: Apart from weddings and funerals, what activities are conducted by the community (including sacrificial/religious/ceremonial activities; entertainment; discussion of public matters; collective labour)? What are the rules and regulations that everyone complies with? How frequent are the activities? Who leads the activities? Who must take part? Who is free to take part? When did the tradition disappear? When was the tradition revived, and has it been successful or not? Who played a crucial role in reviving the traditions? Were there any disagreements and what were they?

❹ (Livelihood) Self-reliance: Changes in self-reliance over time in clothing, food, shelter, transportation, health care, nutrition, religion, entertainment, and energy supply. Who still has the traditional knowledge, skills, tools? Who still cultivates traditional varieties of crops?

❺ (Spiritual) Values: In communities where traditional beliefs or religious faiths are still practised, it is still relatively easy for the people to explain their value system, but this is not the case in most communities. However, when a community gradually revives and has more collective activities, the community spirit will strengthen. When members look back at the gratifying and emotional process of their history, they may be able to identify some values that are crucial for their community. There is often no need to ask villagers about it directly because they usually discover it themselves in discussions after they conduct community-based research.

An understanding cannot be achieved after one or two interviews or visits. Instead, the knowledge is accumulated throughout the course of programme implementation. What is more important is to enable core village members to start using this framework to learn about their own community.

Programme intervention strategies

After the needs assessment framework has been used to help villagers gain knowledge about their community, villagers will start to think about what they want to do together as a community. What benefits the community and not just oneself? This kind of discussion is often carried out as part of the community-based research.

The more collective activities there are, the closer the villagers will become to each other. The solidarity of the community will be stronger and its culture more evident.

To sum up, we can use almost anything as an entry point for community facilitation work, as long as it is for the benefit of the whole community, not for the personal interest of an individual programme participant. Entry points that have been adopted by PCD programmes include:

- Forest/wildlife/species conservation
- Conservation of water resources – rivers/lakes/watershed
- Revival of traditional culture
- Community education, moral education with children/youth

The examples above have commonalities: the collective activity had been previously undertaken by the community, for the whole community, and with minimal resource input. In the past, the activities had been organised by the villagers themselves, and because middle-aged and elderly villagers still remembered the activities, the activities were more feasible to revive.

Since the villagers did not have to rely too much on outside support, their confidence that the community could address its own problems was enhanced. In this way, the community can gradually regain its self-agency and self-reliance.

Finally, it is crucial that community action and community-based research take place simultaneously. Each enables community members to use cultural reflection to gain knowledge of their community, and to learn of the changes in every facet of community life over different periods of time.

Villagers must first understand the changes before they can analyse how the changes are interrelated. They can decide which changes benefit the community as a whole and which have overall negative impacts. They then discuss what can be revived in the community or what sort of collective action can be taken. (This is further discussed in the article “An Alternative Method of Community-based Research” on p.226.)

ACTIONS

WALKING ALONGSIDE COMMUNITIES

Liping, Guizhou: Exploring Economic and Non-economic Incentives

Pan Yongrong

> *In this Liufang Village case, if a facilitator only attaches importance to the market, the initiative will not be sustainable. Attention must be paid to the cultural needs of the local people. Only then will the community go far on the path of ecological agriculture.*

Small stories, Big lessons

"The rice that the Agricultural Bureau introduced has to be cultivated in shallow water and densely spaced, but in Liufang, people prefer to cultivate rice in wide rows and deep water. No matter what the Bureau did, the villagers simply wouldn't change."

STORY 1

Discovering the farming culture of rice-fish-duck

'Why do farmers refuse the introduced rice?' With this question in mind, our facilitators talked with various villagers – the Liufang Organic Farming Association, elderly people and village leaders – which led to a series of stories on the search for seeds, fish fry and ducklings.

It is a traditional practice in Dong communities to plant rice in wide rows: this cannot be changed because "wide rows allow the ducks to look for food – if they are too narrow, the ducks can't wade through". Similarly, deep water is needed for raising fish – if it is shallow, the fish have difficulty swimming, especially when they are large. Agricultural Bureau technicians had only paid attention to the rice and nothing else in the paddy field, but the Dong include fish and ducks and everything else.

'Why do Dong villagers pay so much attention to the fish and ducks?' With this question, the villagers started to tell the facilitator about their customs. The Dong and fish are inseparable. For them, the fish is a symbol of reproduction and propagation. When an elderly person passes away, the children stop eating meat and only eat fish. When a bride goes to the bridegroom's home accompanied by her male relatives, she brings fish and ducks with her. Ducks are also important during rituals when Dong families with small children make an offering for blessings. In addition, when children collect eggs laid by their parents' ducks, they naturally feel thankful and this helps cultivate family bonds between parent and child.

STORY 2

Seeking old duck breeds for an ecological landscape

It is common to be faced with all sorts of technical issues when facilitating a community in practising ecological agriculture. Once, when the facilitator was chatting with the Liufang Organic Farming Association, a member asked if an expert could be located to provide training in duck health.

'Why?' The facilitator asked.

"Nowadays the ducks are becoming ill and dying at a faster rate than before,' the member explained.

'Why don't you ask the elderly people what they do to take care of ducks?'

The members said they had not paid much attention, because it is the women who usually raise the ducks.

The facilitator then consulted the village women. The women said that in the past, nothing much was needed. The problem now, they said, was that the ducklings were being purchased at the market and they were often infected and thus died easily. The ducks from the market were bigger, but not inclined to go into the paddy field. "They are lazy and are different from those of the past," the women said, "but the old breeds have disappeared."

The facilitator was quickly inspired by these conversations and planned an activity based on the villagers' need to locate old duck breeds in other Dong communities.

First search: old duck breeds

The Dong community's first search was for the old duck breeds. The villagers had learned that the neighbouring village of Huanggang had the older breeds, so they went and asked for some. They raised the smaller ducks in the open and the outcome was great: not only did they weed the paddy fields, they helped prevent pests too.

Soon afterwards, the villagers found that the ducks were eating the rice hulls in the field because the rice stalks were too short. The maturity phase of the rice was also short. They recollected that in the past, glutinous rice had been cultivated. The stalks of glutinous rice were longer, and the maturity phase too, so they also

started to look for the older varieties of glutinous rice.

Seeing that the villagers were becoming interested, the facilitator took the opportunity to conduct a community-based research and an activity for villagers to find seeds of the old rice varieties. Villagers said that there were only a few left, while in their memory, there had been many. Everyone agreed to look for the seeds of the old varieties in Dong communities.

Second search: old glutinous rice seeds

The villagers travelled to the southern part of Liping County, including Long-e and Shuikou, and Xiaohuang of Congjiang County. When they came home, the elderly people said that in the past, traditional glutinous rice seeds had typically been brought from higher altitude areas to lower areas. The villagers thought they might have made a mistake and the yield might be affected because of the geographical difference; subsequently there were many discussions with various communities. In the end, after the traditional glutinous rice was planted, they found that even though the rice was maturing later, the water could be very deep and this was ideal for fish and ducks. That year, a lot of fish were harvested from the paddy fields. The fish were large too, and the community was very satisfied with the outcome.

Third search: young fish

Then the villagers said: "The adult fish may be large but they have short bodies and big bellies – this is different from before." They discovered that in the past, villagers had raised female fish in a separate pond and did the selective breeding by themselves. They learned that for mating, the female had to be at least be three years old and the male at least one year; and three male fish were needed for each female. However , these days, the fish were fertilised and spawned in the paddy fields or ponds; there was no prior selective breeding. That was why the fish had become shorter.

The villagers decided to launch a third search in Dong communities: this time for young fish. They visited the neighbouring areas of Podong which had a long history of breeding fish.

However, the villagers thought that getting young fish from somewhere else was not a self-sufficient approach and not sustainable. They discussed the matter, and everyone, including the village leaders and the elderly people, said they could and should do it themselves:

everyone seemed very interested. However, ponds are needed to breed fish, and villagers said there were very few nowadays. They said that in the past, every family had a pond, but the local government had urged the people to turn their ponds into fields, and most of the ponds had become paddy fields, house foundations or fire-prevention strips. From this discussion on fish ponds, villagers went on to reflect on the layout of the whole village.

During this round, the facilitator observed profound cultural values. A facilitator not sensitive enough might see the rice-duck-fish cultivation only as a form of farming practice, but this facilitator realised that the deep cultural foundations underlying rice-duck-fish cultivation could open the way for broad, engaging conversations about the relationships between agricultural production and community life. The facilitator realised that a discussion on agriculture should not be confined to practice and production, and saw that due to the community's three searches, people were now considering structural changes in their everyday lives. This became the basis for the community's search for a sustainable way of living.

Place, People, Culture, Issues

Place

Liufang Village, Maogong Township, Liping County, Guizhou Province. With a history of over 600 years, Liufang is a Dong community which has preserved the traditional integrated rice-duck-fish farming practice. Altitude: 700 metres. Climate: warm and humid. Forest cover: over 60%. No industrial pollution. Population: 658, with 142 families. Total area: 664 mu, of which 538 are paddy fields.

People

Dong Ethnicity

Culture

Dong villages are situated mostly along rivers. The rice-duck-fish culture – in every village – is not only an adaptation to the natural ecological environment, but also satisfies the people's productive, domestic, cultural and religious needs. This important farming activity fosters appropriate technology in the community,

provides three sources of livelihood, and constitutes a central component of their culture.

Issues

The programme was launched initially with an eye to the market. After nearly ten years of working with the community, the facilitator began to explore how economic and non-economic incentives could be balanced, and the path of ecological agriculture sustained.

Exploration and Discovery: Programme Theories and Approaches

Small farmers, big market, organic rice

Between 2005 and 2007, the programme collaborated with the Resources and Environment Institute of Guizhou University to promote organic rice farming with the local rice-duck-fish farming method. At the time, it was already common for villagers to work in the city and there was a shortage of human resources. Moreover, the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides had become commonplace and had led to environmental degradation and health issues.

After discussions with our partners and the local community, it was decided that the programme's main objective would be to enhance the integrated capacity of the villagers and to explore sustainable development by establishing an organic agriculture association. In addition, the programme explored how organic agriculture could alleviate poverty in Guizhou's ethnic minority communities. The villagers established Liufang Organic Agriculture Association in 2005, and

under its leadership, 30 families began to experiment with organic rice production on a small scale. By 2006, all 538 *mu* of paddy fields in the whole village had been converted to organic farming and the Association applied for organic conversion certification. By 2008, the village had received its certification from Nanjing's Organic Food Development Centre of China.

From improving livelihoods to sustainable living

Two crucial changes were later introduced to the programme. First, because of what the programme team had learned about sustainable living, the objectives were changed considerably. Reflecting on the fact that too much emphasis had been placed on technology and the market in the early phase, elements of community organising, self-reliance and traditional culture were included in the second phase. The team wanted to promote sustainable living, including self-reliance, natural resource conservation and environmental education in the following three years.

Secondly, we tried to fill in the cultural gap by engaging a facilitator who himself is of Dong ethnicity and has knowledge of the local culture. Traditional Dong cultural activities were planned and support was given to villagers to set up community activities, such as a women's singing and theatre group. As a result, diverse groups of villagers were attracted to participate in various activities. Apart from people joining the Organic Agriculture Association and the women's groups, elderly and middle-aged people also joined in, sharing the heavy workload of the Association. The community's cultural self-esteem and social bonding were enhanced, first through the experiments with organic rice farming, and then broadening this into the everyday life of the community.

APPROACH 1
Make connection with villagers through casual chats

Each programme facilitator has different expertise, but all facilitators have something in common: they integrate themselves into the community and strive to be open-minded. One of our facilitators, Pan, is of Dong ethnicity. He spoke the local language and everything about the Dong people was dear to him. He chose to use the most natural way: to "chat" with villagers, motivate them, and find out what they know of their culture, history, values, and general Dong life. In the facilitator's

mind, he saw himself as a member of the community. He and the villagers discussed the meaning of their culture, the problems faced, and what they had been doing to address these problems.

The villagers had a lot of explanations and stories about their customs and habits which inspired the facilitator. Pan was well informed about Dong culture and was aware of how integral the rice-duck-fish system was; what was significant was that through his chats with villagers, he was able to integrate agriculture with culture.

For example, in those days, the Liufang Organic Agriculture Association would commend farmers who had done well in ecological agriculture, especially families who sold the most rice. Many villagers were not happy with this idea of "selling the most"; they believed they should only sell at the market if there was an abundance of the organic rice; otherwise, they should keep it for their own use. The programme team talked with the Chairperson of the Association. The following year, they changed, commending villagers who made outstanding contributions, such as in cultivating or breeding ducks, or growing traditional varieties of crops, or rice, especially glutinous rice.

In the third year, villagers realised that organic farming needed a lot of organic fertilisers like cow manure, but many villagers were already using machinery and there were only a few cows left. Keeping cows can have advantages, but there must be enough grass for feeding. Villagers who had cows usually kept their land very neat and tidy and the cows were dear to them. There were also cultural reasons. Dong people had two totems in the past: snakes and cows. In recent years, some villagers sold their cows because they did not want the elderly people in their families to keep cows anymore, but the old people often purchased them again and brought them home. On the one hand, they were attached to their cows; on the other, they did not know what else to do with their time other than keeping cows. One year, villagers who kept cows were commended by the Association. They received a bamboo hat and a scythe as a prize, with some elderly people crying with emotion when they went on stage. They said that their own children did not agree with what they did, but the Association did!

Through this, we acknowledged that the element of affection was an important factor in community work and must not be ignored!

APPROACH 2

Regional layout – the building of the 'cultural circle'

Dong people have an old saying, 'Ancient trees guard the village, elders run it.' With the participation of village elders, concrete changes could be implemented in Dong communities. When we discussed with the elders, they said, "You could do organic farming in one village, but culture is a circle and you should not limit yourself to only one village. Production can be done independently, but not culture."

For example, it had been discovered that not long ago, there was a lot of intermarriage among people in Waisandong. In this region, weddings and funerals were becoming more lavish and people were giving more expensive gifts. Changing the custom of gift-giving in only one village was not enough. The programme therefore expanded its coverage to Yicaoshui and invited the village elders there to work together. After sitting down to have discussions, they issued a Dong regulation stating that expenditure on banquets and gifts must be reduced, and all the food consumed in banquets must be produced locally.

We asked the elders what element they thought was most important in weddings and funerals. "Don't compete, don't compare, don't waste. We should be proud of our own local produce."

We also asked the elders whether if they saw these as important values, they could also play a role in other platforms? The programme team asked this question because we thought that if these values were seen as important in the community, then everyone might honour these principles and conduct everyday business accordingly. As facilitators, we could encourage them to reflect on whether these values could be shared more widely. Sometimes communities are not used to identifying values to be shared and discussed in other platforms. As facilitators from the outside, this is something we can do.

Thanks to 'traditional networks' such as that among village elders, the programme expanded. It was not a random development. Instead, it was an attempt to connect people again through the circle of culture so that they might work together and support each other.

Reflections and Insights

On organic certification

We had worked in Liufang Village for over 10 years – since 2005. Initially, PCD adopted a strategy to promote organic rice cultivation to tackle conflicts between community economic development and environmental protection. After 2010, the programme began to emphasise sustainability.

The success of the Liufang ecological agriculture programme taught us that economic and non-economic incentives were not in opposition. In 2005, the village started to experiment with organic rice in a small area, and by 2008, organic certification was received – surprisingly fast.

Everyone was happy, but soon the Association and the farmers started to wonder. They had spent so much money and energy in preparing all the documents for certification. "The inspector got here, walked around the paddy fields, plucked some heads of the rice and left! Was it because we had really done so well? Or, as long as you pay, you get the certificate? How important is the certificate anyway?"

Later, when the Association sold all the rice cultivated the previous year, not one customer asked to see the certificate. After that, the farmers were not very keen about being certified. "There's no need for certification, but we'll continue to do organic agriculture," said the Chairperson, firmly. "The consumers and the local groups we work with do not expect us to certify. We have become close with each other. Our overall income has increased since we've been practising organic agriculture. The traditional rice-duck-fish agriculture has been revived. Our food is more diverse now and tastes better. We do not get sick much anymore. The water and the air are clean. Neighbours are more united than before. This is enough. We do not expect to sell our rice at a very high price. That is not what we are after."

How do facilitators strike a balance between livelihood and culture?

