

## Ushering Villagers to Take on a Leading Role

In what “mysterious way” did Prof. Cong change the village and its people? To explore this question, the couple went to Gejia Village for seven times and met Prof. Cong there.

“The ‘mysterious way’ is to make the villagers the protagonist of rural revitalization. They’re the backbone of designing. The artists’ designs only serve as a reference. In this way, the villagers will have endless creativity when the artists’ work ends,” said Prof. Cong to this Polish couple. Countryside should not work as a show for artists, but an energy source for artists to inspire villagers!

Prof. Cong translated his words into action. At his suggestion, the villagers here became fully engaged in the art design work. For several times, these local residents had taken issue with Prof. Cong on his team’s design. These responses excited Prof. Cong as, in his eyes, the villagers had already turned into the hero of this art-based rural revitalization! In order to provoke their sense of pride, 130 rural construction artists were named during an activity organized by him.

“Prof. Cong had never given big words to them; instead, he encouraged the villagers to participate in rural construction. This stimulated their creativity of rural revitalization and willingness to collaborate with their neighbors,” Magdalena said with admiration. “The village becomes a home for everyone so a more harmonious neighborhood could be forged. Prof. Cong Zhiqiang made this art form function as an engine of collaboration, and it’s worth learning for the whole world.”

In Gejia Village, art has indeed developed into a driving force of collaboration. Here, four families formerly in constant conflict with one another nowadays transformed the cluttered “disputed land” into a clean “four gentlemen’s courtyard”.

“To be human is to have and know your place.” According to a sentence by Canadian geographer Edward Reiph, Artur expounded his own point of view that as long as one wants to get fully involved in your own space of living, he should become an active participant; and only in this way can immense creativity and happiness can be obtained.

Magdalena and Artur’s interpretation of “villagers’ participation” gives Prof. Cong more confidence. He said, “There are over 2.6 million villages across China. External assistance is far from enough. The goal of rural revitalization can only be achieved by stimulating villagers to participate in rural construction and become masters of their villages.”



*Mrs. Magdalena (left 3) and Mr. Artur (left 2) chatted with a woman of Bouyei nationality in Dingwang Village in November.*

## Igniting Villagers’ Passion for Entrepreneurship

In this sharing session, Magdalena and her husband also recounted their perception of visiting a Western Chinese village.

Ninghai County of Zhejiang Province provides pairing assistance to Qinglong County of Guizhou Province. Thirteen artists involved in the rural revitalization of Gejia Village therefore traveled to Dingwang Village, Qinglong County, for the transformation of this Guizhou village. Its villagers were shown videos about Gejia Village’s art-based rural revitalization and sparked with great enthusiasm. Several scenic spots were built there, like “Future Academy”, “Gejia Yard” and “Dream Weaving Workshop”. Dingwang Village has nowadays become a magnet for tourists.

Upon their arrival at Dingwang Village on November 12th, Magdalena and her husband were deeply impressed by how this art-based revitalization has transformed the remote Guizhou village and how it has sparked the villagers’ entrepreneurial passion.

Mr. Luo Yunquan, a local fellow in Dingwang Village, has renovated his house and turned it into a B&B called “Buyi Nongqing” (i.e. Deep Affection of Bouyei Nationality). “I opened the B&B not only to earn money for myself, but also to help other villagers to get rich.” As Mr. Luo said, he had mobilized several villagers good at cooking to embark on agritainment in the village and others able to dye to set up a dye house for the creation of a tourism industry chain.

It is the very trip to Dingwang Village that makes this Polish couple realize the significance of industrial development in changing the destiny

of villages, especially for those underdeveloped ones in Western China. On their visit to Dingwang Village, they found in many families, husbands were working in the urban areas while wives were left behind to take care of their children.

“If people are leaving villages for work in a city, villages would no longer mean a draw to them.” In the belief of Magdalena, villages are the wealth of human beings, and rural revitalization is of great significance to protecting the sustainable development of villages. Otherwise, a village will become deserted as a growing number of villagers are moving to the city with their whole family.

What makes Magdalena feel blessing is that the rural construction artists of Gejia Village have not only kindled Dingwang people’s entrepreneurial passion, but also taught them how to start their own businesses. On August 30th, salesgirls of the “Dream Weaving Workshop” in this Guizhou village tried live-streaming. More than 120,000 people had watched the live broadcast, and the sales volume exceeded 50,000 RMB yuan.



*Mrs. Magdalena walked through a landmark of Chengyang Village in December.*