

Identifying Ethnic Cultural Values in Preserving and Promoting Cultural Values for Socio-economic Development in Ha Giang Province

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Abstract: *Notwithstanding extremely significant resources of each nation, locality and ethnic group in the development process, cultural values are not likely identifiable in a comprehensive way in daily life. From a case study in Ha Giang province, the paper outlines approaches and methods as well as several scientific viewpoints in identifying cultural heritage values in cultural conservation strategy associated with socio-economic development goals.*

Keywords: Ethnic Cultural Values, Ethnic Cultural Values of Ha Giang, Conservation and Development

1. Overview of the ethnic group and ethnic culture in Ha Giang province

Ha Giang is a mountainous province with 21 ethnic groups living together, including Kinh, Tay, Thai, Muong, Khmer, Hoa, Nung, Hmong, Dao, San Chay (Cao Lan group), San Diu, Giay, La Chi, Pa Then, Phu La, Ngai, Lo Lo, Co Lao, Bo Y, Pu Peo (and a few from other ethnic groups). Each group has its unique cultural values, creating a rich and diverse cultural environment but still imbued with the common identity of the locality and each ethnic group, which is expressed in many aspects such as culture landscapes (rock plateau, geology, geomorphology, caves, rocky hills, soil hills, etc.) or in the relationship/behaviour

of ethnic groups, in village landscape and living space, production culture (rock brotels, terraced fields, buckwheat fields, fruit trees ...), material culture (works/types of architecture, food, clothing, production tools, transportation, etc.), spiritual culture (festival system - community rituals and spiritual activities associated with historical-cultural relics - beliefs, folk games, folk arts and literature, ethnic knowledge in prevention, treatment and healthcare activities, etc.).

2. Ethnic cultural values

Cultural values of ethnic groups in Ha Giang province include values created by the people of the 21 ethnic groups in the past and present. The cultural values

of ethnic groups over time crystallize into a system of cultural heritages, which are expressed not only in the material aspect of historical and cultural relics from the past but also activities. The culture that brings the breath of life today, is an organic part of the lives of the communities in every village and every family. Preserving and promoting the value of this heritage treasure is the contribution to the sustainable development of the current ethnic community. Cultural values of ethnic groups in Ha Giang as a component of ethnic identity include knowledge, beliefs, morality, art, law, customs, activities, etc., present the nature of human capacity as a member of the social community. The cultural values of the ethnic groups here are understood to include all of the core tangible and intangible values, crystallized from the social relationships of the people, each ethnic group, formed by their residency processes, their impact on the specific natural world that they create, to satisfy their living needs, their survival needs and their development. In that sense, it can be seen that the cultural values of 21 ethnic groups in Ha Giang include: cultural types associated with residence practices, housing architecture, villages associated with the environment, folk knowledge about environment and resources; customary laws regulating community life; folk songs, folk music; economic activities of each ethnic group, ethnic communities with different degrees in the process of ruralization and urbanization. The elements of the above types of culture are very diverse and plentiful, rich in identity and property,

a tangible and intangible capital of the community, ethnic group, and locality, this is a resource for development.

3. Identify the value of ethnic culture

First of all, it must be affirmed that identifying the cultural values of ethnic groups is hard and complicated work. The fact of researching and evaluating cultural values in Vietnam in general and in Ha Giang in particular in recent years shows that, although we have had scientific methods to identify values, however, identification research is usually only effective for cultural works and heritage that have been “static”, independent and less associated with contemporary life (historical relics, architectural and artistic relics...). As for the cultural heritage “living” (lifestyle, customs, villages, cultural ecology...) coexisting with the contemporary life of ethnic groups, the identification of heritage has not been detected fully.

For ethnic culture in Ha Giang, it is necessary to have a view of value in the direction of cultural integration. In the context of the existing ethnic cultures in Ha Giang with traditional heritage characteristics and intermittent and ongoing contemporary life, we can identify three value groups as follows:

** The self-value of the ethnic heritage*

These are the values of architecture, art, houses, villages, irrigation works, defensive works... Many architectural values here bring outstanding features, representing a style and type of architecture, decoration or sculpture...; typical features of an ethnic group, a period, with integrity are still preserved. For example, the stilt house of the Tay in Vi Xuyen district, the defensive

house of the Hmong in Dong Van district, the earthen houses (nhà trình tường) of the Lo Lo in Lung Cu District.