The community can go further on the path of ecological agriculture if importance is attached to cultural needs. In the beginning, when facilitators

promote ecological agriculture in rural communities, they generally focus on agricultural technology and the market, and expect yields to be no less than before. As they struggle to increase farmers' productivity, they often introduce agricultural experts from elsewhere. To improve community livelihoods and to increase productivity and income, facilitators often make use of their connections and identify high-end markets for the farmers.

However, the development of market mechanisms for agricultural products does not necessarily function to serve the community. Agriculture and communities are diverse and complex. In communities where cultural heritage is relatively intact, agriculture, everyday life and traditional culture are closely linked. The intervention of the community facilitator, even if it is as little as the promotion of a certain type of seed, may change people's daily lives. On the other hand, everyday life and traditional culture are woven into a protective net that prevents the entry of newly introduced elements, or filters them, so that the community is not very easily changed by the outside world.

If the facilitator had only attached importance to the market in the Liufang programme, the initiative would not have been sustainable. Only because attention was paid to the local people's cultural needs was the community able to go further into ecological agriculture. The facilitator remembered that Dong people had once been forbidden to raise fish. Fishponds were considered to occupy land better used for rice cultivation. However, even after the ponds were removed, Dong continued to raise fish, and once the policy was abolished, they immediately started raising fish more earnestly.

Finally, coming back to organic agriculture, we have wondered why other villages only looked on when Liufang was doing organic agriculture. Why did young women who married into Liufang take up organic farming while young Liufang women who married into other villages stopped? It was a subject that the programme team and the villagers discussed a lot. Even though rice was a main staple crop for the Dong, why had we confined ourselves to rice and never looked at agriculture from a wider perspective? The Dong did not only cultivate rice, they were also engaged in forestry: according to some studies, Dong have a long history in this. It is only in modern land use management that forestry and agriculture have been divided into

separate practices. The Dong have never separated the two, especially in mountainous areas where forestry and agriculture are integrated.

Expanding the programme does not mean repeating what has been done. Even though other villages may not be interested in organic rice cultivation as practised in Liufang, they can start with maintaining or planting forests and protecting the environment: water resources, among other natural resources, depend on this.

Over ten years, the Liufang programme expanded its area of work and its geographical coverage in its effort to promote ecological agriculture and to practice sustainable living. The villagers attached a lot of importance to ecology in farming. They said, “After practicing ecological agriculture for so many years, there are now many freshwater fish. There are also many small shrimps and frogs.” The villagers have gratitude that biodiversity is returning to their community and environs.

The way the Dong see nature brings important insights for community facilitators. The saying in Dong culture “The waters and the mountains are the hosts and human beings are the guests” communicates their ecological outlook that as guests, people must respect the host. We cannot usurp the host’s position and do whatever we like. When you visit someone in their house and do whatever you like, you are being discourteous and uncivilised.

Deqin, Yunnan: Seeking the Multiple Functions of Agriculture

Li Ziyue and Maggie Tang

> *Do we promote cultural reflection or ecological agriculture? Which should be prioritised? If they are both related to the programme's theory of change, is it necessary to make a clear distinction between the two ? Are they not intertwined, like two sides of the same coin?*

Small stories, Big lessons

"It was only when the programme team summarised our experience that we realised we had lost our way for a while when walking in the deep valleys of Deqin. However, when we looked back at where we came from, after walking round and round a thousand times, we felt as though we were emerging from the fog. All of a sudden, everything became clear."

STORY 1
A beautiful misunderstanding

In Yangze Village of Foshan Township, a pilot site for the Deqin programme, the main objectives were to promote ecological agriculture to enhance the community's capacity for self-reliance.

The programme started with a field research exercise in the community. Teachers from the Yunnan Academy of Agriculture were invited to conduct training with farmers on the hazards of pesticides, and after about two years, most of the farmers had given up using chemical fertilisers and pesticides. From the viewpoint of programme assessment, the outcome was considered adequate; however, when things seem to have gone smoothly from the very beginning, we should not let ourselves be happy too soon. What was interesting was learning, two years later, about the farmers' real preference for corn:"We had looked at corn from an outsider's perspective. We provided lots of training, advising farmers in many ways, such as not planting too close together. In the end, we learned that they cultivated corn not for the kernels but for the stalks."

Only then did the programme team realise that the skills introduced for the farmers had been misdirected. The training had focused on harvesting kernels, yet it was stalks that the villagers preferred as a way to feed their livestock – the more stalks, the better. This was a wake-up call indeed. We realised that we knew next to nothing about the traditional, agro-pastoralist culture of the Tibetan people of the region.

The programme team then found out that in the past, the villagers had never used pesticides. It was only when outsiders were in town to promote pesticides that they tried them, out of curiosity. We were outsiders too, introducing a lot of training because we were so

eager to promote ecological agriculture. In the face of a perfect result in programme assessment – with the farmers practising ecological farming (or perhaps, they had always practised ecological farming) – what was our role as facilitators? What else could we do? Could it be that we had not really met the real local needs? What could the programme team do, faced with this roadblock?

STORY 2

A reflection on ecological grapes and pesticides – to kill or not to kill

The programme team found that the agricultural training did not meet the interests and needs of the Yangze community. In the meantime, we discovered that some villages at lower altitudes, in the arid regions of Deqin County, were cultivating grapes and needed support in acquiring skills for this. The team wanted to use ecological cultivation as an entry point to explore the challenges that the Tibetan communities were facing. The team also wanted to encourage reflection on sustainable living. However, we slowly discovered that employing ecological agricultural methods to assist villagers with technical issues of grape cultivation had both its pros and its cons.

Grapes were not a traditional crop. It was a new crop, introduced to meet market needs. The locals loved and hated it at the same time. As villagers converted more land for grapes and bought more and more food from outside the community, farming had been reduced to a means for cash: it had been separated from their everyday life. This contrasted their traditional relationship with the land, when farming felt like a deep bond.

In good times, such as bumper harvests or when grape prices were not kept down by large corporations, the farmers earned a bit of money, but they never had any control over the price. Moreover, they did not know how to prevent and treat plant diseases and became very dependent on experts and the promotion units from the local government. When they were told to use pesticides once a week, they did so, whether the grapes were infected or not. Over time, a pattern of overuse developed.

Being Tibetan Buddhists, the locals believe that all living creatures are equal and that no one should kill a living being. In the beginning, when pesticides were introduced for grape cultivation, they did not realise it would kill any creature. As villagers began to realise this during the training sessions, they began to think about how to limit their use.

"This was a process. We were working in a fog, trying to figure out villagers' farming practices, but we gradually began to see better. The villagers too were watching us in the fog. As they saw more of us, they got to know more about the problems of modern agriculture," a programme worker said.

We organised skills training for core farmers: villagers observed their plots and researched the plants that were traditionally used for composting and pest control.

Self-reliance challenged by grape cultivation

Over the two-year training and experiment phase, we felt that the villagers had not been able to gain much control over the techniques introduced. After all, grape cultivation was new and not indigenous, so the community lacked experience. They could not draw on their traditions to solve problems. The introduction of skills from outside the community had not only changed their relationship with their land, it had also affected their self-agency. No matter how well the grapes turned out, they did not feel that they owned the knowledge and the methods.

"Traditional knowledge connects people with land. When a landscape disappears, habitat is also lost, as well as the meaning that people had attached to that land – such knowledge is always intertwined with the cultural and religious system, providing it with powerful legitimacy," writes environment and agriculture scholar Jules Pretty[1]. In Deqin, the land used for grape cultivation had lost meaning: villagers had become separated from their culture, and their traditional knowledge and skills could not be accessed. All in all, modern agriculture everywhere has cut people's deep relationships with the land – who will safeguard the land now?

1 Jules Pretty. *Agri-Culture: Reconnecting People, Land and Nature.* Earthscan, London, UK, 2002.

Place, People, Culture, Issues

Place

❶ Sinongxidang Community, Yunling Township
❷ Foshan Township, agro-pastoralist community

People

Primarily Tibetan Buddhists

Culture

1. Sinongxidang Community under the sacred mountain

Kawagebo Peak is a sacred mountain of the Tibetan people in Yunnan. Sinongxidang Community lies at the base of Kawagebo, along the trail walked by pilgrims. The local people have lived here for generations and have a long history of culture linked to Kawagebo. They are proud of their strong traditions and culture and are also aware of the need to protect the mountain.

However, the development of tourism and market forces are changing their way of life. Their longstanding self-reliance has been replaced by the cultivation and marketing of grapes. Now they are dependent on the external market for their income and daily needs.

2. Foshan Township, a semi-agrarian, semi-nomadic community

Foshan is situated in the mountains where Tibetan people follow an agro-pastoralist way of life. Every summer, they graze their cattle in the mountains, meeting their daily needs through a strong bartering network they have developed with communities at lower altitudes.

There is a unique network formed by *jushi*, lay Buddhists in the village who abide by the precepts and practise their faith in daily life. *Jushi*, who know Tibetan and read the Buddhist scriptures, play an important role in education and traditional cultural heritage.

Issues

In Sinongxidang, previous crops had been replaced by cash crops (grapes). Farmers had become dependent on chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and pollution has resulted from using these products. Young people had left to work in the city, and workers from outside the community are being employed to work in the

vineyards. The social life of the community has become more complicated and volatile: Sinongxidang faces a lack of cohesion, and problems such as illicit poaching and logging, mostly undertaken by migrant workers colluding with local villagers. There is also a lot gambling which is threatening the solidarity of the community. While villagers earn more cash nowadays, they also have more debt. The community is also unsanitary, with garbage heaps strewn about, and food has become unsafe. The community spirit is weakening, with fewer occasions for traditional singing and dancing.

It is important to face these challenges, rebuild the community harmony and solidarity, pass on traditional culture, and protect the sacred mountain and all its precious species.

In Foshan township, with the support of the PCD programme, the *jushi* actively conducted community-based research on issues of everyday life in Foshan. Villagers have gradually become aware that the mode of market-dominated economy has had a negative impact on their health and on the ecology. This is clear in the case of Sinongxidang, where the overuse of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, the over-processed and over-packaged industrial food, and the increasing unsanitary conditions have all been identified as bad for one's health.

Influenced by the market, the villagers had given up using their local medicinal herbs, becoming over dependent on purchased medicine from elsewhere. They would go to clinics for injections and medicine, even for minor ailments. Ironically, in order to earn money, they had been recklessly pulling up wild plants and killing wild animals that had been used for medicinal purposes – some were endangered species. These actions sounded an alarm.

The more that people became dependent on the external market for their health and food, the more they lost their inner connection with the environment. The animals and plants in a habitat had become something distant, external, and something to be sold for profit. Through the community-based research and various everyday actions, the *jushi* and enthusiastic villagers have raised community awareness that human health and ecological health are actually two faces of the same coin; and in this, they have sought to rebuild the connection between humans and nature.

Exploration and Discovery: Programme Theories and Approaches

Coming out of the fog, a clearer picture on multiple functions of the agro-pastoralist way of life.

PCD has been promoting sustainable living in Deqin since 2005. Through numerous approaches, we have tried to find out what 'sustainable living' means to the local people. At the same time, we have also tried to gain inspiration from the traditional local culture to rebuild interactions and connections with nature. The programme has supported the community to explore themselves and to rediscover the links between life, culture and nature through learning about traditional culture, community-based research, forest conservation, and most significantly, ecological agriculture.

The original objective of the programme

PCD's programme in Deqin County started with supporting the revival of traditional culture. We believed that when the villagers had a clear idea of their own culture and what was important for their community, they would naturally think of ecological agriculture, the conservation of old crop varieties, and a sustainable local food supply – this is what we see as being important for any rural community.

With this in mind, we launched programmes on traditional culture and cultural reflection almost simultaneously in Yangze, Sinongxidang and Foshan. The three communities wanted to experiment with ecological agriculture, but since grapes were an introduced cash crop and not a crop that met the programme's goal of self-reliance, we proposed cultivating staple crops in the higher and colder mountainous areas of Yangze and Foshan. The earlier story about corn stalks came from this initiative.

Given the fact that the area of land used for cultivating grapes kept expanding, and their cultivation ran counter to the Buddhist precept of "refraining from destroying life", we decided to launch pilot programmes on ecological grape cultivation in Sinongxidang and Foshan. Consequently, the community started to reflect on the multiple meanings of their agro-pastoralist way of life.

Technology to be linked with local culture

When the villagers began to explore ecological agriculture, experts and trainers on skills and technology were brought in from outside. However, the 'professionals' did not necessarily have knowledge of the local culture nor the insight to completely understand what the villagers were communicating, and the technology was not grounded in the community either. It was crucial for the programme team to help the villagers and experts understand each other on every aspect of the initiative; therefore, the most important challenge for the programme was to develop new skills grounded in local knowledge and culture. There were many key points in the process, including the choice of crop varieties, knowledge about the connection between farming and other productive activities, identifying the actors, the interactions among actors, and the role of facilitators. All this had to be considered from multiple perspectives, otherwise the programme path would become too narrow, too limiting, and might even lead to a dead end.

After the villagers had started to reflect on their production and everyday life, an initiative was launched as a way to practice ecological agriculture *and* the Buddhist precept of not destroying life. However, it was realised that experts and technicians from the outside might not fully understand this. Their skills and the training they provided might not be an appropriate response to the villagers' expectations. If, however, the technology increased the yield but violated the precept, the villagers (and even the programme team) would be faced with a dilemma. Should we continue to explore the Buddhist precept or should we make concessions in order to increase the yield? This was another challenge.

Discovering a problem is the beginning of finding a way out

The programme used production technology as an entry point. However, if any eco-agriculture skills were to take root locally, the cultivation of ecological grapes had to be integrated with the local culture and the everyday life of the community.

The Buddhist precept of refraining from destroying life aroused the community's interest in learning new skills – they wanted to prevent the use of pesticides in grape cultivation. However, for the programme team, the connection between grape cultivation and everyday life of the community had to be found. Grape

cultivation requires a lot of field management skills and intensive work almost year-round – this conflicted with the traditional Tibetan agro-pastoralist and somewhat laid-back way of life that flowed along with the seasons. When the community began cultivating grapes, the villagers lived a much busier life – come tourist season, for instance, or harvest time for caterpillar fungus and Matsutake mushrooms, a traditional occupation, the villagers would already have their hands full working on the grapes.

The programme team was faced with a dilemma. The programme had responded to the villagers' need to learn eco-agriculture skills to cultivate grapes. If the farmers succeeded, would they cultivate more grapes and become monocrop producers and dependent on a larger external market? This would run counter to the original objectives of self-reliance.

The team reflected on this problem while organising eco-agriculture training activities, and also talking with villagers about their vision of integrating farming with everyday life. The team then initiated community-based research in the form of village "health walks" and other activities; through this, the villagers realised that since they had reduced cultivation of staple crops, they had been purchasing larger amounts of food from outside the community. Although consumption of this packaged food and use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides had led to problems with garbage and sanitation, they thought that it was impossible to return to their previous lifestyle. They felt they could not stop growing grapes: they needed the cash.

The villagers then thought of cultivating both staple crops and grapes. Whether fed to humans or livestock, crops could – and should – at least reduce their need to buy human food and animal feed.

The villagers were interested in studying intercropping because it maximised land use. Intercropping would of course reduce the output of the vineyards, so some concerned parties discouraged it -- they were also afraid that the quality of the grapes would be affected. However, many villagers were willing to harvest fewer grapes in order to meet their food needs.

At this stage, the programme team thought about organising the community to monitor their use of pesticides. In the beginning, there were 13 core villagers, and gradually more villagers got involved. The number of intercrops that villagers experimented with had also

increased, from corn to include wheat, vegetables, legumes and old crop varieties. Gradually, the villagers mastered the principles behind the technology and had their own ideas, which became their own experience. Through village-to-village exchanges, more communities became involved.

From agriculture to ecosystem

Since the cultivation of grapes as a cash crop seemed to be unavoidable, the programme team chose to start the discussion on ecological agriculture around the subject of intercropping. However, ecological agriculture relies on a systemic view, enabling people to build a knowledge of the ecosystem and to see connections between all things, including between humans and everyday life. In ecological agriculture, farmers align skills, crop varieties, and layout with nature. If we were only concerned with grapes, we would end up being concerned only about technology and a few varieties of crops, and only villagers who were concerned about grape cultivation would take part.

