Guizhou Village Cultural Landscape Preservation and Development Program: 
Dali Village Progress Update

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Project Background

GHF has officially begun the collaborative “Hundred Village Project” with Guizhou Administration of Cultural Heritage (GACH) since April 2013. The first chosen pilot project site is Dali Dong Village in Rongjiang County in southeastern part of Guizhou Province. In addition to GACH as the principle managerial organization, Peking University (PKU) School of Archaeology and Museology is the main technical execution organization. The 5-year project intends to complete the conservation and development planning for Dali village and realize some of the short to mid-term goals following the plan.

2013 and 2014 are transformative years for Dali Dong Village. It is listed on the Chinese tentative list for World Heritage Site nomination in 2013, along with 19 other Dong villages found in Guizhou, Hunan and Guangxi Provinces. Some of its best preserved historic structures including residential houses, “flower” bridges, granaries, historic wells and stone trails (The Dali Historic Architecture Group) are being named as one of the 7th batch of Major Historical and Cultural Sites Protected at the National Level announced by the State Council in 2013; it is also listed as one of the 6th batch of National Famous Historical and Cultural Villages in 2014. All of the above titles are the highest official recognitions of a cultural heritage site in China; it is rare that a living village settlement heritage, as opposed to a monumental site, can be named in all 3 listings. Having the value of its built environment well recognized by the Chinese government, the strategy focus of the project is to provide seed funding for drafting of conservation plans and proposals that satisfy the requirements of the relevant government departments, such that implementation grants and legal enforcement may be granted. In addition, GHF funding will go towards supplementing areas where the government funding are restricted, such as supporting community based restoration and cultural projects, rehabilitation projects and other relevant research activities.

Figure 1: Examples of buildings from the Dali Historic Architecture Group.
Project Progress Summary

Even though the Dali Dong Village preservation and development program is designed as a 5-year project due to practical implementation considerations, but GHF has begun project investigation since 2011. Prof. Sun Hua from PKU has been conducting field survey of ethnic villages in Southwestern China for years; and in particular, has completed a basic investigation of Dali Dong Village back in 2008. Therefore, 2013 is but an official launch date for the project implementation, which is based on all these previous efforts.

In July-August 2013, teachers and students from Shanghai Tongji University (TJU) and Peking University formed a joint survey team to carry out field work in Dali Dong Village. 15 architecture students from TJU led by 2 professors and 3 TAs completed measured drawings for 26 important historic buildings in the village. This is followed by the PKU team led by Prof. Sun Hua whom carried out preliminary investigation and planning design for the core historic center of the village. The results from the 2013 summer survey will be published in 2015 as part of a collection of survey on ethnic villages in southwestern China. It is also part of the foundational data for future conservation planning work.
In November 2013, Prof. Wang Hongjun from TJU and Shanghai Unit Architects have been appointed to carry out pro-bono design service for the Dali Dong Village Eco-
museum. Preliminary designs have been presented to the village committee and Guizhou Provincial Research Center of Cultural Heritage Protection (GRCCHP) in January 2014 and were well-received. Currently, the design is under revision based on feedbacks from the previous meetings and will be presented to Rongjiang County government in April 2014, who will hopefully grant unconditional land use in the village for the proposed museum site. Once the design has been finalized, it will be submitted to the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) for construction funding support. If all goes well, construction of the Eco-museum should commence in 2015 with part government and part NGOs (GHF + Youcheng) support.

A total of 4 historic houses and 1 covered bridge in Dali village that are part of the nationally listed Dali Historic Architecture Group were selected as the first batch of heritage buildings to be conserved in 2014. Taihe Group, a professional historic building restoration company based in Guizhou, was appointed to carry out condition assessment and complete the intervention plan of the 5 structures with supervision from GRCCHP. The intervention plan should be completed by end of March 2014 and submit to SACH via GACH. After review and approval by SACH, according amount of conservation grant will be awarded to begin restoration work by the 3rd or 4th quarter of 2014. The intervention plan is based on the documentation drawings carried out in summer 2013. Due to the multiple historic buildings listed on the Dali Historic Architecture Group, 5-10
structures will be selected each year to submit to SACH to seek approval and funding for restoration and all of the listed buildings should complete conservation intervention by the end of the 5 year project timeline. SACH has already promised a special conservation grant to GACH, which will be used on 5 historic villages in Guizhou with status of Major Historical and Cultural Sites Protected at the National Level; Dali Dong village is listed as one of the five and will be awarded 400,000RMB to be used for conservation purpose.

In addition to the intervention plan for the listed historic buildings, a master conservation and development plan is underway for Dali Dong Village. The plan will be jointly completed by Peking and Tongji University, with me as the principal project coordinator. I am now drafting the master plan outline to be submitted to the Guizhou Province and Rongjiang County government for review. Contents such as infrastructural design (fire safety, etc.), agricultural land use and development, tourism development, etc. will be included in the master plan in addition to conservation policies and guidelines.

Community development and mobilization are an important component of the project, since the village is a living heritage, without the support and participation of the villagers, the conservation and development project will not advance very far. Since early 2013, several meetings with village representatives have being conducted to explain about the project goals and proposed work and have obtained preliminary support from the villagers. During the meetings on January and February 2014, the village committee are keen about the building and design of the Eco-museum; 3 local representatives were appointed to be the coordinator of the conservation project, and the villagers will submit proposals of small-scale community public works and cultural projects that are not supported by government funding (e.g. repair of the drum tower and rebuilding of damaged stone trails, traditional festival celebrations, traditional Dong song and dance events and training, etc.). At least 1-2 such community projects will be chosen and implemented annually with support from GHF and Youcheng Foundation.

Figure 4: Assisting International Channel Shanghai with the filming of Dali Dong village.