

LaoShi Village Community Construction - The Perils and Opportunities of Ecology and Livelihood

Talking about the natural resources of LaoShi Village, there are 113 tamarind trees, most of which are ancient trees over a hundred years old. They surround the residential areas of LaoShi Village, blending into the front streets and backyards of the village, providing residents with daily shade and yielding tamarind fruits year after year. Located to the north of LaoShi Village is the Zhu Bi River, an estuarine habitat where fresh and brackish waters converge. It hosts a variety of crabs, with a majority being fiddler crabs, as well as diverse shellfish, fish, and shrimp. A flat wetland area of over 300 acres was once developed by the ancestors of LaoShi Village into salt fields (using ancient sand drying techniques). The former salt fields of LaoShi Village were registered by the Danzhou Salt Bureau, and during its heyday, over 30 households in the village were engaged in traditional salt production. At that time, the people of LaoShi Village relied on the salt industry for their livelihoods. Although it was hard work, it provided security, and life was worry-free.



Unfortunately, this area of over 300 acres, which was integrated with wetland scenery and self-sufficient salt production base, was forcibly requisitioned by the Danzhou municipal government in 1996 and transferred to the Zhengzhou Aquaculture Company, all of which were excavated into fish ponds. Since then, LaoShi Village has embarked on "crazy" aquaculture, and since the invasion by the Japanese, it has once again declined. For nearly 20 years from 1997 to 2017, high-density and highly polluting South American white shrimp farming caused serious pollution to the estuary of the Zhu Bi River, resulting in the almost complete disappearance of benthic organisms such as crabs and shellfish. And those aquaculture farmers, including residents of LaoShi Village, went bankrupt, incurred debts, and fled... The fish ponds also fell into disuse and gradually became dilapidated. In recent years, with the stagnation of shrimp farming, the estuary of the Zhu Bi River has regained its natural vitality, fiddler crabs have returned, women gathering seafood can once again find shellfish, and waterfowl are becoming more abundant. In 2020, LaoShi Village obtained an ecological restoration project funded by the government. After a year of discussions and design (involving designers, residents, and ecological consultants), as well as government approval, bidding, and other procedures, in August 2021, we finally received news that the construction unit was ready to start work. However, there are still a few villagers engaged in aquaculture who have objections to the practice of transforming 60 acres of fish ponds into wetland ecological ponds. It is unknown whether they have forgotten the past suffering or if they have found new efficient aquaculture models. They believe that maintaining the status quo and continuing high-density, high-level pond aquaculture can bring development and benefits to LaoShi Village.



LaoShi Village Fish Ponds (formerly salt fields)

Regarding the future development direction, positioning, and planning of LaoShi Village, in recent years, representatives of residents have held many meetings to discuss or privately exchange views, proposing ecological, educational, and cultural development directions and positioning. Our efforts in recent years, the introduction of projects and resources, and the achievements we have made are all centered around these three aspects. Projects we have cooperated with public welfare organizations include the Blue Ribbon Marine Conservation Association's United Nations GEF project, which includes the "Community Biodiversity Baseline Survey" conducted by the Lotus Wetland Research Institute and the "Development of Natural Education Courses and Guide Training" by the Squirrel School. In addition, we invited Dr. Liu Yi, a Ph.D. in environmental studies from Xiamen University, to conduct a baseline survey of benthic organisms in the village and jointly develop the "Mother River Zhu Bi River Natural Exploration Series Courses". These projects, launched since 2020, have produced some preliminary results in improving the living environment (garbage management), restoring the ecological environment (planting mangroves), investigating community ecological resources, and community livelihoods (community products, study tours, natural education). In 2023, we cooperated with a well-known urban brand coffee shop to supply tamarind sauce, and also cooperated with professor from Hainan Normal University's School of Life Sciences to jointly promote the development and research of community ecological products.



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Ecological Restoration Project - Ecological Ponds

The ecological restoration project invested and constructed by the Danzhou municipal government in 2022 completed the dredging of ancient river channels, restoration of ancient salt fields, coastal sand plant gardens, and wetland ecological ponds, laying a good foundation for flood control and disaster reduction, improvement of living environment, conservation of ecological environment, and sustainable livelihoods in the community. Especially the restoration of ancient salt fields, it not only preserves and inherits the deepest memories and cultural heritage of the community collectively but is not just an intangible cultural heritage; it can recreate livelihoods for the villagers. Now, some women have taken the lead in production, tirelessly making salt, seeing their own salt being sold in bags, creating value with their own hands and getting returns, how much comfort and encouragement it will bring to their hearts. In the future, we will assist the salt farmers in establishing the LaoShi Salt Conservation Center, use the power of organization to carry out product research and development, branding, marketing, and use the returns to further carry out cultural and ecological conservation and promotion work in LaoShi Village, so that more people can understand the local rural sentiments, nature conservation, sustainable living values, share our values with more people, and their minds, bodies, and spirits can be stretched and elevated, and

encourage everyone to work together to leave a cleaner and sustainable resource for future generations, "for generations to come, forever to be used". For friends who are interested in our philosophy, values, products, and projects, whether they are consumers, scholars, experts, volunteers, etc., you are welcome to join us in building and creating together.



Ecological Restoration Project - Salt Field Restoration



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Joy of Women's Harvest