THE SIX SISTERS

The villagers use the phrase 'the six sisters' to describe the eco-system. For them, nature is like one big family made up of sunshine, air, soil, water, plants and all living things (including humans). Interestingly, after the discussion about the six sisters in the family, villagers started to raise frogs. Because of the use of pesticides, frogs had disappeared from the ditches and the fields. The programme team did not understand why villagers raised frogs when they were talking about ecological agriculture, but that was how the farmers saw it: ecological agriculture could not be separated from frogs, as animals are one of the sisters in the family. This was perhaps something to remind us to do: look at the connections among things on a larger ecological scale.

The six sisters opened up a dimension of space; gradually, villagers began to explore different layouts for farming. One farmer drew a landscape with the sacred mountain, forest, pastures, a water source, farmland and village – a semi-agricultural, semi-nomadic model, villagers said.

SHARING NEW PERSPECTIVE 1

Whoever comes is the right person

Whether we could explore ecological agriculture and understand the meaning of their way of life from a wider perspective was actually dependent on the people with whom the programme team came into contact. From the beginning, the programme involved mostly the more public and vocal villagers, who were men. Later, we found out that it was the women who were the farmers. In the Tibetan area, it is women of different ages, including elderly mothers and young daughters-in-law who made agricultural decisions. The men's job, particularly for older men was grazing cattle.

We initiated exchanges with different groups of people with different viewpoints about the ecological layout of the agro-pastoralist community. There were women, elderly people, farmers, and men who knew about the traditional culture but were not farmers. Their viewpoints embodied their experience, which was what we wanted to find out. We talked with farmers about grazing cattle and talked with shepherds about farming. We talked with women about culture and talked with elderly people about farming.

Once, on a bright sunny day, the programme team talked with village women, the village doctor, *jushi*, and elderly people who grazed cattle by a lake. The men explained their views of traditional culture. Even though the women did not say much on this subject, they told the men, "Will you continue grazing your cattle? When we work down there in the fields, we are happy to see cows strolling by when we look up."

The women said their way of life felt "complete" only with both agriculture and cattle. What they expressed was rooted in everyday life. The scenery, the grass and trees, the cows and lambs on the land, and birds in the sky. All of these are a part of people's memory and being, creating a close bond between them and place. Because of this intimate and holistic relationship with place, they have become more motivated to protect it.

The women became more involved in learning and experimenting with ecological agriculture, and gained confidence in their new skills. Other villages invited the women to come and share their skills, which they were glad to do. These exchanges took place in the village, with participants visiting the farm plots in the day and dancing in the evening. We simply followed the course of everyday life so that more people could

join in, and soon enough, with good relationships among communities, villagers began to conduct their own learning sessions on ecological agriculture. The women practising ecological agriculture also started their own online groups on Chinese instant messaging app WeChat, pushing the boundaries of the programme. When the programme team came across any expert or learning opportunities, they would pass the message to the villagers through WeChat. Some elderly people who did not have a mobile phone told their daughters to join for them.

SHARING NEW PERSPECTIVE 2
Looking at ecology from the dimension of time

In the villagers' memory, the change in production along the arid river valley did not start with grapes. It was mining. Because mining needed animals to transport heavy loads, villagers began to breed horses, and then, because herd composition was changing, it had become more difficult to farm. Even after the mining stopped, the ratio of agriculture to pastoralism could not be balanced again. Later, a new cactus was introduced, which brought pests that affected the local cactus variety. Then it was grapes, but the price fluctuated too much. Next, they started growing medicinal plants. Faced with these many waves of changes and challenges, often imposed from outside the community, villagers had been thinking and questioning their own experience and wondering how to go forward.

After all, ecological agriculture is about choosing a way of life. In the change from an agro-pastoralist way of life to the mono-cultivation of grapes, what values have been lost? Can this be prevented and how? Are they gone forever? Grape cultivation is a deviation from the traditional way of life: how do we look at it from the viewpoint of traditional farming that espouses multiple values?

We, the outsiders, and the villagers must explore together how the community can embody and practise these principles. We must not only consider things from the perspective of technology, and we must not contemplate solutions by restricting ourselves to a specific group of people or to a specific issue. The dimension of space means more than looking at the farmland in front of us, but also paying attention to the space, landscape, and layout – we must broaden our imagination. The dimension of time allows a better understanding: how did people respond to the changes and how do they

reflect on them? What values do they safeguard in the process, and what had they given up? Asking these questions will help us understand the nature of the current challenges. As outside facilitators, we can only help provide communities with different perspectives and information so that they can reflect on their decisions and see that some results may be irreversible.

Reflections and Insights

The Deqin programme lasted for 10 years, with many changes in direction and methods. Through working and learning with the villagers, some ideas that was once abstract have begun to gain substance, such as our understanding of the systems view. We also gained insight into our approaches to facilitation.

The process of clarifying the perspective of the community

The programme sought to expand our understanding of the multiple values of farming through a cultural perspective. In the beginning, external facilitators (including the programme team and experts) were clear about what they wanted to advocate, but the villagers were either not very clear about what they would like to do or did not have a consensus among themselves. What was important was not to attach too much importance to 'visible' output, such as the total production output or the volume of chemical fertiliser and pesticides reduced.

Instead, attention was paid to whether the viewpoints in the community were becoming clearer.

When the villagers became clear about what they thought (their inner perspective) and asked the facilitators how they could farm while practising Buddhist precepts, what was the response of the outsiders and how did they continue to work with the villagers? This was important. The so-called inner perspective is a continuous process and there is no final answer. The inner perspective and mainstream development were often in conflict. When the villagers developed a clearer inner perspective as the programme proceeded, the outsiders who worked with them were faced with a big challenge. Of course, it was also more interesting and more inspiring. Together, the programme team and the community had to start thinking from a broader perspective on how to address the problems facing Deqing.

Developing a holistic worldview on ecological agriculture and culture

Regarding the relationship between the concepts of ecological agriculture, traditional culture and rebuilding the connection between humans and nature, the programme team was puzzled, as these comments reveal: “When we were doing ecological agriculture, we were trapped in skills and technology”; “We were unsure whether we had done the right thing or the wrong thing by introducing ecological agriculture into cultural reflection”; “In a culture-driven programme, one deals with abstract and conceptual issues. We had to strike a balance between the abstract theories and realistic, practical issues by reinserting theories into everyday life.”

“Do we promote cultural reflection or ecological agriculture? Which should be prioritised? If they are both related to the programme’s theory of change, is it necessary to make a clear distinction between the two? Are they not intertwined, like two sides of the same coin?” After all, we should look at life from a holistic point of view. After years of exploration, we have come to the following conclusion: When we introduce ecological agriculture into a community programme, if we adopt an outsider’s way of thinking and are concerned mainly with skills and technology needed for the production of one crop, the programme’s path will be narrow. We must not make assumptions, but seek inner experience while adopting a broad and holistic systemic perspective – then we may be able to see the multiple

values of farming in traditional culture, question our choices in everyday life, and develop more alternatives to move forward, together. Thanks to open dialogue with villagers over the years, we have gained more understanding about the ecological outlook of Tibetan Buddhist villagers, the meaning of their agro-pastoralist life, and human relationships in the community. This has opened an important door for the programme.

Xishuangbanna, Yunnan: The "Action" and "Non-action" of Community Facilitators

Shen Dingfang and Maggie Tang

> *In this story, the community was always the leading character. The community facilitator, on the other hand, was a bit like the clown in a drama. The identity as an 'outsider' or 'spectator' allowed this person to introduce a new perspective into the community, making cultural dialogue and innovations possible. The main character might make a different choice because of what the clown says, but the clown never acts in the place of the main character.*

Small stories, Big lessons

"Community facilitator"— an awkward identity

When one goes into a community as a community facilitator, one always feels some inner conflict. On the one hand, the facilitator carries his/her own values and/or that of any organisation, and wants to foster community change in a certain direction through introducing something from the outside. On the other hand, the facilitator knows that development organisations and facilitators are in essence an outside force, coming into contact with the community in the name of 'community work'. "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man," said the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, and both the community and the facilitator will change because of the contact and exchange. However, will the change bring more good than harm? As the community facilitator promotes values strongly believed in, how is the community protected from becoming dependent on the outside force?

This story is about a Bulang community in the village of Zhanglang in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. It is a story about how one community facilitator struck a balance between action and non-action.

STORY 1

Community based research— the meaning of *dana*

There are four inter-related aspects in a community's culture: history and traditions, community organisation, natural resource management, and production systems. As a form of production, ecological agriculture should be understood in this four-part context and within the overall layout of the community.

With this understanding, we encouraged members of the community to unearth the core of their own culture through community-based research undertaken between 2008 and 2010. The youth group, for instance, studied its organisation, management and functions, mostly revolving around traditional song, dance, and rituals. Eventually, many villagers joined in studying the origins of the village, the introduction of Buddhism into the community, traditional legends and customs, and more.

The community was the subject of its own reflection and action, and the community response was often unexpected. In 2013, we went on a study trip to Laos and Thailand with some of the community members. There, we visited a Karen community that was both self-reliant and doing very well in terms of self-organising and collectively managing village public affairs. We could see that it had not been affected much by modernisation, which we thought could offer a lot of learnings. We had planned to stay there for two days, but the Zhanglang villagers asked if we could leave after just one. They told us that in the 1980s, Zhanglang was like the Karen community. For them, there was no need to go all the way to Thailand to learn about this way of life. They could just remember the '80s.

However, the exchange did bring some changes for Zhanglang. The villagers noticed that communities in Laos and Thailand put a lot of effort into passing on their traditional culture to younger generations. The Bulang community in Zhanglang had been thinking about how to advocate the continuation of practising *dana*, a Buddhist virtue of generosity, charity and giving. Almost everyone had thought that *dana* meant offering money, labour and material resources, but they found that in Laos and Thailand, *dana* also meant offering one's knowledge so others can benefit from it. The Bulang sought to practise the essence of *dana* through such acts as protecting the forest and volunteer work.

In 2015, when the community-based research was still going on, someone from Manbie Village suggested conducting research on how much money was spent on *dana*. It was learned that villagers had spent 140,000 yuan, with over 130,000 on cigarettes, sweets, transportation and lodging, and only 9,000 donated to the temple in Manbie. In other words, people spent a lot on consumption and only a little on *dana*. The villagers found that ever since *dana* was linked with consumption, the spiritual activity had turned into an opportunity for eating and drinking.

As the community began to reflect on the meaning of *dana*, they organised the *ajahn* exchange (Please refer to the article "Regional Framework Approach: Cross-regional Exchange and Mutual Encouragement among Community Organisations" on p.242). *Ajahn*, a term that translates as 'teachers', are learned elderly Buddhist men who had reached the rank of *abbot* or above while they served in the monastery. They now serve their villages and are usually married, with children. The *ajahn* exchange was attended by participants from over

20 communities, and rules were set down to ensure that people were truly making offerings and not consuming. The following year, Manbie spent 110,000 yuan less on the celebration associated with the practice of *dana.*

Our facilitation also helped the community to broaden their concept of the spirit of *dana* to the relationship between humans and nature. In Zhanglang, there were three elderly villagers who for the past seven or eight years had often planted trees and trimmed branches in the forest nearby. *Ajahn* commended these community contributions, giving the elderly villagers clothing and shoes as symbols of approval. Now the number of elderly people who volunteer to protect the forest have increased to more than ten.

STORY 2

From quantitative change to qualitative change

In relation to ecological agriculture, there were two major events. In 2011, the local young people returned from an exchange programme and shared their ideas about protecting the forest with the villagers. The *ajahn*, elderly people, and village cadres all agreed that the forest should not be destroyed for economic development, and thus arranged to cut down the tea trees that had been grown by a dozen families in the forest reserve. For them, the forest was a god that protected the village, and gods and spirits lived in the forest too. They felt that the more the forest remained uncultivated, the better, and the bigger the trees, the better. They realised that growing tea trees there was destroying the whole ecology, but an increasing number of people had been doing so, even cutting down the forest to earn money for the timber. If this did not stop, the community would risk losing its traditions.

Then, in 2014, Zhanglang set down a new rule: tea plantations could no longer use pesticides and fertilisers. There were over 3,000 *mu* of tea trees and the change took effect immediately. When two families continued to use pesticides after the rule had been established, the youth group visited their plantations and cut down all their trees. Everyone was shocked and no one dared to use pesticides anymore.

There were also changes in Manbie. In 2015, the villagers visited Bulang Xiding village for an exchange. They found that villagers there were raising chickens in their tea plantations. In 2016, they visited another village, Manmai, where 80 households also raised

chickens among the tea trees. Soon Manbie Village was growing tea: in 2018, over 1,500 *mu* of tea was cultivated without using chemical pesticides or fertilisers – both banned in the village.

The changes were so fast. How did it happen? We noticed that even though the government and tea company owners had put forth the idea of organically grown tea, villagers had not taken it up. Since the government promotion was not communicated clearly, in black and white, it was difficult to encourage villagers to do it, while the tea company owners did not visit every village. Some communities did it when they had the resources and stopped when they did not.

The changes in the communities seemed to have a subtle link with the programme. By building and strengthening community groups, communities acquired the tools and the habits to take part in public affairs. At the same time, they did what they wanted to do. In this way, the community's sense of self-agency was realised.

Through community-based research, villagers gained more knowledge of their own culture. For example, they realised that they had been protecting their forest, and they now knew the spiritual meaning of *dana*. That was why they began to monitor aspects of their everyday life, such as the use of pesticides and fertilisers.

Through the *ajahn* exchange platform, Bulang communities could exchange ideas. The facilitators said, "When you work only with one village, you feel so helpless sometimes. But when you are able to build an atmosphere and there are many opportunities for exchange within a system, it is easier for things to take a leap from a quantitative change to a qualitative one." For example, when the villagers found out that the other Bulang communities were practising ecological agriculture, they visited these communities and learned about the problems brought about by chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

Place, People, Culture, Issues

Place

Since 2008, the programme area has covered four villages in Xishuangbanna: two natural villages of Akha communities (Xinzhai Erzu and Ximan Village) and two of Bulang communities (Manpi and Zhanglang).

People

Akha and Bulang

Culture

In the mountains inhabited by ethnic minority peoples in Xishuangbanna, farming skills, philosophy, and cultural traditions are closely linked. Swidden cultivation (also known as slash-and-burn) was the traditional way of farming here: land could be cultivated again after being left fallow for 11 to 12 years. This mode of cultivation was the way in which the community used the natural resources, and a rich culture was developed in relation to it. Examples include the connection between slash-and-burn and *li* (behavioural norms) among the Bulang people in Menghai, and the festival of the Akha people. Shifting cultivation, a self-reliant way of farming, needed very little of any inputs from outside the area.

In some research, however, shifting cultivation is synonymous with backwardness. Influenced by this way of thinking, many people have turned away from the practice, switching to high input and high output modes of farming. Farmers in Xishuangbanna gradually started to cultivate new crop varieties, often using chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Later, with the introduction of cash crops, they were forced to give up their traditional way of farming altogether.

Issues

Because of government policies, mainstream culture, and modern agricultural technology, many aspects of life have been changing for the ethnic minority peoples of Xishuangbanna. The cultural traditions of the Bulang and Akha are in danger of extinction. These changes have already led to a decline in productive activities of farmers in some areas and severe soil erosion in others. Food security has been threatened.

Exploration and Discovery: Programme Theories and Approaches

Following the rhythm of the community—discovering links between agriculture and culture

Apart from sustainable living, ecological agriculture is one of the foci of the programme, but there have been notable changes in our approaches in promoting it over the last few years.

Between 2008 and 2010, our approach in Ximan Village was 'typical': farming technology was introduced with the intention of developing skills by drawing on local knowledge, which meant improving methods that villagers used and encouraging them to mix and match. The farmers who were willing to experiment with ecological agriculture were identified, and it was expected that they would then stand as examples for other villagers.

After two years, we found that the effect of the activities was too limited and not aligned with promoting self-reliance. The programme failed to attract more farmers and we were unable to find any entry point to bridge the gap between farmers, and between the programme and the community. The facilitator concluded, "To tackle the problems, the villagers must have the motivation. We have to start with increasing the villagers' confidence in being able to meet their own daily needs (both in terms of materials and beliefs). Ecological agriculture can be integrated into this approach, and enhancing technology is the basis for the development of ecological agriculture."

