Representation of Tusi Heritage Environment—The Archaeological Site of Laosicheng Tusi Domain

The design approaches to interpreting and presenting the site of Laosicheng Tusi Domain

As a particular type of cultural landscape, the archaeological landscape is unique in nature as it provides extensive outdoor on-site experience, and closer contact between people and the site, complementarily to the indoor exhibition at the museum. The design approaches to interpreting and presenting the site are often limited from the conservation point of view, but we seek for possibilities and develop design strategies in order to deliver a dynamic experience, in which authenticity and integrity of the site and its landscape setting will be best preserved.
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**BACKGROUND**

Tusi Sites: Located in the mountainous areas of south-west China, this property encompasses remains of several tribal domains whose chieftains were appointed by the central government as “Tusi”, hereditary rulers from the 13th to the early 20th century. The Tusi system arose from the ethnic minorities’ dynamic systems of government dating back to the 3rd century BCE. Its purpose was to unify national administration, while allowing ethnic minorities to retain their customs and way of life. The sites of Laosicheng, Tingya, and Helingtun Fortresses that make up the site bear exceptional testimony to this form of governance, which derived from the Chinese civilization of the Yuan and Ming periods.

The Site of Laosicheng Tusi Domain lies on the banks of Linge River, 15km east of Yangzhun County of Tuju and Miao Autonomous Prefecture in western Huanan Province. In the lower mountainous areas of the middle Huling Mountains in the east of Yun-Gui plateau. The site represents the Peng Clan Tusi, one of the earliest established Tusi of Yuan Dynasty, and it also represents Tuju People, the main ethnic group who have settled in this area from time immemorial. The site was initially constructed in the fifth year of Shaoxing period (1135) of Southern Song Dynasty, and subsequently developed large-scale construction since the sixth year of Hongwu period (1373) of Ming Dynasty, until it was left abandoned in the second year of Yongle period (1402) of Ming Dynasty. For almost 600 years, it served as the political, economic, military and cultural centre of this region.

**DESIGN STRATEGIES**

**Core Exhibition Area**

- Information design: divide complicated information into layers; incorporate original archaeological drawings/photos records, regional text from historical written records, and artistic illustration; avoid long descriptive text.
- Facility design: small, portable, self-assemble, local aesthetic.

**Presenting the archaeological remains**

- Zone highlight: the settlement pattern and overall layout by preserving the overlapped system of boundary walls, roads, drainage, etc.
- Highlight: the variety of archaeological remains.
- Plan: connect these highlights in a sensible way to allow dynamic interpretation.
- Adopt appropriate facilities depending on the interpretation objectives with minimum intervention.

**Bring the site to life - interpretative system**

- Interpret the historic landscape setting (visiting key features in terms of time and space from field investigation and historical written records).
- Identify key features: Settlements of ethnic minorities in mountainous areas; key features of buildings, vegetation, roads, and access; river and stream.
- Enhance the disturbed landscape setting: Identify and remove the incoherent features, especially those visible from along the main roads of access.
- Emphasize visitor experience with focus and variety: highlight the key features: scenic point of entrance area, riverside walk, dock, villagers.

**Museum Area**

- Integrating the new landscape and architecture with its natural surroundings.
- Making use of the natural topography.
- Using local materials.
- Selecting local plants.
- Getting back to nature.

**Integrating the new landscape and architecture with its natural surroundings**

- Design objectives: learn from the local construction methods of Laosicheng Tusi Domain, focus on natural landscape, and minimizing artificial works. Restore the disturbed area after the museum construction to be former natural sites.

**Integrating the new landscape and architecture with its natural surroundings**

- Design objectives: provide interpretation that is simple and meaningful, make the value of the site can be easily communicated.