

Fostering Harmonious Coexistence of Man and Nature through Conserving Eco-agricultural Practices

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Nature is the home for human survival and development. The ideal state of the planet is the harmonious relationship between man and nature. For thousands of years, the holistic concept of ancient Chinese philosophy, i.e., theory of harmony, has influenced Chinese thoughts and formed the roots of China's traditional eco-agricultural practices. Some of the ingenious agricultural systems were listed as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) sites by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. On the World Environment Day of 2021, Center for Natural and Cultural Heritage (CNACH) of the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research (IGSNRR), the Chinese Academy of Sciences held a forum of review and prospect to celebrate its 15th anniversary in IGSNRR, reflecting the theme 'Harmonious Coexistence for Man and Nature' of this year. More than 180 participants from governments, research institutes and universities attended the meeting. Mr. Parviz Koohafkan, president of the World Agricultural Heritage Foundation and Mr. Yoshihide Endo, coordinator of the GIAHS, sent their video congratulations, respectively.

Professor Min Qingwen, Deputy Director of the research center had a retrospect of the history of the CNACH and reported the progress of discovering, protecting, utilizing and inheriting the GIAHS and China Nationally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (China-NIAHS), which are remarkable land use systems and landscapes with significantly bio-cultural diversity evolving from the co-adaptation of a community to ensure sustainable development. As one of the first responders and participants of GIAHS initiative, China is also the most successful practitioner and principal contributor. For example, China's GIAHS sites have reached 15, accounting for nearly a quarter of the total sites in the world, ranking first among all the countries. Apart from this, China has been taking the leading role in exploring and evaluation, comprehensively researching, enacting national-level administrative rules and regulations, and implementing monitoring and assessment and so on.

The government of Qingtian County, Zhejiang Province, signed a cooperative letter of agreement with CNACH and shared the experiences of green development in the first GIAHS pilot site with Rice-Fish culture system for revitalization of rural development and construction of beautiful China. Other representatives from GIAHS/China-NIAHS sites also showcased their efforts to protect the heritages and use biodiversity for delivering multifunctional ecosystem services. More and more Important Agricultural Heritage Systems have been involved in the responsibilities for fostering the harmony between man and nature and contribute to green, low-carbon development. However, Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, whose cultures are in harmony with nature, are facing the threat of loss in a changing climate and globalization context. Nevertheless, learning from indigenous knowledge, traditional systems of practices and thinking of nature-based solutions can help us resolve the massive environmental issues and support sustainable development goals, as well as facilitate present-day ecological civilization construction.

Prof. Li Wenhua, Academician of Chinese Academy of Engineering and Director of CNACH, summarized that research on Agricultural Heritage Systems should not be satisfied with the discovery of innovative sites, but further excavate their cultural souls. These heritage systems will provide some toolboxes for China's current agricultural development. Many examples have shown that the experiences and lessons from agro-forestry, eco-agriculture and non-timber forest economy were drawn from these traditional agricultural systems. What are the roots and souls of Agricultural Heritage Systems? Where are their most precious treasure-troves? And how can we disseminate wisdom models to other places and make use of indigenous knowledge to solve the practical problems in agricultural development? etc. He also stressed the importance to learning the essence of culture from history. China has abundant legacies and ecological wisdom to provide diverse paths for its agricultural development.



Fig. 1 Celebration of the 15th anniversary of the Center for Natural and Cultural Heritage (provided by CNACH)