With this reflection, the programme began to follow the pace and interests of the community, even when what the community wanted seemed to have nothing to do with ecological agriculture. For example, when a villager in Zhanglang returned from Thailand where he had been working, he was very sad about the changes that had happened in the village and wanted to do something. He became the local facilitator and teamed up with other villagers and launched activities, mostly about increasing Bulang people's pride in their culture – not directly related to ecological farming.

The programme facilitator felt uneasy that the activities were not about agriculture, but did not immediately

voice this, instead waiting and gradually finding a clear approach. Eventually, the facilitator reflected, "Ecological agriculture can only be promoted as part and parcel of the community's core culture. The process should not be dominated by outsiders (including technicians). It should only be done with the community's consent. Ecological agriculture must be seen as part of community culture and cannot be separated from it."

METHOD OF FACILITATION 1
Promoting action by and participation of traditional community organisations in public issues

We had done a lot in the community, first in building up community organisations.

The community organisations of Zhanglang village were quite well-established. There were an elderly people's group, a middle-aged people's group, and a youth group. It was quite easy to mobilise the youth group and they would implement any plan readily.

However, this approach had its limitations. The youth group usually took part only in one-off events. The activity to learn the culture of the community was seen as rather personal and many members did not join. The 'classroom' approach failed to foster reflection on the community's culture.

Moreover, when the programme team tried to mobilise youth for activities that the programme was concerned with, such as pilot programmes on ecological agriculture, reflection on changes among young people, and affirming the community's core culture, things did not go smoothly. There seemed to be a lot of difficulties.

Because of this, we changed our approach. Youth were encouraged to form groups to conduct activities of interest, which we facilitated. The purpose was to enhance their capacity in carrying out activities and to ensure that the activities had an impact at the community level. The youth group formed interest groups and conducted research on customs, singing, dancing and martial arts, sharing their findings with the group. In this way, membership stabilised and the role of the group gradually became clearer.

To conclude, our focus was on helping community organisations become used to getting involved with public issues and stabilising the participation of the core members. To do this, we were not eager to link

the activities with the programme objectives, at least not immediately. The activities were designed mostly around the interests of the members of the organisations and were launched with the consent of the community.

METHOD OF FACILITATION 2
Community-based research as an entry point to community reflection and action

What we mean by community-based research is the process by which members of a community find out, study, reflect and gain new knowledge on issues related to their lives or to the community with or without the facilitation of outsiders. The participants may take collective action based on the outcome of the research and gradually gain cultural self-awareness. Community-based research differs from research conducted by outsiders in that the emphasis is not on the output (and any publication of the results) but on the subsequent sharing, discussion, reflection and action of the community.

By engaging interviewers and the community, both emotionally and intellectually, community-based research helps people gain new knowledge about themselves and local culture.

Emotional level:

The process of community-based research nurtures community members to identify with their culture and gradually become more confident and have more self-esteem. It also enhances unity and social cohesion, helps resolve conflicts within the community, increases everyday communication, and encourages members to act as a community.

Intellectual level:

Community-based research helps community members gain knowledge. For example, people learn about traditional knowledge and skills, such as handicrafts and historical stories. They also learn about community-wide problems. If a community is faced with a concrete problem they do not know how to tackle, community research can be used to find solutions.

Community-based research can help facilitators from the outside to gain a better understanding of the community too.

Since both emotional and intellectual factors are involved, the process of the research and its outcomes can also be seen as a preparation for more communication and exchange. As community members gain

confidence and knowledge about their own culture, they will gradually grow and become more willing to connect with others.

METHOD OF FACILITATION 3
Promoting cross-community exchange platforms

Since 2013, we have been organising platforms for cross-community exchange – before that, exchanges were usually on a one-to-one basis. In the region inhabited by the Bulang, we initiated something different – the *ajahn* exchange. In the first exchange, Zhanglang invited nearby villagers to come and discuss their origins, roles, duties, and characteristics and relationships between Bulang villages.

In the second, held in Manbie, participants discussed actions of the villages since the last meetings. They also talked about the history of their villages, the origins of their Buddhist temples, and traditional festivals, and they held a storytelling session, with the stories drawn from Buddhist scriptures or from folklore. The emphasis was on learning.

The cross-community exchange provided support to both the host village and participating villages. The activity created an atmosphere of learning about one's own culture and provided a platform for participants to share. Taken altogether, cross-community exchange served three purposes. First, the exchange helped *ajahn* understand their roles better and to be more prepared to be a force to bring about change in the community. Second, many participants realised that they knew very little about their own culture and became determined to learn more. Third, they found that there were few storytelling platforms anymore, and the young nowadays seldom listened to stories – this became a priority to change.

Through the exchanges, many participants came to feel strongly that the survival of their culture was at stake. They felt the need to conserve their traditional culture and undertook practical actions. For example, inspired by the first exchange, one *ajahn* from Manbie became very firm about protecting Bulang traditions. When he returned to his home village, he engaged his community in repairing the temples, organised young people to build new *Sala* (a pavilion usually donated by villagers as a way to practice *dana*) and to learn traditional rituals and martial arts, among other actions. When the second exchange was coming to an end, a young *ajahn* in Zhanglang invited Manbie monks to come and teach villagers about traditions.

A few reminders about cross-community exchange platforms

1. There should be some difference between the communities in the platform

Every community does well in some, but not all aspects. This constitutes difference. Exchange will be more meaningful with this difference, because communities can learn from each other, instead of learning only from one village. Everyone in the exchange will be more enthusiastic because of this.

2. Training local facilitators

The programme team believes that in general, local facilitators can accurately sense the pace of the community, and participating villages are encouraged to discuss ways of reporting and to choose the next host community. Depending on specific needs, the host community usually decides which communities to invite; this can also prevent outsiders dominating.

3. The role of external facilitators

Putting trust in local community facilitators does not mean facilitators from the outside have no roles. Sometimes facilitators from the outside enjoy certain advantages because of their identity. Both the first and second exchanges were co-chaired by the programme worker and the local community facilitator because there had been little official exchange among the main central temples[1] for a long time, and there were participants who did not belong to any temple, such as village cadres and some community leaders. In the first exchange, the programme worker had a substantial role in facilitating the meeting. In the second, a novice facilitator was supported by a veteran and the programme worker played a more minor role. Most of the time, the two exchanges were facilitated by local facilitators in the Bulang language.

Any facilitator – from within the community or from elsewhere – must be sensitive to the life of the community and raise issues for reflection when the timing is right.

The main role of the external facilitator is to be a catalyst.

1 There were central temples in two villages in Xiding Township, Menghai County, as well as central temples on Bulang Mountain, but it was unclear how many there were in total. Each central temple governed the temples in a number of villages. Zhanglang Village, where the first exchange took place, had had a central temple. Manbei Village, the site of the second exchange, was in the jurisdiction of Manma Central Temple.

4. Innovative responses can be developed on the basis of traditions

In Bulang areas, there used to be a traditional network consisting of temples[2], but the links between these temples had already broken. Because of this, we contacted a retired government official who had a wide network to mobilise participants for the first exchange. We succeeded in inviting Manbie, a village which did not come under the jurisdiction of Zhanglang, to join. They even became the hosts for the second exchange. In the inviting of other villages, traditional (sending wax-sealed letters) and modern means (the administrative institutions of the township) were used to ensure that the exchange was approved by all villages. All of this served to increase the influence and the legitimacy of the exchanges.

The exchanges reactivated the traditional temple network, which again played the role of disseminating information about major events in the community. However, participants wanted to expand the geographical reach and not to be constrained by the traditional network. Now there are two networks, each functioning on its own and playing its own unique role.

The *ajahn* exchange differs from the traditional network in the way it selects its participants. Even though it has *ajahn* in its name, participation is not exclusive – in addition to *ajahn*, there are also village cadres, *bakao* who traditionally manage temples, members of youth groups, and others. This composition is conducive to the transmission of traditional culture and the mobilisation of different sectors of the community.

2 This was a folk network of temples . A true Bulang village in the traditional sense has its own temple, and there is a hierarchical relationship between the temples of different villages. The most senior temple is called the central temple and each governs a few junior temples. Traditionally, if a junior temple wants to conduct any activity that is related to Buddhist beliefs in the community, the central temple must be notified and related ceremonies conducted before the activity can take place. Apart from this, there are many mutual help activities among communities, such as fundraising to build temples and visits during festivals.

Reflections and Insights

The initial contact with the community—who is changing whom?

Because of an incident shortly after the programme began in 2008, the programme team started to reflect on their relationship with the community.

"The Bulang community attached importance to the practice of *li*, norms of behaviour," the facilitator said. "There were a lot of rules in some types of *li*. To some extent, I often found these *li* 'tedious', but the community put in a lot of money and effort just to maintain the integrity of *li*. It is the various types of *li* that keep the community life harmonious and orderly. Isn't this the model of sustainable living of the Bulang people? There is no need to introduce concepts from the outside. Let's promote their *li*."

The facilitator also noticed that an outsider could easily misunderstand a community. Once when villagers were sharing results of a community-based research activity on mutual help in the village, they talked about how to do *li*, who did what, how things were brought to one family, and what the other family did, and such. The participants were sharing their experiences enthusiastically, but they did not seem to be saying anything about mutual help. At the time, our partner also felt the same.

As the facilitator came to know the people better, it became clear that the community had their own way of expression. Villagers were indeed talking about mutual help when they were sharing, but a facilitator from the outside who did not know this way of expression might think that nothing was being said about the topic. This incident led to a significant change in thinking about the role of a facilitator – from "facilitating the community" to "learning from the community".

It seemed that it was the programme facilitator who was changed.

A long and winding road

After eight years of working with the community, much had been achieved through the programme but a lot still needed to be done. In terms of ecological agriculture, we found that villagers' understanding was

still not deep enough; most community members still viewed culture and livelihood as two separate things. The programme facilitator said, "We found that the villagers attached a lot of importance to their religious beliefs and placed a lot of emphasis on the economy too, but they could not link the two together. When we learned that they used a lot of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, we wanted to discuss this from a religious viewpoint, but they said economy was economy and belief was belief, and one did not talk about them in the same breath. When we talked about economic issues, we wanted to bring in some themes from their beliefs, but they said that their beliefs should be separated from economic activities. Economics should not encroach on their beliefs."

This situation is not uncommon: traditions and modernisation often clash. In the past, traditional culture was an integrated whole, providing direction on almost every aspect of one's life. As a society "modernises", commercial and administrative concepts and principles gradually enter into people's way of thinking, talking and behaving, and lives are fragmented into different parts and dominated by different values and principles. As the importance of one value grows at the expense of another, the influence of traditional culture shrinks. Often, it is only the festivals and ceremonies that are left in the sphere of traditional culture.

What we have to do is to work with the community to analyse the challenges they are facing and reflect on the values that have been safeguarded over the generations in the hope that they will provide insights to those in search of the future. This is the original meaning of cultural reflection in our community programme. The platforms that have been built in the last few years can help us promote cultural reflection effectively.

Back to square one: how to strike a balance between action and non-action

The story of Xishuangbanna is a story about how a community facilitator struck a balance between action and non-action.

By non-action, we mean creating the conditions for things to happen. Building community organisations creates the vehicle for the community to act on public issues and to become used to taking action. Community-based research serves to build the community's cultural self-esteem and to enable community members to become more aware of the core values of their

culture; this in turn provides important guidance when they reflect on how to respond to challenges. Cross-community exchange helps build an atmosphere of support and provides opportunities for communities to learn from each other and take action.

In this story, the community is always the leading character. How the story continues depends on the unique qualities of that character. This is to say that action and non-action have to be understood in the context of a community's potential. Each person may have a different understanding of what constitutes potential. For example, looking at it from the perspective of economic development, some people may count the number of businessmen and university graduates. However, when we first visited Zhanglang, what we noticed was people's respect for nature, that people got along well with each other, and that there were very few conflicts. We saw that Bulang villages were generally self-reliant in terms of material needs, and that their traditional community groups were still in place. What was important was that the communities cared about the sustainability of these traditional institutions; they did not think they were valuable because a cultural expert from outside said so.

If facilitators can look at a community from these perspectives, they should be able to strike a good balance between action and non-action.

Baiyi and Wayao, Guizhou: A Reflection on Participatory Technology Development as an Entry Point to Ecological Agriculture

Zhan Yuping and Freda Ng

> *We do not apply pesticides. If the grasshoppers want to eat the crops, let them. There is not only forest in a good ecology. There is also grass, and all sorts of plants and animals. They are all part of the ecology. Grass is part of the ecology, as are weeds.*

Small stories, Big lessons

STORY 1

The best food is made from *Lulanzi*[1]

In Wayao, very few people grow new crop varieties. I also think it's important to grow the older varieties; I want to continue this. Actually, there's a sentimental reason: the old varieties are very dear to me. That's why I keep growing them.

Take soybeans, for example. In Wayao, we cultivate three varieties: *ximidou* (small 'rice' soybeans), *baishuidou* (white water soybeans) and *lulanzi* (green and blue). The colour and taste are very different. For *Huoyanhui*, a flame ceremony held during the New Year to ward off disasters, every family contributes in cash and in kind: the money is used to buy chickens and ducks, and every family contributes the *lulanzi* they have grown. We use bean curd from *lulanzi* to make one of the main dishes for *Huoyanhui*. The wish is that we can be as pure as the bean curd in the coming year, and that life will be as fragrant and sweet.

When I was a teenager, my grandfather told me why and how our family started growing *lulanzi*. Many years ago, an ancestor of the family worked for a landlord. He was very poor and his boss was very mean and calculating. The landlord wanted to make sure that the tenant farmers did not take anything from the fields. At the end of every work day, a servant would search the farmers to make sure that nothing had been taken, including seeds. The landlord believed that as long as the tenant farmers had nothing at home, they would continue to work for him.

Our ancestor got tired of working for the landlord, and finally had an idea: he noticed that the servants never bothered checking the workers' shoes. So, whenever he had the chance, he hid a few seeds there. He did not dare to hide too many for fear of being caught, and if ordered to take off his shoes, he would turn them upside down to show that he hadn't taken anything.

1 Oral account by Luo Xiuqiong, villager of Xiaozhai Community, Wayao Village, Niuchang Township, Baiyun District, Guiyang City, Guizhou Province; Written by Zhu Xiaoxing, Assistant Programme Officer, PCD

However, he always pinched the shoe-tip where he had hidden the seeds.

He started returning home more often. When it was the season for growing beans, he stealthily planted the *lulanzi* he had taken, and later, secretly collected the harvest. After a few years, he had many seeds, not just of soybeans but red rice too. With the seeds, he could earn his own living. He did not have to work for the landlord anymore.

These days, many farmers in Wayao grow new soybean varieties. They buy these new, non-indigenous varieties and no longer save the seeds of the old varieties. Apart from having an inferior taste, new varieties are far more susceptible to pests, and if farmers do not use pesticides, insects lay eggs in the flowers, which infest the beans as they grow. The old varieties rarely have these problems.

It is interesting to note that in the old days, our ancestors went through so much hardship to save seeds. Their actions helped build a life of self-sufficiency and self-reliance for the community, as well as a culture of tasty local food. The idea of paying cash to buy seeds is like having a 'landlord' again—relying on others and being limited to produce only under certain conditions. It seems to me that we only own our land in name. Why do people act like that? This is something I cannot understand!

STORY 2

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in an ecovillage

Vegetables are traditionally cultivated in Luoba Village, Guizhou Province. There has been a diverse range of crops, and disease and pests were not a serious problem, so farmers did not use much, if any, pesticide. Luoba vegetables had a good reputation, but few purchased the vegetables because the village was quite inaccessible, farms were scattered, and output was small. Farmers had to bring their produce into the market in town on their own.

In the beginning, few people were willing to buy organically grown vegetables at a higher price, so vegetables that could not be sold would end up being fed to the pigs.

In 2007, CSA was still new as both concept and practice. With the programme's support, Luoba leaders

went to Anlong, a village in Pi County, Sichuan, to learn about organically grown vegetable cultivation and ways to reach urban consumers. After they returned home, Wang Shiqiang and a few other active farmers started to deliver vegetables to a few urban families in Guiyang with the support of the programme and an organisation in Guiyang. They formed a group to share the delivery work, but stopped after a few months: there were few orders, transportation costs were high, and it was difficult to meet customers' requests for particular varieties of vegetables. In the end, only Wang continued.

