

# From European Vineyards to Asian Rice Terraces : Food Cultural Landscapes and the Valorization of Living Gastronomical Heritage

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雑誌名	Senri Ethnological Studies
巻	100
ページ	213-221
発行年	2019-03-12
URL	<a href="http://doi.org/10.15021/00009396">http://doi.org/10.15021/00009396</a>

## From European Vineyards to Asian Rice Terraces: Food Cultural Landscapes and the Valorization of Living Gastronomical Heritage

饮食文化景观：活态美食遗产的可持续性发展，从欧洲葡萄园到亚洲梯田的考察

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### ABSTRACT

In light of the current food crises affecting the world, the need arises to reflect upon the damaging effects of industrial food production, and to take steps to protect more sustainable systems. Organizations like UNESCO might do well to consider living landscapes that provide human sustenance as World Heritage Sites. The term *food cultural landscapes* can be defined (to complement the current UNESCO definition of *cultural landscapes*) as ‘*primarily food-producing geographical areas or properties that represent the combined work of nature and humankind*’. Emphasizing the gastro-cultural aspects of these areas lends importance to how these places have nourished people for generations. Based on previously-inscribed food-oriented cultural landscapes like the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, other possible food cultural landscapes are suggested. Because inclusion of a site in the World Heritage List tends to both facilitate protection and generate interest, doing so may ensure the continued existence of these valuable but threatened food-producing areas.

### 摘要

鉴于目前困扰世界的粮食危机，我们有必要反思工业化粮食生产的破坏性影响，并采取行动保护更具持续性的系统。比如，教科文组织这样的机构可以很好地考虑将那些提供人类赖以生存的景观作为世界遗产地。饮食文化景观的概念可以这样被定义（补充当前教科文组织对文化景观的定义）：粮食生产的主要地区或物产（自然和人类相结合的代表性产物）。

通过强调这些地区的“美食文化”，我们将注意到这些地方养育后代的方式。从前食物导向的文化景观如菲律宾科迪勒拉斯的水稻梯田开始，其他类型的饮食文化景观也可能被提出。由于列入世界遗产名录往往既有利于保护，又能引起人们对这些场所的兴趣，这些有价值但也受到威胁的粮食产区可能会在某种程度上继续存在下去。

## INTRODUCTION

The recent spate of food crises around the world, primarily in the global south, has forced people to reflect on the sustainability of current food practices. Industrial agriculture, long touted as the solution to world hunger, has been shown to be destructive and problematic. Closer inspection of the Green Revolution, for example, reveals that high-yielding crop varieties were dependent on high amounts of fertilizer and pesticide inputs, which was highly damaging to local farming ecosystems. Further implementation of production-oriented agriculture resulted in great reduction of food biodiversity, poisoning of lands, and the continuing disappearance of traditional foodways (Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009). To take advantage of economies of scale, small landholdings are slowly consolidated into large monocrop plantations, leaving small farmers landless and disenfranchised. Additionally, the gradual homogenization of food production threatens indigenous agricultural, food transformation, culinary, and eating practices, which may be predicted to disappear in the very near future.

In light of these alarming developments, how can UNESCO contribute to solving the world's food problems? This paper suggests extending the current cultural landscape category of the World Heritage Program to include food-oriented cultural landscapes. As such, the world can give greater value to long-established areas in which food is produced, transformed, and consumed in more ecologically sustainable ways. The term 'food cultural landscapes' is suggested for such properties, to emphasize their primarily gastronomic character. Inscription of these places in the World Heritage List (WHL) may not only facilitate protection and conservation initiatives, but also enlighten people as to how food can be produced with the least amount of environmental destruction.

## GASTRONOMY AND WORLD HERITAGE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

### 1. UNESCO and Food-oriented Landscapes

Although the UNESCO WHL features great examples of what can be called food cultural landscapes, the gastronomical aspects of these areas are not fully discussed or appreciated. For example, the World Heritage Convention (WHC; UNESCO 2000) description of the Loire Valley cultural landscape hardly mentions the superb wines or exquisite cuisine of this fabled land. Today, because various food cultures (e.g., Mexican, French, Mediterranean) have recently been inscribed in the UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity, the time is right to acknowledge the settings that gave birth to them.

Another example of a UNESCO-protected food-oriented landscape is the Argan forests of southern Morocco. These areas nurture a unique food culture based on the precious oil laboriously extracted from the almond of the *Argania spinosa* tree. However, independent of the WHL listing, these forests are protected under the more ecology- and biodiversity-oriented Man and Biosphere Program.

Thus, the protective mechanisms are geared more toward the endangered trees, giving less attention to the food culture that surrounds them.

Some food-oriented cultural landscapes, like the Alto Douro region and Pico Island in Portugal, the vineyard landscapes of Piedmont, and the agave areas of Mexico, are best known for alcoholic drinks, which are not basic sustenance needs. Nevertheless, UNESCO has chosen to protect these areas because they demonstrate how humans have worked with the environment to establish productive and beautiful landscapes.

Given that UNESCO is already protecting gastronomical heritages around the world indirectly through different programs, is it not possible to develop a more coherent plan of action within existing WHC frameworks?

