

Rice Terrace Conservation through Local Community Involvement in Kamiseya, Miyazu City

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1. Introduction

The degradation of Japan's agricultural environment in mountainous areas has become an issue. Rapid economic growth and other changes in society since the 1960s have led to depopulation in such areas, causing abandonment of formerly cultivated areas and endangering the continuation of local agricultural practices. Recently, however, the value of mountainous rice terraces as cultural landscapes has been rediscovered and conservation movements based on interaction between urban and rural communities have been created. The objective of this study was to set up a conservation plan for Kamiseya's rice terraces based on local characteristics and the views of the local community from the viewpoint of a revitalization of the area.

2. Research site and Method

This study looked at the rice terrace landscape of Kamiseya, Miyazu City, one of the most distinctive rice terrace landscapes in Kyoto Prefecture. Currently, the hamlet counts 14 households. Most residents are over seventy. Rice cultivation by non-residents and rice farming events by an NPO are organized.

Method: 1. Determine local rice terrace landscape characteristics such as distribution, location and ownership: Interview with 9 household members, field studies, literature research, analysis of aerial photos. 2. Clarify community views on future conservation: Interviews with inhabitants, the NPO, commercial units and governmental institutions (September 2005-December 2006). 3. Determine views of 97 visitors to Kamiseya by questionnaire (July-November 2006).

3. Results and Discussions

Since the 1960s, abandonment of rice terraces in Kamiseya has rapidly increased. Reasons include the mass exodus after the big snow in 1963, rapid economic growth with new job

opportunities in fields other than agriculture (Nishijin weaving industry, local forestry office), the 1971 rice acreage reduction governmental policy and the falling rice price. While the rice terrace area was 22.5ha in 1975, only 6.1ha were left in 2004. From a topographical viewpoint, continuation of cultivation was favored in low elevation areas and in places close to settlements with easy access to terraces and water supply. Regarding management, 44% of the terraces were cultivated by tenants and 46% by farmers who were owners. Both groups showed a low interest in continuing cultivation and favored leaving fields in the care of outsiders. Regarding why they had kept cultivating terraces, residents mentioned the pleasure and health benefits of rice cultivation. As for terraces they would not be able to cultivate in the future, they favored renting fields to outsiders rather than being helped directly. Visitors mentioned the benefits of learning traditional rice farming techniques while being refreshed, contributing to environment conservation and having contact with rural residents, but stated a lack of time and difficult access as negative factors. The NPO, whose main objective was the conservation of *satoyama* (cultural landscape), considered rice terrace preservation as one of its key activities and organized rice farming events to raise the interest of the public.

Judging from these results, sustained cooperation between all parties is essential to make the conservation plan work. Increased cooperative efforts by commercial units and the NPO will be necessary to guarantee a productive life foundation for inhabitants. Moreover, it became obvious that in order to accomplish an effective plan 1. the NPO must act systematically 2. the objectives of the NPO and the inhabitants must be synchronized 3. factors that inhibit smooth participation by visitors must be eliminated 4. the charm and appeal of the area must be enhanced.