Five years after the programme ended, a PCD staff member visited the community and was surprised that Wang was still delivering vegetables. He had been doing it for five years non-stop. In 2016, he cultivated 10 *mu* of vegetables, raised a few dozen chickens, and also kept honeybees. He was delivering vegetables, chickens and eggs to city dwellers. Through word of mouth, he had built relations with 50 customers, who paid 600 yuan in advance for six months of produce. He made two deliveries each week, though some customers drove to Wang's farm to collect directly. He sold any excess at the market.

Wang, who had been the most enthusiastic CSA farmer since the beginning of the programme, was also the most persistent. He appeared to have gained something from CSA: "Many of my customers work in the provincial government and universities. The vegetables cost 100 yuan a month, which is not high at all. After so many years, my customers and I have become good friends."

Place, People, Culture, Issues

Place

❶ Baiyi township, Wudang District, Guiyang
❷ Wayao village, Baiyun District, Guiyang

People

❶ Han people of Luoba and Buyi people of Luoguang in Baiyi
❷ Buyi people of Wayao

Culture

The **Baiyi** programme was first launched in Luoba village, a community with weak cultural heritage and inhabited by Han people. The programme focused on technology, with the aim of generating income.

In **Luoguang village**, the programme team and partner explored the multiple functions of agriculture, and the integration of agriculture and traditional culture, as ways to catalyse diverse incentives and to sustain the practice of ecological agriculture.

Wayao, a Buyi ethnic community, has a singing festival and banquet on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month to pray for peace and a good harvest. Situated in Niuchang Township just 38 km from Guiyang, Wayao is the only purely agrarian town in the district.

Issues

Baiyi

Nowadays Luoba Village has become geographically very accessible, and also quite influenced by the outside world. Villagers' agriculture has also been faced with challenges of corporatisation and industrialisation. The local district government saw Luoba as a good example of modern agriculture with unique features: "pick-your-own-exotic-fruit farm + base of organically grown vegetables + leisurely and healthy home".

Villages like Luoba located in the vicinity of cities were also influenced by urbanisation and the "development mode of modern agriculture", becoming more and more distanced from a self-reliant, family-based and a more cyclical mode of economy and more and more dependent on the market. They had also turned away from traditional modes of production and turned towards agritourism. When Luoguang opened to

tourism, the Buyi community thought that they would no longer have to work in the cities.

Wayao

According to the 2018 work report of the Baiyun District government, Wayao will be developed into one of the six rural integrated areas in the district in 2018 and the plan to construct a geothermal spring village will go full steam ahead.

Exploration and Discovery: Programme Theories and Approaches

The original intention of the programme

In 2005, shortly after PCD was established, pilot programmes on ecological agriculture in Guizhou and Guangxi were launched simultaneously as an entry point to explore alternative development. The objective was to promote sustainable living and self-reliance in rural communities. Apart from the ecological agricultural model promoted by the agricultural department in the 1990s, in which bio-gas played a key role, there were few NGO ecological agriculture initiatives in southwest China. PCD supported scientific researchers interested in ecological agriculture to use agriculture technology as the entry point for pilot sites.

Baiyi and Wayao were two such sites in Guiyang, and researchers at the Guizhou Academy of Agricultural Sciences were our main partners. The 2005-2012 programme had various stages: training on theories and technology; establishment and development of community organisations; participatory technology

development; training of community facilitators; exploration of CSA; and ecovillage initiatives. The two programme teams, consisting mainly of researchers, also shifted their focus from technology to community-based work, first emphasising participation and the integration of traditional farming culture, and then developing ecological agriculture and creating an ecovillage.

METHOD OF FACILITATION 1

Thoughts on ecovillages

Technical support had often been an entry point for our eco-agricultural programme in Guiyang. Any cultural element tended to be treated as an embellishment. Taking Luoguang as an example, the Buyi people loved to sing folk songs, but in the early days of our programming, both the facilitator and the programme team – whose members mostly had agricultural backgrounds – had no idea how to connect agriculture with folk song. Folk songs were sung at the start of programme activities, but farmers began to lose interest – it was not their norm to sing this way. Everyone saw the two (the programme and folk songs) as being in two very different realms. At that time, facilitators had not yet gained an understanding of how to facilitate such an integration and the subsequent activities focused mostly on farming.

With these constraints, the Guizhou team reflected on how our partners and the villagers could be encouraged to expand their thinking beyond ecological agricultural technology, also integrating the relationships between agriculture and everyday life, personal health, and values. A training course on the framework of ecovillages, held in Thailand, was useful for the programme team and partners: the framework was used in the assessment of the Baiyi and Wayao programmes, to identify and summarise the changes in the community, and to find the ones directly and indirectly related to the programme. The main purpose of the assessment was not to see if the programmes had achieved their goals, but to help villagers see the changes in their communities and to reflect on the relationship between these changes, such as how farming was connected with the conservation of forest and living species, and with their health. At the same time, we hoped to introduce to our partners a framework for reflecting holistically on sustainable living. Perhaps most importantly, we also wanted the programme team to connect agricultural technology with everyday life / culture, and the excerpt below is from a programme report with this perspective.

Ecovillage Framework

Like the Cultural Reflection Framework, there are four dimensions in this framework: worldview, ecology, society, and economy/livelihood.[1]

Ecovillage and worldview

In the ecovillage, 'worldview' refers to people's perceptions of nature and the relationship between humans and nature. Humans are part of nature, and all creatures have inherent value. Different from a linear model of modern development, with an emphasis on material growth, all aspects of life are taken into consideration, including the integration of traditional and modern knowledge. Personal awareness and the development of critical thinking give rise to this understanding.

During the programme evaluation, it was found that villagers had started to see the connection between the individual, society and ecology. Villagers of Jitu stated that ecology was not the problem of a single family: it had to be protected through collective efforts. Ecological agriculture too could only be developed through the collective efforts of the whole community. The villagers remarked: "I am in you and you are in me. It's only fine if everyone's fine"; "We will be affected if other villagers don't practise ecological agriculture. The overall ecology will be affected by their practices, and the old crop varieties that we cultivate will be destroyed by any hybrid varieties."

Through a village walk activity in Wayao, villagers noted the importance of sanitation, pointing out its connection with ecological agriculture. They wondered how they could produce healthy vegetables and breed healthy poultry and livestock if their community was unsanitary. They started to take practical steps to tackle the sanitation of their own homes and of the whole village. There was obvious improvement.

Generally speaking, villagers envisioned the ecovillage with such principles as: everyone to be educated and knowledgeable, and healthy and safe; families to be harmonious; the community to be united and the people to help each other; elderly people to be respected and children to be loved; elders to pass on knowledge and experience of traditions and customs to younger generations; the community to be self-reliant, and resources to be recycled.

Farmers who had taken part in the programme developed a stronger identity as farmers: they felt a sense of pride when consumers appreciated their products. They were also proud to contribute to a better ecology.

1 Editor's note: The ecovillage framework was originally designed by Gaia Education for urban and rural ecovillages. PCD has drawn on the content, adapting it for our sustainable living education programmes.

In relation to environmental protection, villagers gained confidence, self-esteem and trusted their views more fully. In Wayao, we asked villagers what they thought were the main reasons for the improvement of the environment, and whether they were related to the programme. They saw many reasons, including that they did not have to cut trees for firewood because of the construction of the bio-gas tanks; they had a higher income and could afford coal; they had received income subsidies after they stopped farming and returned their fields to forest; villagers were obliged to plant trees; village rules had been set down and tree conservation rangers employed; and ideas of ecological agriculture had strengthened the villagers' awareness of the need to protect the environment. It was determined that programme and non-programme factors were interrelated in the improvement. During the discussion, some villagers intuitively said that the programme was the dominating factor, perhaps because they valued the programme or felt a sense of ownership of it. Maybe they treasured the environment more than before and wanted to play a more active role in engaging with government policy.

Ecovillage and economy

The ecovillage concept of 'economy' focuses on the sustainability of a community, advocating three things: a moderate livelihood not dependent on the overexploitation of natural resources, a local economy that reduces its dependence on an external (or global) economic system, and an economy that enhances a community's capacity for self-reliance.

Ecological agriculture brought self-reliance and independence to everyday life. For example, there was no longer any need to spend money on buying seeds and chemical fertilisers, and diverse crops were cultivated to help guarantee a community's food variety and security. Villagers of Wayao loved to experiment and were proud of the outcomes, such as working on different ways of mulching, intercropping different plants, and preserving old crop varieties. The main eco-agricultural method they experimented with was the cyclical method of 'eco-farming—eco-breeding—improving soil fertility—eco-farming', allowing for the land to be cultivated and nourished at the same time. They used manure as fertiliser and various methods to prevent and control plant disease and pests. In general, the programme found ways to reduce dependence on the external market and strengthen the local economy.

Ecovillage and ecology

The application of ecological principles is seen in activities such as construction of green buildings in the community, building the cyclical system of local food and agriculture, and protection of water resources. What is most important is that ideas and designs align with a holistic ecological framework.

In the latter stage of the programme, Wayao started refer to the ecovillage concept in designing their activities. Beekeeping was used as an entry point to help farmers broaden their views from agricultural production to an ecological system, and a few farmers, including the party secretary of the natural village of Dazhai, had always kept bees. However, by and large, villagers had not followed suit: it was only the beekeepers who were aware that the use of pesticides threatened the honeybee. To deepen the farmers' systemic view of the ecology of agriculture, the programme invited beekeeping experts to Wayao to present on the negative impacts of pesticides on bees, agriculture production and ecology. After the training, more farmers started to keep honeybees.

Villagers' ideas about ecology – especially those of farmers who had taken part in the programme – have become more holistic and sophisticated. They started to look at their habitat, land and forest as parts of a whole. Villagers of Tianba saw ecological agriculture as beneficial not just for the health of farmers and consumers, but of animals in the mountains too. Villagers in Wayao realised that there was ecological interdependence among all species: "Birds and rats will die if they eat the crops on which pesticide has been applied, and other animals that eat them will also die. There are advantages if there are more birds in the mountains, because they pick the worms and insects off our crops and in the forest. They also help disperse seeds and bring seeds of other plants into the mountains and into the earth. While there are wild animals that may destroy our crops... as long as we have enough to eat, it doesn't matter that they take some. It's only when the mountain is bustling with life that we will have a good ecological environment."

Old crop varieties were valued by Wayao villagers. More villagers started to see that old varieties were adaptable, disease-resistant and nutritious. In general, villagers were open to new knowledge; for example, villagers of Luoguang visited Meitan County in Guizhou in 2008 and learnt the theory of intercropping in wet paddies. They not only experimented with intercropping, but also with raising ducks and growing vegetables in the paddy fields.

Ecovillage and society

In an ecovillage, people in a community or a group should try not to be egoistic. Team spirit and cooperation are more important than competition. It is believed that the capacity for leadership can be nurtured in every person. In any society, some people are equipped with modern knowledge while others hold traditional knowledge. Everyone is equal and should help and respect each other. There are mechanisms to resolve disputes and to tackle differences. One learns to rein in one's desires and consumes moderately. The education of the next generation is paramount, with an emphasis on developing a worldview harmonious with nature.

The organisations in a community develop exchange networks with other communities.

The communities of Baiyi and Wayao embraced these societal values and were motivated to learn and share their knowledge. The two villages saw the ecological agriculture programme as creating an atmosphere of exchange. Villagers of Wayao said, "We had been very conservative and in the past, there was no exchange. Even when we had good seeds and skills, we wouldn't tell others because we were afraid they would take advantage of it. Now when we see someone cultivating a new crop, we ask to learn." Community facilitators also set out examples and shared outcomes of experiments with everyone.

Villagers attested that relationships in the community had improved because of the sharing. They believed that when everyone was happy, there would be less conflict. In Luoguang, villagers who had joined study trips posted their experiences and reflections on public message boards and. shared what they learned directly with villagers not practising ecological agriculture. Community facilitators and eco-farmers had more opportunities to join learning sessions – within the community and elsewhere – and they took part in various discussions among themselves. Overall, the emphasis was on a harmonious relationship between human beings and environment.

Community facilitators in the programme had a strong sense of responsibility, first practising what they had learned before sharing their experience with others. Through the new technology they also gained more confidence in themselves.

Early on in the programme, the training of community facilitators focused on the principles and technology of ecological agriculture. Later, social skills and team-building were introduced. In the programme design, facilitators were expected to liaise with external groups and organise farmer-participants. Facilitators said that through this process, they learned to work better with group members, as a team. They soon realised that work could only be completed through group communication and the sharing of tasks.

For some villagers, sharing knowledge was a way to address conflict. For example, in Wayao, only a few families grew fruit trees, and their fruit was often stolen before it was ripe. After more villagers mastered the skills and grew fruit trees, the thefts stopped, and the mistrust too.

Another case was in Xiaopingshan Village. A few years ago, there was a flu outbreak among chickens, which had been transmitted through a non-indigenous breed. The villagers had a discussion and set down a village rule that chickens from elsewhere were not allowed in the village. Everyone has abided by the rule ever since.

METHOD OF FACILITATION 2

Community organising of community facilitators

It was difficult to practise ecological agriculture on one's own: strengthening the capacity to build community organisations was a very important part of the programme. In Luoba, the programme trained community facilitators and helped them set up an ecological agriculture interest group with other villagers. The group met weekly and talked about the principles, knowledge, technology and management of ecological agriculture. Luoba villagers also established interest groups on composting, growing fishwort and other topics of their choosing.

In every village, a few facilitators were trained to organise interest groups which were used as platforms for promoting the programme and to experiment with ecological agriculture. In Wayao, community facilitators were also trained to develop community organisations. Most of the facilitators in Wayao were women, while in Luoba, most were men. The Wayao programme team was more interested in the ecovillage idea, taking one step at a time, following the flow of the villagers, and bringing about change quietly. The women facilitators were also concerned about their own health and that of their families.

A villager named Luo from Wayao stands out. Unlike other men who handed over everything about farming to women, Luo was very interested in ecological agriculture and had become one of the few male community facilitators. He became famous in his village after the snowstorm of 2008 when everyone's garlic died from the cold except Luo's. He had mulched his garlic, mostly with mugwort. Not only did his garlic survive, it thrived.

Luo loved to research. When the programme was underway, he experimented with all sorts of mulching materials and made comparisons, also displaying his compost for all to see. He cultivated vegetables using the no-till method and was applauded by farmers from Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and Guangxi who joined a farmers' field school activity; yet his fellow villagers did not prefer this soil fertility improvement method, as it required intensive labour input. Neither composting nor no-till cultivation were widely practised in Wayao.

The experience of training community facilitators

In Wayao and Baiyi, community facilitators were trained to lead learning activities for the ecological agriculture group and other villagers. The facilitators played an important role in promotion and practice of the learning activities, and had aroused the interest of an increasing number of farmers in the communities. From interviews with the facilitators, it could be seen that they had to play many roles and had to meet many different expectations of villagers. For example, they had to model different farming practices. Among many tasks, they organised learning sessions for the ecological agriculture interest group, provided practical guidance to villagers, disseminated knowledge, helped the programme team to communicate with villagers, contacted consumers to help market the produce, and organised group production.

While the facilitators in the two programme sites were committed, juggling the many roles sometimes created difficulties:

- They and their families came under a lot of pressure because they had too many responsibilities;
- The identities of the community facilitators and the implementation of the programme were linked. Because of their capacity and ways of thinking, some facilitators set their responsibility within the mandate of the programme, such as only being concerned with farmers who joined the interest groups, not each and every farmer.
- The facilitators were sometimes involved in programme resource distribution and because of this, villagers did not always trust them when they also promoted skills and training.
- Facilitators received more programme support as they were expected to set the example for the rest of the community. However, it gradually increased the distance between community facilitators and villagers and created misunderstanding between them.

Therefore, when building the mechanism of community facilitation, the following should be taken into consideration:

- The roles of community facilitators should be very clear. Learning and skills promotion should be separated from organising production and marketing products, otherwise there is a hidden risk of learning being dominated by the concern

for the market, and facilitators may not be able to consider the interests and needs of villagers.