The chronological value represents the rarity of the residual heritage over time, the representation of the artifact with a historical period, a building or space, and is a testament to historical events. This is reflected in the Vương Dynasty (Meo King Vương Chi Sinh in Dong Van district), the old house of the Tay people in Dong Van town. The highlight is the value in the traditional construction method, which is shown carefully in local art and experience in construction. Besides, intangible cultural values of beliefs, customs, traditional practices, performing arts exist together with architectural works and living spaces. These values should be identified as an integral whole and should not be separated during the conservation and development process.

** Inheritance value, continuation in contemporary life*

If looking at the time, considered as the root of the heritage, this value has not been formed, but it has been formed gradually until today. It includes the value of ecological landscapes such as geology, geomorphology, trees and water surface, topography... These factors are changing over time by the impact of humans in the survival process. The case of Ha Giang stone park (global geological park), the landscape of Nho Que river, Ma Pi Leng peak... are the shreds of evidence.

Place imprints create an identity, symbolizing the region: It is not a historical value because it may be recreated, recreated, or restored to the shell to keep the soul. A

newly built village entrance gate, which is not located in the old place, still has the mark of place, creating the identity for each village of each ethnic community because it has been transformed into a symbolic value of its own of villages and ethnic groups in contemporary life.

The value of creating habitat, ecology, human ecology: This value in Ha Giang is also highly dynamic. The system of rivers, streams, and lakes surrounding traditional villages plays a role in creating a balance of the water ecosystem, ensuring shifting cultivation and terraced fields, creating biodiversity. Currently, the water supply and drainage cycle in the highland villages of Ha Giang have had a great deal of technology intervention, of which the most significant impacts are hydroelectric works, irrigation works, exploitation of natural forests, etc., thus the natural ecological role has decreased significantly. However, we can still restore biodiversity if appropriate measures are taken.

Contemporary social and cultural values: There have been changes of traditional values in contemporary life such as traditional house architectures that have been converted several architectural structures, built by new materials, equipped with comfortable technology equipment to serve the needs of people in contemporary life. If the traditional architectural values do not continue and adapt to the residence needs of contemporary ethnic society, then it will be destroyed by its owner. This case is very common in the villages of ethnic minorities in Ha Giang such as the stilt houses of the Tay people, the stilt houses of the Dao Ao Dai sub-group in Vi Xuyen

district are now made of higher floors. The floor below was used to confine cattle, now it is used to build auxiliary works such as bathrooms, and closed toilets.

Arrangement of village landscapes such as gates, fences... in traditional villages of the Hmong, Nung... in Quan Ba, Dong Van... are typical examples of the fragility of traditional village cultural ecology in contemporary social and cultural values. Therefore, recognizing their value for conservation and development must also question whether they have any value in contemporary life, they can receive and tolerate new functions, suitable for contemporary life or not.

** Value integration, development*

Integration and development values are not additions of the first and second value systems as analyzed above. The cultural value of ethnic groups when integrated will be multiplied. If the intrinsic values of culture and heritage are easily identifiable and can be preserved, contemporary cultural values such as customs, traditions, folk songs, dances, etc., are capable of promoting the pastoral service. Development goals associated with conservation, this will be the strength of the community of ethnic groups in Ha Giang. Therefore, the identification of the ethnic cultural values here fully, the system will help the community to integrate and comprehensively the cultural picture in each ethnic group, which is the basis for implementing two conservation goals and promoting cultural heritage for the goal of sustainable socio-economic development. If the cultural heritage is separated from the values of contemporary life, it is difficult to

successfully achieve the goal of preserving ethnic culture.

4. Promoting the value of ethnic culture in service of sustainable socio-economic development

a) Perseverance of sustainable development goals

In general, sustainable development is the development that ensures the development needs of the current society without damaging the development potential of future generations; is a close and harmonious connection between economic growth, cultural development, social justice, and environmental protection; using all available resources of society in a rational, effective and responsible manner, not only for the current development but also for future generations.

