

Living Environment of a Dam Induced Resettlement Village in Vietnam

-A case study on an ethnic minority in Aden village, Quang Nam province-

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1. Research Background and Objective

Vietnam contains 54 ethnic groups, with the Kinh people as the majority. Housing culture of the ethnic minorities and the majority population has great differences. Most ethnic minorities in highlands live in stilt houses with thatched-roofs, which are constructed by kinsmen and neighbours entirely of locally available materials. On the other hand, the majority, Kinh people live in grounded houses. Stilt houses and grounded houses have great difference such as their seating style and space uses. One of these highlanders, the Katu people, who traditionally lived in stilt houses with thatched-roofs has undergone changed living environment around 1970s. Recently, economic development has led to an increase of electricity demands and many dams have been developed. In 2006, the Katu people in their residential area in the central highland faced relocation due to the A Vuong dam construction. The people were relocated to new settlements where they were compensated with a number of uniform houses. How are these houses affecting their lives? Aden village is chosen as a case study and the villagers' adaptation to the newly given environment are investigated.

2. Research Methods

Fieldwork was conducted in the target site of Aden village. First, the village conditions were studied, measurement survey was conducted for the creation of the base map of the village. Through the interview survey that was conducted with selected ten households, the overview of the basic information of the households as well as the updates on building modifications, reasons for modification and uses after the modification were investigated. This survey was a part of the project of "Evaluating Impacts and Community Resilience of Dam-displaced Indigenous Villages in Central Vietnam" engaged by the professors in the Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, where this study focuses on the housing environment aspect.

3. Research Findings and Conclusions

Although residents requested Kinh style houses for their compensation, the compensation house was constructed on 2m high stilts with reinforced concrete pillar and brick wall. The compensation house is composed of a main house and a sub house, which has three rooms, one toilet, one shower room, and one kitchen. Since the compensation house has the problem of cultural differences and function, within six years after the resettlement, residents have made various improvements on the houses. The same housing style with the one in the previous village, stilt house and grounded house were additionally constructed, and the compensation house itself was modified and living space was created. These highly dense conditions due to the large number of houses create new problems for the village. Newly constructed houses are already double of original number of houses compensated.

According to the findings from 10 surveyed households, space usage of the houses varies among generations even before the resettlement. Kitchen, dining and bed spaces of residents above 40 years of age were within one room in the stilt house, whereas young people separate the bed spaces from kitchen and dining spaces. Although only the kitchen is built separately in the compensated house, trend of the space usage is similar to the one before the resettlement after the various modification. While there are residents who prefer to live in traditional houses, one resident who built a modern Kinh style house for his family still live his life in a stilt house. These results show that the residents are living in a familiar living environment in their daily lives, by making several changes in the compensation house and building new houses.