- How can "community facilitators" be transformed into an internal mechanism of the community? How can facilitators be enabled to feel that they are not only performing their duties within the programme but are also working with a sense of love for the community and for ecological agriculture? In theory, the role of community facilitators should not be confined to a few individuals. Instead it should be a team of people that can encourage more participation within the community.
- Community facilitators should not be trained only in knowledge and technology. There should be training to strengthen their worldview and social skills, to improve their holistic understanding of ecological agriculture, and to increase their incentives to practise these in everyday life.

Reflections and Insights

The mechanism of community participation is crucial to community development. When we visited Baiyi and Wayao five years after the programme ended, we found that both communities had had a lot of changes, in particular the composition of the labour force engaging in agriculture as well as the local economic production structure. This was very much due to the policies of the local government. Even though the community facilitators were still practising ecological agriculture, we had failed to popularise ecological agriculture in the two communities – villagers had not yet made the conscious decision to build a sustainable future for their hometowns.

What happened was partly due the mechanism of community participation built into the programme design. In the beginning, the programme used technological development to facilitate the communities in converting to ecological agriculture as a means of exploring sustainable living. This aroused interest and quickly attracted the participation of many villagers.

In other words, this strategy had the advantage of meeting the needs of the community. With the help of agricultural experts, the programme discovered an eco-agricultural model that was locally appropriate. This was perhaps the most important experience PCD gained from the programmes in Baiyi and Wayao.

However, when the programme expanded, attempting to effect change in the values, awareness and everyday life of the farmers, the approach heavily relied on a few community facilitators and faced a bottleneck. A member of the Baiyi programme team felt that when the programme moved from the phase of ecological agriculture to ecovillage building and began looking at traditional culture, he felt less competent. He did not know how to promote the concept. For him, agriculture and culture were two totally different fields. Community facilitation was an external mechanism brought in by the programme, and it had failed to weave into the life fabric of the community and bridge the gap between ecological agriculture and everyday life.

When designing any mechanism for community participation, the traditional mechanisms of community learning and interaction must be considered. They could be the means to increase the participation of different sectors and to build an atmosphere for continual exploration at the level of everyday life.

Awareness and action are needed among farmers

Ecological agriculture emphasises holistic outlook and systems thinking, with production technology and community life inter-related. That is why for technology and awareness to take root, entry points for the programme must extend into everyday life. For people to change their way of thinking from a focus on the individual to the community and ecology, there must be an awakening of affection, a greater sense of belonging, and a consciousness that is connected to the community. This is also why, in the latter part of the ecological agriculture programme, we tried to use the ecovillage framework to shift the programme strategy away from technology and into everyday life. However, the communities needed more time and collective action for the change in consciousness to be sustained.

Nandan, Guangxi: From Paddy Farming to Exploring Sustainable Living

Zhan Yuping

> *When a facilitator recognises the importance of cultural reflection and ecology in a programme, he/she needs methods to communicate the ideas with the community and to put them into practice. At this point, one should note that communication with the community does not mean communicating with one person or a handful of people. If the exchange is only between the programme team and the participating farmers and there are no exchange platforms among members of the community, this could become a weakness in the programme.*

Small stories, Big lessons

PCD has supported programmes in the Baiku Yao community in Nandan County in Guangxi for over 10 years and has witnessed the rapid development of tourism in this traditionally agro-pastoralist community. The development of the programme has faced many difficulties because of the inexorable impact of modernisation and the turnover in the programme team. The latter also posed a challenge to the continuous documentation of programme experience for learning purposes. In the process, however, we witnessed the dedication of the programme workers, the enthusiasm that flared up and died down again in the community, and the villagers who persisted in practising ecological agriculture even after the programme ended. Every experience has been transformed into nourishment that enriches our reflection and action.

STORY 1

The enthusiasm that once filled the community

The Baiku Yao villagers of Nandan were once filled with enthusiasm for ecological agriculture.

In 2008, villagers and PCD partners joined a study visit about seeds in Wayao Village, Guizhou. Everyone became very enthusiastic about the traditional crop varieties, and on their return to Nandan, they discussed what they could do. After a community-based research activity, it was found that most of what was farmed by the community – corn, millet, cotton, black pig, *yao* chickens and silkworms – were heirloom varieties and species, employing traditional cultivation and breeding practices. Their rice, however, was mostly hybrid varieties and needed a lot of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, causing many environmental problems. In the early stage of the programme, the focus was on agricultural production and there was little connection between agriculture and traditional culture. Apart from conducting pilot programmes on ecological farming at the community level, such as making plant-based pesticides, replacing chemical fertiliser with farm manure, and experimenting with the cultivation of old crop

varieties, the programme also organised study trips, including to Guizhou and Sichuan.

Ripples were set off in the quiet community. Even though Baiku Yao had a rich cultural heritage in farming, the influence of mainstream culture had meant that some villagers looked down on and had lost confidence in their own culture. Thanks to the study visits to other communities, however, they found that their traditional methods were actually quite 'scientific' and could be used to replace chemical fertilisers and pesticides. They became more confident in practising ecological agriculture. For example, in 2009 and 2010, when drought led to failed harvests of their hybrid rice, villagers managed to harvest some traditional rice varieties. After a series of training sessions and experiments, farmers saw the hazards of agricultural chemicals and were motivated to practise ecological agriculture. Many women farmers became interested to join the programme through the training sessions, and became very active: over 40 women attended one workshop on pesticides and health. These changes, and the local varieties of crops that were exchanged through study trips, enhanced farmers' confidence and determination.

The programme team, as outsiders, gradually became aware of the cyclical principles of ecology embraced by traditional Baiku Yao culture, and came to see that in many ways, the traditional farming culture was linked with ecological agriculture. The Baiku Yao farming practice of feeding hay to cows and using the manure as fertiliser for rice are ecological practices, for instance. Baiku Yao ceremonies also embody their worldview, which corresponds with a sustainable way of living.

There were community changes at two levels at this stage. An increasing number of farmers joined in exploring ecological agriculture to grow and eat healthy food. Farmers' enthusiasm for experimentation flared up, as is demonstrated by the story of a villager, Li Youming.

STORY 2

Sustaining hope

Just as the older traditional houses were increasingly replaced by concrete houses, ecological agriculture was also increasingly confronted by challenges posed by modernisation. The villagers responded in various ways but were faced with setbacks, one after another.

The programme conducted an assessment a year after its launch. The local programme team member told the facilitator apprehensively that villagers were becoming less enthusiastic about ecological agriculture. His work was getting difficult. One reason was that they had focused too much on experimenting with ecological paddy fields.

Regarding rice, the size of the plots that the villagers cultivated were small, just enough to produce food for their families. Even though a previous experiment had shown that rice could be cultivated without using pesticides or chemicals, yields were lower. Conventional varieties from the Rice Research Institute of Guangxi Academy of Agricultural Sciences were drought tolerant, pest resistant, and tolerant of poor soil. They were therefore suitable for local cultivation, but the yield was less than for other types of hybrid rice available in the market. Hence, only a handful of farmers were willing to continue to practice ecological rice farming. Even with these many setbacks, there was hope as long as one person persisted.

Li Youming, often called 'Uncle Li' was one of the most enthusiastic farmers. He had called many village meetings to mobilise people to continue ecological agriculture, but to no avail. Still, he persisted.

Influenced by the programme, he had also taught himself ecological farming technology for many years – he is now in his fifties. Whether conducting experiments to compare varieties of rice, or testing hybrids, he was scrupulous. He experimented with 20 to 30 different varieties of rice every year. When there was not enough land to cultivate them, he resorted to plastic buckets on a rooftop. He collected over 20 conventional varieties of rice through exchanging seeds and undertaking study trips. Every year he conducted screening and rejuvenation with the difference rice seed varieties he collected in order to restore the quality of seeds. "I don't care if the yield is high or low," he said. "I will continue to save seeds. No one knows when there will be a natural or

man-made disaster. You have control only when you have seeds."

Not only did Uncle Li save rice seeds, he made short films on his experiments and came up with the idea of setting up a family seed bank. He wanted to turn his home into a community centre for learning about ecological agriculture. Even after the programme ended, he has been continuing on with his mission, such as selecting and cultivating rice varieties suitable for local cultivation, fermenting wine from wild fruit, making enzymes, and building Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) links with customers in cities. His nephew has followed in his uncle's footsteps, working alongside him instead of in the city.

In the struggle between improving one's material life and passing on traditional culture, there are people in the Baiku Yao community who strive to achieve both. In spite of the dominant trend of industrialisation of agriculture, there are local farmers who persist in learning and passing on the practice of ecological agriculture. This is the hope that we witness.

Place, People, Culture, Issues

Place

Lihu Township, Nandan County, Guangxi

People

Baiku Yao

Culture

Baiku Yao, a branch of the Yao tribe, live mainly in the townships of Lihu and Baxu in Nandan County, Guangxi, and in Yaozhai township in Libo County, Guizhou. In 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recognised Baiku Yao as the offshoot of an ethnic minority group that best retains its folk culture, describing them as a "living fossil of human civilisation". Even today, every member of the Baiku Yao has his/her own ethnic clothing, and the community has completely preserved its solemn burial ceremony and several festivals, as well as its traditional clan organisation *youguo*, the primary unit.

Issues

In the 1980s, the household contract responsibility system was established, and land was cultivated with the family as the primary unit. However, Baiku Yao villagers still consider plots to be owned by *youguo* and retain former boundaries. As the reform and liberalisation policy deepened, there was more interaction between the Baiku Yao – who had once formed closed communities – and the outside society.

In the mid-1990s, some members began to leave Baiku Yao communities to work in the city. Then, in the 2000s, the local government started to promote tourism in the locality. In 2010, Wangshangtun in Lihu became the first pilot community to launch new rural reconstruction plans at the village level. In 2014, the government launched a project to redesign and transform the landscape of Lihu, which was a market town, into that of a tourist town. On the whole, the Baiku Yao community has been undergoing unprecedented social, economic and cultural changes.

The original intention of the programme

In 2002, the newly established PCD wanted to explore 'alternative development' models, yet we were unclear about our definition. Therefore, we started an exercise to study alternative development, with traditional culture as the first topic of our focus. The Centre of Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK) helped with a workshop entitled Traditional Knowledge and Sustainable Livelihood, which considered different strategies and interventions; we invited partners in Guizhou and Guangxi to take part. This gave rise to a series of small-scale participatory action research projects on traditional knowledge and sustainable livelihoods, leading to a 10-year relationship with the Baiku Yao community.

In the first years of PCD, there was little exploration on ecological agriculture and cultural reflection. In 2007, PCD began to discuss sustainable living as a concept, and even though we were unclear about its implications, there was a consensus that we did not want to promote forms of livelihood that deviate from everyday life. We

adopted the strategy of learning-as-doing to explore local meanings of the concept.

Elements of cultural heritage and ecological agriculture were introduced into the Nandan Programme to explore the path of community sustainable living through experiments, exchange, learning and training. As described earlier, due to the learning and exposure trips, some villagers, including women, became very enthusiastic about ecological agriculture and were willing to experiment with it. However, there were many challenges at this stage of the programme, such as the difference in cultures, language barriers and inadequate interaction between the programme team and the rest of the community. It was only at a later stage that we began to look inward and seek the core values of the Baiku Yao community by strengthening dialogue between traditional organisations and modern management; that is, dialogue between the programme's community management committee and *youguo*, the traditional clan organisation.

Exploration and Discovery: Programme Theories and Approaches

Heart: awakening of heart and strengthening resilience

What matters most in a cultural reflection programme is not whether a particular form of traditional cultural practice is revived, or the size of ecological farms cultivated by villagers has increased – we believe that what is most important is the change in the hearts of the villagers and facilitators.

In Nandan, the programme achieved quite a lot in ecological agriculture, but many farmers did not continue because of difficulties they faced in making a living. Li Youming, a farmer committed to ecological agriculture and to his holistic ecological worldview, is an example of the achievement of the programme. Even though the programme ended in 2014, he remains active in various networks, such as the Guangxi Farmer Seed Network and Ecological Farmers' Market in Nanning, the provincial capital. He has also influenced a new

generation of farming groups in Guangxi, including young people in the Baiku Yao community; they have been learning to preserve local crop varieties and have started to practise ecological agriculture.

Apart from agriculture, the programme has nurtured a group of people who appreciate Baiku Yao culture to take action. In 2011, the Baiku Yao Ethnic Culture Preservation and Development Association in Nandan County was established to document and preserve Baiku Yao culture. Young people in the community photographed traditional culture and customs, recording changes in the community as well; eventually, they became an important force in the circle of community film-makers . Both the cultural leaders and youth became more confident in their culture than before. People reflected on the mainstream educational system and the development of tourism and sought to bring about gradual changes through their actions.

Cultural reflection and ecological agriculture appeared to be a two-pronged approach, but ecological agriculture is basically a part of traditional culture. Whether the entry point is agriculture or cultural reflection, the points of intersection must be identified because they embody the core cultural values at different levels of the community. They are not separate but interrelated, just as one's head and hands are connected.

Head: theories and reflections

Cultural reflection: How to break free from constraints imposed by cultural differences?

No matter which ethnic group a programme might work with, a programme worker faces a cultural difference between him/herself and that community. Even if the worker is a local person, the difference is still there, though it may be less. This does not mean we should stop our work in cultural reflection; instead, we should think about how we can break free from the constraints imposed by cultural differences.

On the one hand, a programme worker should increase his/her cultural sensitivity. As mentioned earlier, even though PCD had identified local partners in Nandan who would work at the community level, the programme team's knowledge of Baiku Yao culture was still inadequate. To take farming as an example, we had suggested many times to explore ways to integrate Baiku Yao farming culture with ecological agriculture, yet after

several years, we had failed to find the point of integration, and the programme failed to gain widespread recognition in the community whose main concern was still on meeting material needs.

Programme workers to adopt a holistic perspective

An eco-agricultural programme team that adopts the cultural reflection perspective must work with the community to broaden the programme, with the focus on agriculture including the local people's ecological views and cultural values. The programme team tried different ways to encourage villagers to learn about ecological principles in their traditional farming culture, but efforts over the years showed that we failed to make a breakthrough. Given the cultural differences between the programme team and the local community, the facilitator had to first affirm the approach of cultural reflection and be open-minded and inquisitive vis-à-vis the traditional local culture. Equipped with experience and community work methods, the facilitator will gain knowledge of the community and be able to help the exchange between communities.

In this context, it is useful to look at the example of traditional Baiku Yao practice of shifting cultivation. Wet rice cultivation was relatively new in their culture, and influenced by the Zhuang and Han people, they started to cultivate rice, with the main consideration being livelihood. In other words, there was distance between rice growing and their culture. The programme workers spent a lot of time and effort on rice cultivation, but the programme only managed to attract a handful of people who were interested in experimenting with cultivating ecological rice: they failed to mobilise the community. Looking back, if the programme had not confined its definition of agriculture to crop cultivation and animal rearing, it might have been able to identify the intersection of agriculture and culture. Every step in the production of the Baiku Yao clothing, for example, from growing and spinning cotton to weaving, embroidery, batik dyeing, rearing silkworms and sewing, is closely linked to Baiku Yao history, culture and farming practices. The cotton, the batik dyeing paste, and all the plants used for dyeing are all connected with farm work throughout the year.

Hands: community organising and advocacy

Importance of community platforms and traditional organisations

After a facilitator recognises the importance of cultural reflection and ecology, he/she needs methods to communicate the ideas with the community and to put them into practice. Inspired by the programme, villagers set up a community management committee in 2003 to oversee a small fund. The programme however did not have any contact with the traditional *youguo* and knew next to nothing about it, which led to low levels of community participation and collective action.

When we reflected on this experience, we realised that when we advocate for change in terms of building inner strength, the work should not be limited to individuals or to a handful of people. Instead the programme should make efforts to build a wider community platform for promoting change. The hands and the heart are one. When the heart awakens, the community will naturally take collective action to bring about change.

The promotion of community exchange platforms should also replace the traditional top-down approach of poverty alleviation with the bottom-up approach of identifying community needs and mobilising the community. Only this kind of a programme design can bridge the gap between the programme and people's real needs.

In the Nandan programme, even though villagers had become enthusiastic about ecological agriculture at an early stage of the programme, the programme team had put too much effort into task-oriented issues and not enough into understanding the traditional organisations. This limited the facilitator's feeling for the cultural context and thus their ability to get close to the community networks. Therefore, the programme failed to identify key people in the community for an insider perspective, and could not mobilise the community from within.

