

Preface

Promoting Rural Revitalization through the Conservation of Agricultural Heritage Systems

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The 2nd Conference of the East Asia Research Association for Agricultural Heritage Systems (ERAHS), on the theme of “Rural Revitalization in Marginal Areas: Biodiversity and Traditional Agriculture”, was successfully held in Sado City, Japan from June 22nd to 26th, 2015, which involved more than 120 participants including researchers, government officials, entrepreneurs and journalists from China, Japan, Korea and the Philippines. This conference was organized by ERAHS and Sado City and co-organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations University (UNU), Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research of Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS-IGSNRR), Korea Rural Heritage Association (KRHA), Japanese GIAHS Network (J-GIAHS) and Niigata Prefecture. It was also supported by Japan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF).

After the opening ceremony, Dr. Mbuli Charles Boliko (Director of Liaison Office in Japan, FAO), Mr. Kazuhiko Takeuchi (Senior Vice-Rector of UNU), Mr. Kentaro Morita (Assistant Director of Rural Environment Division, Rural Development Bureau, MAFF, Japan), Mr. Qingwen Min (Professor of CAS-IGSNRR, China), Mr. Won-Keun Yoon (Professor of Hyupsung University, Korea) and Mr. Koji Nakamura (Professor of Kanazawa University, Japan) gave keynote addresses and presentations, respectively, on further planning for the GIAHS initiative, traditional agriculture and sustainable development, GIAHS promotion activities in Japan, conservation of agricultural heritage systems in China, development of agriculture and fisheries heritage systems in Korea and human capacity building through involvement with GIAHS.

Through development and progress in the past ten years, GIAHS have become an influential international project. As Dr. Mbuli Charles Boliko mentioned, the GIAHS project has played a highly positive role in improving the status of women, increasing economic productivity and promoting rural revitalization in marginal areas. Since GIAHS was endorsed as a corporate programme in 2015, FAO will mainly focus on the GIAHS standardized management, capacity building for heritage stakeholders and the establishment of the platform for sharing GIAHS conservation experiences in the future.

During the conference, 42 experts and government officials have given oral and poster presentations, introducing progress and perspectives of GIAHS in China, Japan and Korea. Research on multiple values evaluation, community supported agriculture, agricultural heritage tourism, traditional ecological knowledge, conservation and management mechanisms, typical success stories and general introduction of GIAHS sites and some candidate sites in the three countries have been reported in the conference. An exhibition of GIAHS conservation and agricultural products was also held.

This conference provided a platform for research and experience exchange on agricultural heritage systems conservation and showed clear trends and features as follows:

1) Multi-disciplinary research. Speeches, presentations, posters and papers in the conference indicate that agricultural heritage conservation has attracted increasing attention from many different areas of study. Researchers who have focused on agricultural heritages are from multi-disciplines including history, ecology, economy, policy, tourism, customs, ethnology and anthropology.

2) Multi-sectors involvement. Many postgraduates choose agricultural heritages as their topic of study in universities and institutes, and there are many opportunities for them to learn the topic, like exchange programmes, forums and workshops. An example is the Noto’s Satoyama Satoumi training course which is held in both Kanazawa University (Japan) and Philippines University to help the young generation. With the help of the ERAHS platform, China, Japan and Korea have initiated research cooperation on agricultural heritage conservation by sharing their advanced technologies and successful

experiences, thus facilitating further studies on agricultural heritage conservation in East Asia.

3) Comparative study. There are a total of 18 GIAHS sites in China, Japan and Korea by the end of June, 2105, including five rice culture systems, three tea planting systems, several rice terraced systems and others. Therefore, researchers from the three countries make comparisons by focusing on specific agricultural heritage systems. These studies can also promote further research on the conservation of agriculture heritage system, and provide strong scientific support and successful experiments for the vast number of similar traditional agricultural heritage systems.

4) Multi-stakeholder process. Agricultural heritage conservation should not only be the task for the local administrators, neither be the research project for experts; but other stakeholders, including local communities, farmers, entrepreneurs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), should also actively participate in it. Many practices for conserving agriculture heritage systems and promoting rural revitalization have been reported, including more attention from local governments, the support and guidance from experts, participation from local business enterprises, as well as communities and volunteers.

All papers in this issue are based on the submissions to this conference and reflect on research progress in the three countries:

1) Examination of the role of traditional knowledge. Niles and Roth demonstrated that GIAHS are of great potential relevance to contemporary society-environment challenges, rather than as relics of past 'traditional' agriculture, by examining the role of human knowledge within the continuous cultural and ecological evolution of GIAHS. Li et al. confirmed the important role that traditional ecological knowledge plays in maintaining stability of the Hani rice terraces system and realizing the efficient use of water resource, through analyzing the knowledge of water, forest resource, terraced fields management. Qiu et al. investigated the utilization and management of small irrigation ponds in Noto Island, Japan and found that the traditional management of pond water use largely contributes to mitigate the harvest loss from natural disasters such as drought in the face of extreme climate.

2) Evaluation of important ecological services. Kusumoto and Inagaki investigated the flora in Chagusaba, Japan and environmental factors to affect the number of native species and found that land modification had an especially significant effect on the diversity of native plants. Park and Oh found that the maintenance and preservation of gudeuljang paddy fields on Cheongsan-do, Korea plays a crucial part in the preservation and maintenance of the biodiversity for vegetation that grows among rocks and in adjacent forest areas. Sun et al. used a material quality assessment method to calculate and analyze the important ecosystem services of Xiajin Yellow River Ancient Mulberry Trees, China and found that, with the benefits from soil and water conservation, soil improvement and other ecosystem service functions, the system structure has become much more stabilized; the ecosystem service functions more diversified and the landscape function status has developed especially well.

3) Formulation of conservation strategies at different levels. Zhang et al. analyzed the economic, ecological, aesthetic, cultural, and social values, as well as the research values, of the Hani Rice Terraces as GIAHS and proposed approaches to maintain and conserve them. Wang and Min analyzed and evaluated the status and problems of agricultural heritage systems in Zhejiang province, China and provided references for their conservation and inheritance that can promote agricultural sustainability and expand agricultural functions. Yiu et al. compared the agricultural heritage conservation schemes of China, Japan and Korea and, in particular, the national programs and their implementation under GIAHS programme.

4) Exploration of dynamic conservation approaches. Lee et al. pointed out that rural eco-museum is a highly valuable tool to help preserve agricultural heritage sites and neighboring areas as well as to enhance community identities and strengthen local economies. Park et al. demonstrated the importance of public-private partnerships and local ordinance systems or comprehensive planning of land use controls for agricultural heritage system sites. Shi et al. proposed agricultural heritage systems as an entry point for balancing the development of urban areas and rural areas, as they can inherit local traditional culture, keep the green and organic agriculture cultivation systems, exploit the distinct landscape tourism, and the likelihood for diversified development.