The general trend of today's world is developing in association with the preservation and promotion of cultural values, both tangible and intangible, towards the community which is the cultural subject living inside the heritage area, and the community which is the visitors of the heritage site. Cultural diversity and biodiversity of ethnic minorities in Ha Giang must be fully and comprehensively identified for sustainable development. Ha Giang's multi-ethnic cultural values must be determined as an organic part of socio-economic development and new rural construction. The preservation and development of ethnic cultures in Ha Giang must not be hindered. Instead, it must create a driving force for development.

In sustainable development, unlike cultural heritage conservation, biodiversity conservation is not the intact preservation. It

is the combination of both conservation and sustainable development. For Ha Giang, in the context of changing ecosystems, it is necessary to study and implement measures to limit the decline or disappearance of some ecological regions such as terraced fields in Hoang Su Phi and Xin Man; stone plateaus in Dong Van, Meo Vac, Quan Ba, and Yen Minh; a valley of water fields in Vi Xuyen, Bac Quang, etc. Accompanying and closely associating with each of these natural ecosystems is the diverse ethnic and cultural ecosystems - which were created from the adaptive survival of ethnic groups in the natural ecosystem. Therefore, in the development policy, it is necessary to formulate an interdisciplinary coordination mechanism and apply modern science and technology in management, as well as uphold the principle of socio-economic development with the ultimate goal is the preservation of local cultural and biological diversity.

In Ha Giang, there have been some “conflicts” between conservation and development. Many constructions and projects (such as the “Ma Pi Leng Panorama” project for tourism in Ma Pi Leng mountain landscape heritage area; the project of lift construction for sightseeing and visiting Don Cao relic, located inside Dong Van district old town market; the construction of Lung Cu eco-cultural and spiritual tourism area, etc.) was built without adequate research and proper identification of natural and literary values in the region, also could not satisfactorily address development goals associated with conservation. It should be affirmed that, if these values are compromised or lost,

the sustainable development goals of the projects will be difficult to achieve.

b) Developing models of conservation and promoting sustainable cultural values

The preservation and promotion of ethnic cultural heritages for socio-economic development in Ha Giang focus on tourism development and local people’s livelihoods, thus the model of ethnic cultural villages has been under construction. Since 2010, Ha Giang has set a requirement to build two to three cultural tourism villages in each district, associated with protecting the natural landscape; planned and step by step invested in building spots for entertainment and community activities; focused on vocational training to create products for tourists (Resolution of the 15th Party Congress of Ha Giang Province (2010-2015)).

In the Program No. 29-CTr/TU dated July 24, 2017 of the Standing Committee of the Provincial Party Committee on the implementation of Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW of January 16, 2017 of the Politburo on developing tourism into a spearhead economy, Ha Giang province has been planning tourist areas, tourist clusters in detailed, as well as devising a project to develop community-based tourism and building typical cultural villages into tourist villages. To this end, up to now, Ha Giang has more than 50 community cultural and tourism villages that have been built. The villages that have started tourism activities are mostly the villages of the ethnic groups of the Dao, Tay, Hmong, and some other ethnic minorities, attracting a significant number of domestic and foreign tourists for visiting

and staying. For example, the community-based cultural and tourism village of Tha, Tien Thang, Ban Tuy (Ha Giang city), Phin Ho (Hoang Su Phi district), Sang Pa A (Meo Vac district), Nam Dam (Quan Ba district), Khiem (Bac Quang district), My Bac (Quang Binh district), Na Rang (Xin Man district), Ban Lan (Bac Me district), Lung Cam Tren (Dong Van district), Buc Ban (Yen Minh district), etc.