Changing the approach from 'looking outwards' to 'looking inwards': training key persons in the community

The programme facilitator had tried to make use of community exchange and learning to mobilise

community leaders to organise the community from within. Yet, since the 'inside' and 'outside' were not balanced, the community's own unique culture was ignored and the participation of the community limited. Although the programme team had spent a lot of time and effort on the Nandan programme, and a handful of community leaders were trained through external activities, as it had not engaged the traditional *youguo*, which had significant power in the community, villagers were not mobilised.

Reflections and Insights

PCD has worked with the Baiku Yao community for over 10 years, and we have come to see that community work is a process of self-reflection and learning. We have seen that while facilitators from outside a community may only have little influence on a community, the way they think and practise are in turn nourished by that community.

Thanks to the acceptance of the Baiku Yao villagers, our partners and colleagues have been able to explore and learn through trial and error. Subsequently, we have all learned more about the community and how to work together, with our hands, heads and hearts.

APPROACHES

RECOLLECTING FORCES OF CHANGE

Thoughts and Practice: Capacity Building through Cultural Reflection

Integrated Capacity Building Team, PCD

> *In our exchange with Thai facilitators, they said that the relationship between the self-awareness of a facilitator and cultural reflection is when a facilitator finds his/her own roots, has a historical consciousness and cultural identity, and identifies with a value system – then the facilitator will gain inner strength and will not be susceptible to external influence.*

The Heart, Hands, Head Framework

As with any other theory, in cultural reflection there is a process needed to move from idea to action. The capacity building of the community facilitator is critical, and integrative activities should touch on the three 'Hs': the heart, the head and the hands. In cultural reflection, the heart means the motivation of a community facilitator, who asks: why it is meaningful to learn cultural reflection/cultural perspective? The head means knowledge and theories of cultural reflection. The hands: after a community facilitator agrees wholeheartedly with the importance of the cultural perspective, what actions are taken? How does he/she put theory into practice?

We have organised various cultural reflection capacity building activities, and what we share in this chapter is presented mainly as accounts of workshops and training activities, and what was learned from them. Some community facilitators participating in the activities are local villagers, and when that is the case, the activity design changes accordingly. It is not easy to explain the meaning of 'cultural reflection', but we have gained precious experience in our exchanges and interactions with facilitators through these activities.

In this chapter, we will discuss the activity design and what we learned.

Preparation for Facilitation: Exploring the outer and the inner aspects of community culture

Whether the participants of a capacity building activity are facilitators from within the community or from outside the village, care must be taken in choosing suitable cases or examples to illustrate theories. If, in a training, participants are asked to list in detail the forms of culture of a village in a routine manner – such as the design of their clothing, unique local herbs, and how ceremonies are conducted – they might only direct their attention to external aspects of the culture. If, in contrast, participants only learn a lot of abstract theories – such as the holistic nature of culture and its dynamic qualities – it might be difficult for someone new to cultural reflection to understand what is being said. The preferred approach: cite local cultural examples, interpret them with the theory, and let them complement each other.

In the initial period of designing a capacity building activity, the training team should learn about the participants and their village or ethnic culture. The team can visit and talk with key people who are familiar with the local culture, or invite participants to give an explanation about the culture during the activity itself. These people can be from outside the community (such as scholars) or from the community itself (such as village elders). What is important is that their knowledge of the local culture does not remain an external aspect (the aspect of what). They must be able to explain the reasons and core values behind the culture (the aspect of why) and how values are embodied in everyday life.

In reality, one may not be able to find the perfect informant, and in this case, it is advisable to prepare by conducting interviews or making visits before the activity in order to inform one's cultural perspective.

Touching the Hearts of Participants – What does cultural perspective have to do with me?

When designing a cultural reflection capacity building activity, the organiser must find out what participants are interested in and what their expectations are. This will help in designing activities that participants can relate to and connect with their motivations.

In the past, our activities targeted two groups: community facilitators from within the community (internal facilitators) and from outside the community (external facilitators). For example, in one training targeting internal facilitators, most participants were young people in the community, and they were confused about their future. They were asking themselves questions such as: Where are my roots, and should I stay in the village or should I live elsewhere? They wanted to contribute to their community, but were concerned about their livelihood if they remained in the village.

Our activities were often attended by external facilitators as well, mostly programme workers who looked at the community from the perspective of the programme, focusing on aspects of the community culture such as livelihood, agriculture, and ecological and biodiversity conservation, .

When we design training for internal facilitators, we must respond to the question: Why should I learn about the culture of our village? For external facilitators, the question is: Why does community work need the cultural perspective?

In cultural reflection training, participants are facilitated in exploring their relationship with culture, starting from the personal level. Here we may refer to the discourse on place[1]. 'Place' is the space that holds subjective and objective meanings, such as history (knowledge), identity/belonging, experience (sensory), memory, feeling, and even a sense of responsibility (sense of place). 'Place' is different from 'landscape'. The latter is for one to appreciate and to observe; the observer is outside of the landscape. To say a space is a place means that one lives in it; one is an insider. When exploring community culture, community members are encouraged to describe the place as the insiders that they are. In one cultural reflection capacity building training, the following activities were conducted for participants to experience their perspective on place.

ACTIVITY

My happy time in the village

In a training activity for young people in the community, participants were invited to share a happy experience in the village. The purpose was to mobilise the feeling, memories and sensory experience that they had for the place. After the stories, they were asked to compare the current situation of the village to that of before. The purpose was to see the kind of reflection this would bring to the surface .

The mark of culture that I bear

In a workshop for external community facilitators, participants were invited to share the origins of the names, food and customs of their hometowns. The purpose was to awaken the participants' memories and feelings and to help them to see that culture is in our everyday life. Culture is a collective and individual experience – collective because it relates to a specific community and awakens their feelings, and also unique to each individual because it influences each person's preferences and judgements differently.

In one exchange, Thai facilitators said that if a community wanted to form a collective vision and to find a way forward together, personal motivation and enthusiasm for change was essential. They said that the latter was built on understanding one's roots (potential) and on analysing how society influences one's way of thinking (socialisation).

In PCD cultural reflection trainings, participants are sometimes asked to explore their inner self through activities that cultivate their inner strength and self-awareness, as seen in the following case:

Building a safe environment for sharing

A safe and trusting atmosphere helps participants explore their inner selves and enables them to share their deeper feelings. In the training, participants are divided into small groups, and team-building activities are conducted to build trust within the groups. Participants are invited to talk about different things, starting perhaps with superficial topics such as the origins of their names, and then proceeding to more personal things such as the River of Life activity below. They write down what they are satisfied with or proud of within themselves, and are asked to share this in small groups. They are reminded that there is no need to compare or to judge, and that the purpose of the activity is to bring out a feeling of pride – derived from oneself, one's family and/or one's community.

River of Life

Participants are given a sufficient amount of time to ponder three things/persons/moments in their lives that have had the strongest

influence on them, positively or negatively. They are then asked to share these in small groups. The participants will observe the relationship between the community and the individual in this exercise.

There is another dimension to self-awareness — that of one's cultural stereotypes. Whether one is an internal facilitator or external facilitator, one may have false assumptions about the culture at hand. In one training, a resource person of Miao ethnicity shared that although people of the same ethnicity might have similar customs, local customs vary because of geographic location, experience/history and social organisation and structure. Every village has its own unique features. Another resource person added that people tend to hold on to the "original form" within their culture, but when traditional modes of production disappear, their way of life inevitably changes.

Flexible Use of Tools for Community-based Research

In the training with community facilitators, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools for community research are common, including mapping of knowledgeable people, resource mapping, the farming calendar, and developing a community history timeline. These tools can provide information for community facilitators to understand a complex community. In our experience, however, a facilitator may become too attached to the tools and forget why he/she has gone into a community in the first place! A facilitator, for instance, may make the maps mentioned above for the sake of making maps. A mature community facilitator can interact with the community on an equal basis and achieve his/her goal without using any of those community research tools.

Here we will not discuss in detail how each research tool is used. Instead, using some tools as examples, we will explain their functions (what information they can provide in understanding the community) and share some analytical frameworks about the community from the cultural perspective. Different community research tools represent different perspectives or information for learning about a community – here are some common tools and their possible uses:

Common tools	Possible uses
Farming calendar	To show the production cycle of agriculture which can be used to analyse changes and how they influence the community's everyday life
Cultural calendar	To understand festivals, their background and origins, functions, organisers, changes,and how changes are being addressed
Timeline of community history	To find out factors ensuring resilience,from the experience of the village in addressing crises and solving community problems collectively
Community resources map	To understand the spatial layout of the community and to identify the available community resources, how the community manages them, and how people gain access to them
Mapping of knowledgeable people	To find out the community's human resources and to know whom one can consult when needed
Diagram of community organisation	To find out the organisational resources of a community so that one may leverage the power of the community organisations when needed

The community facilitator should use multiple tools at the same time and pull all the information together. Only then will he/she be able to have a complete picture of village life. The tools can be used flexibly and, depending on the circumstances, new tools can be created. For example, in a workshop, a participant suggested adding the solar terms to the farming calendar.

The Analytical Framework of Cultural Reflection

At the stage of information collection, a community facilitator may use community research tools, but prior to information collection, he/she should think about how to analyse the information collected. The analytical framework below is from a training session with the veteran Thai facilitator Chatchawan Thongdelert – it can be adapted when put into use. The diagram shows different aspects of community culture, tangible and intangible.

Using this framework, the information collected can be collated and processed into the four aspects of a community's culture. To show changes, two separate diagrams can be used to display the situation 'before' and 'after'.

From the diagram, the facilitator may analyse:

- Changes in the community, such as: what are the changes in the needs of the community in each aspect of life? What is the most important change? What will soon disappear from the village? Are there any values and customs that have been preserved?
- The feelings of community members toward these changes.
- Reasons for change: internal or external to the community. Positive reasons represent the potential/positive factors of the community, and negative reasons represent constraints or present problems.
- What longstanding problems does the village face? What are the reasons for these problems?
- Who are the key people in the community? Who should be held accountable for the problems identified? Who has the power to bring about improvements?

The two diagrams of the past and present (before and after) can be a basis for community members to discuss their visions for the community. The framework can also be used to process the outcome of the discussions, and to work towards a 'future' community culture.

To conclude, the capacity building training in cultural reflection does not limit itself to a specific form or tool. Instead, participants can lead the training creatively, making for a robust journey, searching for identity and culture, and seeing the world from different perspectives.

1 Tim Cresswel. *Place: An Introduction*, Malden, MA : Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

An Alternative Method of Community-based Research

Huang Yin, Seren Tang, Wei Luodong

> *It's said that the impact of mainstream culture on traditional communities is like boiling a frog in warm water. The impact is even greater when a community is suddenly subjected to a major change due to an external factor. Experiential community research helps villagers to dig deep and to think systematically. It helps sensitise villagers. While it may give rise to anxiety and a sense of crisis, villagers will also feel that their community has the potential and opportunity to respond to these problems and challenges.*

Community-based participatory research, or community-based research, is a common approach in community work. Traditional community research aimed at information collection only uses data to find out the background of the community and its livelihood: what is lacking is the cultural perspective. Moreover, community research dominated by external experts often fails to empower the self-agency of a community, which is why the community does not have a sense of belonging or a sense of ownership in relation to the output.

Over the last decade, beginning with the theme of traditional knowledge and agriculture, PCD has explored cultural transmission and reflection. Through community-based research with a cultural reflection perspective and with the help of local communities, we are gradually seeing the road ahead of us more clearly.

Cultural Perspective

Every community culture has its tangible and intangible aspects. The tangible includes expressions of culture, such as singing and dancing, clothing, ceremonies and rituals, and architecture. PCD always stresses that the key is not cultural heritage but cultural

reflection. We do support communities to take action to transmit their knowledge to the next generation, but we are not working on the UNESCO idea of cultural heritage per se. We believe that culture is a process that keeps flowing. The carriers that hold the cultural values should be protected, but new forms can also be created. The intangible aspects are the reasons for particular cultural manifestations and the core values held by the carriers of the culture.

Understanding the difference between traditional and modern culture is critical for cultural reflection. In modern civilisation, traditional core values should be reinterpreted by the community and conserved in accordance with the needs of the times, which is often the foundation for the future development of a community.

Characteristics of Community-based Research

We believe that the purpose of community-based research is to nurture the inner strength of the community and for villagers to identify with their traditional culture – community members will then develop the strength of persistence and confidence. In community-based research, through the process of collecting information and analysing data using the cultural reflection analytical framework, the community will gain more knowledge of the tangible aspects of their culture. However, what is more important is that they gain knowledge of the intangible core values as well. If there has been any (negative) change in their culture, it is important that they consider taking collective action. Conducting community-based research with a cultural reflection perspective is done because of one's love for the community, and is a community-led process. It does not aim at delivering any particular output. The goal is to revive participants' connections with their community through reflection and collective action.

Use of Community-based Research in Nurturing Inner Strength

In the face of mainstream development, we believe that the inner strength and resilience of the community makes it easier for the community to identify the sustainable future they want. Most traditional communities have their own platforms to nurture their villagers' inner strength, such as collective sacrificial ceremonies and rituals, traditional art activities, and the concern and care that elderly people and spiritual leaders show

towards the community. However, these platforms are typically facing immense challenges today.

To take singing and dancing as an example: Many ethnic minority peoples have their own songs, such as Miao songs, and Dong songs. Some songs are concerned with the ways of production, such as dyeing cloth. It can be difficult to pass on this type of song to the next generation if that way of life has already changed – the conditions and platforms for the songs have been lost. Other songs are about community spirits or beliefs, such as ancient *zhilu* – songs to lead the dead on their way to the next life. These songs tend to be long, chanted slowly and create a peace within, a type of song that can nurture inner strength. However, these songs are rarely sung nowadays, or at best are only known by external experts and scholars who, although they are trying to save and protect the songs, are turning them into a non-living culture.

We believe that each community needs to identify the forms and platforms which are appropriate for their present needs, and that community-based research may help with this identification. Taking the *zhilu* songs for example: through community-based research, the community may be able to rediscover the songs as important carriers of their spiritual values and see the systemic connection between the songs and their traditional way of life.

We have found that in communities that have a strong cultural heritage or religious belief, it is easier to nurture inner strength. This is done by connecting villagers with their culture through community-based research which calls forth their collective memory of their culture. This was the idea in the Xishuangbanna Programme:

- Community-based research in the Akha community focused on learning about Akha culture and rebuilding villagers' cultural self-esteem and self-identity.
- The programme in the Bulang community focused on identifying community spirit and inner values, fostering discussions, and building consensus through community-based research.

Why can culture and history be a source of inner strength? How can they provide a sense of self-esteem and self-identity? This can be explained by the difference between the notion of place and landscape. It is easier for local people to feel connected and attached to a place

or to develop a sense of belonging and responsibility because of their experience, feeling, memories of the place, or their symbolic significance with the place. For outsiders, the place is more often a landscape, which is totally different.

How Community-based Research Brings Sustainable Change to a Community

STEP 1

Whose Research? Identifying Issue(s) of Collective Concern by a Community

The first step is the most important. The issue to be studied must be approved by the community. Only when a community agrees that it is in fact a problem will they desire change. That is why we must remember three things before we take the first step.

First, the facilitator should reflect on the principles behind his/her motivation for conducting the research. We believe that one purpose of community-based research is to trigger the community's sense of subjectivity – to nurture a community's confidence and increase a sense of belonging for its members.

Second, the facilitator must respect the opinions of the community. It is difficult for outsiders, including experts, to know what is important for a community. It is crucial to stress that community-based research must start with issues that concern the community collectively, not issues of concern to outsiders or to individual villagers. Only then will villagers feel that the research is a common endeavour and the responsibility of the community. When the community believes that

something is important and is able to explain why it is important (which is how the research can help), and when the community can reach a consensus internally, then the research has important potential for the community.

Third, the purpose of the research is not to publish anything for external use or to prove anything. Instead it is a self-discovery, a reflection, a process for the community to find explanations for itself.

