

## **Reflection on Completion and Handover Ceremony of Mingde Jundi Teacher Dormitory**

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**Wong Wai Yu  
BA(Literary Studies)&LLB V**

It has always been my wish to visit Guangxi for its renowned natural landscape. Project Mingde allowed me to do something meaningful as well as making my dream come true. The Jundi Building was completed to solve the problem of lacking a proper teacher dormitory in Daping Primary School. We were there to assist and witness the handover ceremony, and do some scoping activities for further project development.

The first thing that concerned me during the trip was the infrastructure. The roads were generally narrow and bending, adjacent to very steep slopes. On the 30th September, it was raining. We saw many traces of landslides, half cleaned up or just left on the road. Some sections have collapsed underneath, causing huge danger to road users. Repair work was in progress, with excavators sometimes blocking the road. Or when the road was narrower than normal, drivers of one direction had to go back and wait for the other side to pass first to avoid collision. They seemed quite experienced and used to it, but I really got nervous when vehicles appeared right after the turnings. It might take a very long time, great costs and manpower to widen and consolidate the roads, or to take landslide precautions, but I think it is necessary and worthwhile. For a place to prosper, infrastructure and education are of paramount importance.

The second thing would be the people we met at Daping Primary School. You can feel the passion of the Dong people as they spent their National Day holiday with us, celebrating the completion. It was almost like a festival (well, it really was) at the ceremony. I wish we had more time chatting with the local people, talking about their folk songs and culture. In particular, I was interested in their traditional costumes, dances and the musical instrument lusheng. I have never heard of it before.

If we have more arts or social sciences students going to Daping or other places in the future, I think they can edit a chorography or gazetteer (方志) of the specific region. They may focus on the Dong traditions, eg their fondness of expressing emotions and thoughts by folk songs (lyrics and melodies), the use of lusheng (the structure of a band, occasions it is played, the scores, etc), the traditional costumes (patterns and implications), legends (myths, natural gods worships) and folk stories, etc. I remember once we were at a grocery near Wangdong, the shopkeeper chitchatted with us. She said she never heard of Daping. I was a bit surprised and thought that these minority cultures were so hidden in deep mountains, so unnoticed and could easily fade away in time, if nothing was done to preserve them. Local people might not be as conscious of the value of their culture as we outsiders are. I would recommend a chorographic study of a chosen village in future trips.