However, up to now, Ha Giang has not had a model of conservation and promotion of traditional cultural values for socio-economic development to achieve both conservation and sustainable development goals. Models of cultural villages, community cultural houses, etc. were built massively according to the movement in many localities in the province. The major drawback of these models is the lack of research and assessment to identify cultural values, the integrated values that need to be reserved, and the sustainable development of the villages, not yet linking the traditional values to the live contemporary to ensure adaptation. There is a trend of freezing, ossifying traditional culture, turning villages into museums, turning village communities into traditional cultural performers. The participation of the community in the cultural villages is uneven, only a few households preserve the traditional culture and earn a living by welcoming tourists in the form of homestay business, while the majority of other households are indifferent and unresponsive. Therefore, in traditional villages, traditional architecture, landscapes, and activities are still losing, partly because the villagers cannot make a living from their cultural capital.

c) Socialization of conservation and promotion of ethnic cultural values

The socialization of cultural heritages conservation activities is not merely aimed at mobilizing financial contributions from the people, but primarily on the mobilization of all organizations and individuals in the society who both directly participate and directly enjoy the achievements of those activities. With that in mind, the socialization of activities to preserve ethnic cultural heritages in Ha Giang is understood as building a community of people of all strata voluntarily involve in creating and improving the wholesome and favourable cultural, economic and social environment for economic development, as well as cultural heritage conservation activities. Thereby, Ha Giang can attract resources, economic sectors, domestic and foreign organizations and individuals to participate in the sustainable conservation of cultural heritage treasures of ethnic groups residing in the province.

Socialization of cultural heritages conservation activities in Ha Giang should first aim to the most important target, which are the people in the localities. The local community owning the heritage, if honored, will proactively and actively organize activities to preserve its local heritage. Ha Giang has been very successful in building a model of the "Folk Art Association" in almost all villages. Thanks to these associations, many cultural values have been restored, and many practices that are no longer suitable for the present life have been removed unanimously by the people. Centers and clubs of folk and ethnic culture activities such as singing, folk dancing,

traditional crafting, etc. are restored and operated independently by the resources and capabilities of the literary subjects and dedicated people, not just relying on financial support from the State. The material and spiritual contribution of the local people will bring practical benefits to the work of preserving cultural heritage, and at the same time, their own lives will also be improved.

To socialize the cultural preservation and development of ethnic groups, Ha Giang needs to assign the community to preserve and gradually restore both the existing and lost cultural values. The province should strengthen methodological guidance and supervise the process of community participation in the conservation of cultural heritage, to ensure that cultural values are preserved and restored. Some traditional handicrafts must be carefully studied in the process of conservation and development, also be supported to develop and connect with the heritage chains that need to be preserved, therefore creating value chains and product chains for tourism service.

For the communities living in areas of natural heritage sites such as the case of the Global Geopark or the Dong Van Rock Plateau, etc., besides creating favourable conditions and encouraging them to apply their traditionally accumulated experiences and knowledge in protecting and exploiting natural resources, there is a need to have a benefit-sharing mechanism with the community from conserving and exploiting the resources, facilitate them to participate in biodiversity development activities, and offer steady employment for them.

Besides, it is also necessary to have appropriate mechanisms and policies to increase investment for the preservation of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities from villages. There should be preferential policies for enterprises that actively contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage of ethnic groups in the province (tax exemption and reduction, measures to support the production and sale of products, brand/image promotion, etc.). Especially, the action of encouragement, rewarding, and honouring the organizations and individuals who are enthusiastic in contributing intellect and funding for the cultural heritage conservation should be well-performed and occurred regularly.

Conclusion

Studying, identifying and clarifying the values of cultural heritages of ethnic groups in Ha Giang province are extremely important for preserving and promoting the value of cultural heritage in the cultural and social life of Ha Giang in the present and the future. Identifying the right values of culture will help adequately address the relationship between conservation and development. In the development process, Ha Giang considers cultural heritages of ethnic groups as a resource for sustainable socio-economic development; this is a great potential for developing tourism economy and creating livelihoods for the local communities who own heritages. Ethnic cultural ecology is closely related to the natural ecology in which they are residing. Therefore, in developing tourism economy, Ha Giang needs to pay special attention to cultural and ecological environment factors (including natural, cultural, and

social environment) and the protection and preservation of the original factors that make up the core values of the cultural heritage of the ethnic groups. Considering that cultural heritages are tourism resources, they must be protected and preserved so that the heritages are sustainable resources, therefore it is necessary to make rational use of profits from tourism to protect the heritages.

The goal of heritage conservation should be determined to meet the needs of wholesome cultural activities of the general public in society. With that in mind, the cultural heritages should be brought back to the community and serve the needs of

the people themselves, because they are the subjects of creation, protection and heritage transmission to the next generations □

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