STEP 2
Doing Community-based Research with Hands and Feet Experience

In Yunnan and Guizhou, we adopted many innovative approaches in community-based research, such as health walks, filming, publishing community newspapers, observations, interviews, and learning from elders. Villagers proposed many of these approaches: that is why they were enthusiastic. They took part in and experienced every step, and the process felt different for each individual, yet a collective memory was also created for the community. This is an experiential process and the unique personal experience is not transferable. It was also a creative process. Through experiencing stories and events with their eyes, hands, feet and hearts, the villagers' knowledge and understanding of certain ideas were strengthened. The steps taken in the community-based research (experiencing the whole process→ sitting down to analyse and think→ sharing with the community →community reflection and consensus) are crucial aspects of experiential learning. By reflecting on one's experience and internalising it, the individual forms her/his own ideas and develop their consciousness: this becomes one's motivation for change.

STEP 3
Documentation and Reflection (Community Research Team)

In the Community Research on the Spirit of Mutual Help and Community Economy Programme in Deqin County, a sense of urgency emerged regarding various issues that villagers tended to ignore, such as eroding community solidarity, the loss of identity, and disappearing cultural traditions. This arose in their minds because of their direct experiences and feelings and because villagers became more alert to potential crises: the villagers wanted to protect their community and to take preventive action. In terms of mutual help, villagers broadened

their concerns, thinking about the relationship between humans and the ecology and with outside culture. Their perspectives became more well-rounded, systematic and forward-thinking.

STEP 4

Community Sharing in a Regular Forum

After the community research team collates findings, the next step is community sharing. This step and the last step are connected. It must be stressed that the purpose of using the cultural reflection framework is to promote more collective reflection and action: the more reflection there is, the more actions there will be, and the easier it will be to enhance the engagement of the community. When reflecting on research findings, it is important to use the holistic cultural framework (See article "Application of the Cultural Reflection Framework of Analysis at the Programme Level" on p.62) which stresses the values behind the four aspects of culture. Allow the community to get used to discovering for themselves. Allow their reflections to become collective action.

STEP 5

Summarise and Reflect (Community Level)

Facilitate villagers in making a summary of the research findings and of their reflections on the problems discovered during the discussions. In the Deqin programme, for instance, villagers were very proud to see that there had been many mutual help stories in the communities and that there were things to learn behind these stories. People however reflected that they were not protecting the sacred mountain as much as in the past, and that the problem of gathering caterpillar fungus was accelerating, the garbage problem worsening, and that external factors were impacting the community.

STEP 6 & STEP 7

Actions and Community Reflection

After the community identifies problems, we then start discussing actions to tackle the problems; these actions can be very creative and should be led by the community. For example, a Miao youth of Leishan in Guizhou visited elderly people and *guishi* (literally 'masters of the dead') in his village to learn about the history and migration story of his family as well as the

history of migration of the Miao people. The youth said, "I have always thought that this kind of activity was for outsiders to learn about our culture and history. Now I understand that we are the subject of the learning process. There is no need to promote Miao culture. What is needed is that we young people return home to inherit and pass on this history and culture."[1]

Finally, we need to stress that it is not necessary for community-based research to follow each step mentioned above. Very often, community action and community-based research happen simultaneously – the community becomes familiar with using the cultural reflection analytical framework/perspective to reflect on the community in the course of the action and research.

The Constraints and Challenges of Community-based Research

Challenges for the facilitator

Since the design of community-based research is flexible, with the community having considerable space to manoeuvre, the role of facilitator's role is crucial – he/she has to be able to understand the meaning and value of the research, and this in itself is not easy. He/she should also understand the needs of the community, be able to identify the problems of the community, understand what a community needs, explore community platforms for sharing ideas, help the community to broaden its perspectives through discussing the problems, and have critical thinking skills to understand modernisation and the mainstream development model. If a community does not fully understand the method and meaning of community-based research, the exercise can end up becoming an interpretation of culture and a record of folk customs. Its implication in nurturing the inner strength of the community might be lost, with no real reflection or sharing.

Reflection is a long process

Using community-based research to help villagers connect with culture, gain inner strength, and bring about a desire for change is a long process. Villagers as well as programme workers can become weary along the way, particularly at the stage of discussing and reflecting on research findings. It is necessary to consider the available methods to address this weariness positively.

Sustainability

Villagers are often moved in the exercise, and their emotions can be transformed into a motivation for action. However, the moments may be fleeting and insufficient to develop inner strength for long-term sustainable action: one needs to consider how to follow up on the emotions and how to influence the community as a whole for sustainable action. Selecting participants for the community-based research is very important – if there are not any persistent participants involved in the process – even just one or two! – the initiative can easily run out of steam. This is similar to our ideas about nurturing community facilitators.

1 PCD. *Revival and Resilience-Community Stories in China*, Hong Kong: PCD, 2013:199-214 (In Chinese)

Regional Framework Approach: Cross-regional Exchange and Mutual Encouragement among Community Organisations

Maggie Tang and Shen Dingfang

> *Without the linkage of community culture, rural villages are only isolated islands – lonely and vulnerable. The regional framework approach can reconnect communities through the expansion of cultural connection networks.*

Do not Let Communities Become Islands

In the past, many PCD programmes were based on a single village or community, but the life of a villager involves other villages and communities too: one does not divide cultural connections or blood relationships according to administrative borders. Even with widespread adoption of conventional farming, ethnic minority communities in Guizhou, for instance, continue to exchange traditional varieties of crops with other regions. Yet, because of the division into administrative villages and increasing disregard for the functions of traditional community organisations, many types of connections between communities have weakened. With modernisation, the connections are no longer able to help communities to negotiate with and support each other.

The regional framework approach is not the same as programme expansion. Its premise is that communities are not islands. Instead, they have always been interacting with the outside world as open structures, and the extent of their openness depends on the development of transportation, economic structure and technology. That is why a community can only advance on the road to sustainability by taking this approach into account.

Because of the wide gap between China's urban and rural areas, no matter how strong links may be between rural communities, villages may still be lacking in resources, knowledge, skills and social connections. The regional framework approach affirms the mutual support among urban and rural areas, yet the framework must be built on links developed on the basis of community culture, not on long-distance urban-rural interaction. Long distance means that the gap between the urban and rural areas is relatively wide, and this undermines the self-agency of rural villages and prevents their voices from being heard. PCD places emphasis on the interactions between townships and villages in the same county, such as rural communities and their neighbouring towns, because they tend to share cultural commonalities and treat each other more equally.

Community Organisations from the Perspective of Regional Framework Approach

Programme community and neighbouring communities:

Administrative structure: natural villages belong to the area covered by an administrative village; administrative villages belong to the whole area covered by the town or township. The process of expansion is a gradual one, from a natural village to an administrative one, and then to a town or township, and not vice versa. In this context, village groups, village committees, town and township departments are community organisations in this process of collaboration.

Ecological environment: Many villages share the same forest, water resources and river. Inevitably, there have been conflicts. How did villages resolve the conflicts? What sort of cross-village mechanisms or organisations existed in the past? We can use the same cross-community organisations to promote the programme. For example, pastoralists who graze their cattle in the Yunnan Tibetan mountains for a few months every year have knowledge of the use and maintenance of the pasture. Based on cattle grazing routes, the programme can promote the setting up of cross-village platforms for collective exchange and cooperation among pastoralists.

Cultural connections: Many local communities and villages have their own methods, platforms and organisations for connection – they assist with each

other's welfare and there may be emotional bonds. Dong villages connect with each other through *kuan* or *dong*. Miao communities in southeast Guizhou connect with the neighbouring communities through 'stone burials'. Bulang people in Xishuangbanna have a network of temples (senior temples providing support, care and instruction to junior temples). Among hill tribes which have a history of migration, the naming of villages as respectively mother village, old village and new village reflects the cultural history.

The Concept and Restoration of Community Organisations

In the regional framework approach, community organisations are crucial. Whether the organisations are traditional, formal, administrative, internal or cross-community, they were in existence before the programme and have their own missions and responsibilities. The community has expectations of these organisations and identifies with them. They are part of the community and a part of the given community network. Therefore, not only is it more feasible to work with these organisations in supporting community actions, but the community spirit is also embodied in them: they are the carriers of the community culture and subjects of the collective activities. Cities are formed by migrants. As they are a community of strangers to each other, the city is based on individuality. However in a rural area, a community is the collective formed by people who are familiar with each other and have lived there over the same long period of time. Local community organisations have naturally developed and become the self-agency of the community.

The decline of the community organisations in rural areas implies the decline of community spirit. Many traditional organisations in rural communities are being ignored by community members themselves. As a result, core values and rituals of traditional culture are being lost. Traditional community organisations have subsequently also lost their functions in community education. When the foundation of a community are not strong, it is like a human being losing direction and sense of self. Programme workers and villagers are therefore encouraged to learn about the original community organisations and to find out how they were established, how they have weakened, whether they have ever been revived, and how. This will indirectly help everyone involved to understand the origins, development, decline and revival of the community.

A programme can of course help build new community organisations, but a programme never lasts longer than the community. Instead of building a new organisation, it is more effective to revive, enrich and strengthen ones that already exist.

In the past, we had experience in establishing new community organisations in many programmes, such as the Association of Organic Agriculture of Liufang in Liping, but the purpose was to serve the holistic life of the community, not to serve the programme. That is to say, community organisations should not be established just as mechanisms to serve programme needs. Moreover, there should be a clear division of labour and cooperation between new community organisations and traditional organisations. In Liping, for example, village elders played an advisory role in the work of Liufang Society of Organic Agriculture in reviving their farming culture.

Building Cross-community Exchange for Cultural Connections

Cross-community exchanges should not be one-off external learning activities for the community. They should instead be an important form of activity for community organisations and facilitators to promote cross-regional cultural connections. The powerful role of community organisations can be seen in programmes in Nandan and Xishuangbanna, as described in "Actions: Walking Alongside Communities" (See article on p.126 and p.186) there were several accounts of various organisations developing stronger communities and bringing about change. The Liping programme (See p.72), for example, mentions the traditional community institutions of village elders in promoting the establishment of Dong cultural connections. Here is yet another account.

Story of the Yunnan Bulang People's Traditional Cultural Exchange

ORIGIN:

Facilitated by the Programme, the Community Mobilised its Inner Strength

Initially the Yunnan Bulang community was not very enthusiastic about the programme, and the young people there knew nothing about Bulang festivals. Using this as an opportunity, the programme team changed the entry point of the programme from ecological agriculture to facilitating young people to organise activities for the benefit of the community, by drawing on their interest in learning Bulang songs and dances.

The programme succeeded in connecting with the Bulang youth group who organised entertainment, maintained the security of the village, served the elderly people, and organised activities for public benefit in accordance with *li*, norms of behaviour. Ai Kansan, the leader of the youth group, organised the young people to use *li* to urge masters to teach them the traditional songs and dances. They held an evening party and 20 young people sang songs they had learned. It caused a sensation in the village. It took them two years to bring their community culture back to life, also boosting other organisations in the village. Their actions became an internal force that mobilised the community.

FOLLOW-UP:

Reviving the Organisations' Sense of Responsibility to the Community

The programme makes use of community-based research and reflections on the community's cultural core values to help various community organisations to recognise their duties. By facilitating community ceremonies and cross-community exchange, organisations become aware of their responsibilities. For example, *ajahn*, elderly people, village cadres and the youth group cut down all the tea trees in the community's forest because everyone had agreed that the forest should not be used for tea trees and income generation.

From Community Self-knowledge to Building Regional Cultural Connections

In the beginning, community organisations led four exchanges and visits, two to Zhanglang Village and two to other villages, but they had little impact. In 2013, the *ajahn* exchange invited five villages to Zhanglang: this was how the Traditional Cultural Exchange originated.

The Bulang Traditional Cultural Exchange was an activity that any Bulang community could apply to host on their own initiative. The communities voted on who would be the host, decided on the theme of the exchange, and planned the exchange mechanism. They organised seven exchanges, discussing issues they had in common and making resolutions. The exchanges made a significant impact on a range of issues – fostering community participation, learning about and passing on knowledge about Bulang culture, ecological conservation, ecological agriculture, sanitation, community governance, and ways of interaction within and across communities. There has been a strong atmosphere of mutual support.

To bring about community exchange, there are a few elements to which we must pay attention:

First, a community's traditional culture. The programme team believes that the wisdom embodied in traditional culture is indispensable for a community's sustainable living. The team must enhance its understanding of the core values of a community's culture before it can design and launch activities. One must not limit oneself to a single community when doing community work. Attention should be paid to the interaction and mutual influence between a community and its neighbouring communities. No matter how remote a community is, it is not an island existing on its own.

Second, cross-community cooperative platforms. The communities involved must all desire this platform, not just outsiders, and not just a single community. It is important that all participating villages are motivated to build the platform. There are examples in which communities have wanted to have such a platform to promote mutual help because there had been disputes in their communities. In Yunnan in 2008, in an exchange on a community-based research activity on mutual help, some villagers recollected that there had been struggles over forest resources in the past, to the extent that some villagers had been injured in attacks by another community. The villagers thought it was important to promote cross-community mutual help, and the village that had been attacked wanted the programme to be extended to the neighbouring village to demonstrate goodwill. They were even willing to reduce the amount of their own allocated programme funding so that the other village could be included. This is something that we must learn from the villagers.

Third, the motivation of all the communities to build a cross-community platform. Here we would like to share the importance of community-based research in mobilising a community. When exploring the understanding of sustainable living with the community, the programme team should try to understand villagers' perceptions in the context of that community culture and not introduce ideas from outside. We propose the principles of 'programme team learning from the community, and the community learning from their ancestors', and suggest that it should be integrated into the cross-community research.

This can be understood in three ways: first, when villagers undertake a community survey, they usually do it by visiting villages. For example, if the work to

conserve a village's traditional culture has not been going smoothly, villagers visit neighbouring villages to find out how they have undertaken cultural conservation. The two communities can recollect and share any history of collaboration. Second, introducing community-based research to cross-village exchange platforms will help the study to become more comprehensive. Third, sharing outcomes of community-based research with platforms helps to foster reflection and discussion, which in turn help communities become closer. This process can deepen the sense of responsibility of traditional community organisations, which will more than likely become eager to share ideas with others in their cultural network as a form of support for each other.

Appendix:
Our Partners in Case Studies on Ecological Agriculture and Cultural Perspective

Liping, Guizhou

- Liping County Nationality Bureau of Religious Affairs
- Resources and Environment Institute of Guizhou University
- Liufang Organic Agriculture Association, Liping, Guizhou

Baiyi and Wayao, Guizhou

- Modern Rural Development Research Centre of Guizhou, Academy of Agricultural Sciences
- Institute of Biotechnology, Guizhou Academy of Agricultural Science

Xishuangbanna

- Institute of Sociology, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences
- Yunnan Green Environment Development Foundation
- Society for Xishuangbanna Bulang Nationality Development
- Centre for Indigenous Documentary and Cultural Perspective
- Mueang-Nam Sustainable Development Services Centre

Deqin, Yunnan

- Village Committee of Foshan Township Jiangpo Administrative Village, Deqin, Yunnan
- Deqin Kawagarbo Cultural Society
- Yunnan Shangrila Research Institute
- Society for Culture and Arts of Yunnan Nationalities Research
- Deqin Baimaxue Mountain Community Co-management Society
- Elderly Society of Deqin Sinongxidang
- Deqin Tajiu Wild Life Conservation Association

Nandang, Guangxi

- Institute of Rural Development, Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences
- Guangxi Museum of Nationalities
- Baiku Yao Ecology Museum of Lihu Townshop, Nandang County
- Nandan Society for the Conservation and Development of Baiku Yao Folk Customs and Culture

When Cultural Reflection Meets Agriculture

—Facilitators' Notes

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About Partnerships for Community Development (PCD)

Established in Hong Kong in May 2001, Partnerships for Community Development (PCD) is a community development organisation that works in mainland China. It was established and continues to be funded by the Kadoorie Foundation (via a stream of funds allocated by the Hon. Mrs McAulay). The Foundation is a Hong Kong-based trust founded in 1970 by the late Sir Horace Kadoorie who believed in the motto: "Help people to help themselves".

PCD is committed to working with communities to explore ways of leading a dignified and sustainable life in harmony with others and with nature. PCD adopts the approaches of cultural reflection, nurturing community facilitators, and building networks and platforms in its work in the areas of biodiversity conservation, ecological agriculture, nature education, environmental protection, and prevention and control of pollution. The goals are to invigorate the inner motivation of communities, to promote understanding of sustainable living and to encourage individuals and communities to practise living sustainably.

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