## **2. Too Many European Monuments: The Case for Recognizing (Food) Cultural Landscapes in the UNESCO World Heritage List**

The concept of the cultural landscape has been applied, under various terms, within the discipline of geography since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The term itself was coined by Sauer in the early 1920s (Aplin 2007). Generally, cultural landscapes are defined as ‘the interface between nature and culture, tangible and intangible heritage, biological and cultural diversity’ (Rössler 2006, cited in Taylor 2012). The Cultural Landscape Foundation (2009) has recognized four types of cultural landscape: designed, vernacular, historic, and ethnographic.

Efforts to recognize cultural landscapes began when UNESCO noted the dominance of European monumental edifices in the WHL, resulting in low representation of ancient and complex relationships between indigenous peoples and their environments. An expert group met in France in October 1992 and revised the Operational Guidelines to enable inclusion of cultural landscapes in the list (Fowler 2003). In 1992, UNESCO defined cultural landscapes as properties that ‘uniquely represent the combined work of nature and of man’ (Article 1). UNESCO (2008) also devised four cultural landscape categories: human-made, relict, continuous, and associative. In this vein, food cultural landscapes may be defined as *primarily food-producing areas that uniquely represent the combined work of nature and of humans*. As such, these areas must have a strong association with food production and ‘reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use’ (UNESCO 2008: 96) and sustainable food production. The areas should also feature a vibrant or well-known indigenous food culture.

### **A POSSIBLE EXEMPLAR: THE RICE TERRACES OF THE PHILIPPINE CORDILLERAS**

The Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras can be a good model with regard to forming a food cultural landscape category in the UNESCO WHL. For one, it is probably the most food-oriented cultural landscape in the WHL. It can be considered a multi-internationally designated area, as it is also recognized as a

Globally-Important Agricultural Heritage System by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Because some areas of this World Heritage site are considered *satoyama* (border regions between plains and the foothills of mountain ranges), efforts such as the Ifugao Satoyama Meister Training Program, funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, are involved. Inscription of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras in 1995 was followed only recently by the inscription of other rice terrace cultural landscapes (i.e., Bali, Indonesia in 2012 and Honghe Hani, China in 2013). Much can also be learned from the indigenous food practices in these areas to contribute to developing environmentally sustainable food production.

The Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras were inscribed on the UNESCO WHL in 1995 for the following reasons:

- ‘Criterion (iii) – The rice terraces are a dramatic testimony to a community’s sustainable and primarily communal system of rice production, based on harvesting water from the forest clad mountain tops and creating stone terraces and ponds, a system that has survived for two millennia’.
- ‘Criterion (iv) – The rice terraces are a memorial to the history and labour of more than a thousand generations of small-scale farmers who, working together as a community, have created a landscape based on a delicate and sustainable use of water resources’.
- ‘Criterion (v) – The rice terraces are an outstanding example of land-use resulting from a harmonious interaction between people and their environment which has produced a steep terraced landscape of great aesthetic beauty, now vulnerable to social and economic changes’ (UNESCO 1995).

Notably, Criterion (iii) explicitly states the rice production function of the Terraces, making it clear that the area is valued more as a landscape that sustains people than a monument for aesthetic appreciation. It is an enduring landscape, evolved over several centuries of painstaking manual work by the several ethnic groups that reside on the steep mountain slopes. However, the inscription makes no detailed mention of the large number of rice varieties bred by the Cordillera people through special modes of seed selection. Domoguen (2011) reports that at least 300 heirloom rice varieties were found in the region a decade ago, but many of these were not recorded in the most recent inventory by the Philippine Department of Agriculture in 2009. True enough, in 2001 the Terraces were placed on the UNESCO List of World Heritages in Danger, a result of factors including destruction of the terraces, abandonment, out-migration, and mismanaged tourism. All these factors have led to reduction in both rice production and rice biodiversity. Whereas villages previously planted several varieties of rice, now increasing numbers of villages are seen to plant only one or two varieties. Batad and Bangaan (both UNESCO-inscribed terrace clusters) are reportedly planting only the *Linnawang* variety. This was compounded by the propagation of higher-

yielding introduced varieties (with equally foreign names), such as the *Taiwan* and *California* rices. The Rice Terraces were removed from the list after over a decade of inclusion.

However, although protection of the cultural landscape of the Terraces is fraught with issues, many opportunities exist to create and implement solutions. Villalon (2012), for example, saw how a top-down, centralized management system was ineffective to protect such a large and culturally diverse landscape. More positive results were observed from a more grassroots, community-based approach. Villalon also emphasized that relating heritage preservation to income generation could lead to greater community participation.

The need to provide economic incentives for heritage preservation is illustrated by the experience of the Batad Kadangyan Ethnic Lodges Project (Macapagal and Bermejo 2015). This project enables the restoration and adaptive reuse of abandoned traditional granary-houses (*b'faluy*) through traditional house-building techniques and customs. When a family asks for assistance to renovate their *b'faluy*, they are given money to buy the necessary materials (grass, rattan strips, etc.). They are then responsible for providing the labour to restore the *b'faluy*, usually through the help of family members. For certain tasks, like assembling the grass roof, more members of the community are recruited through the *changah*, a traditional system of group labour with food and drink as compensation. Once the *b'faluy* is renovated, it may be used once more as a rice granary. Indigenous rituals such as the *Pahang* (a type of housewarming celebration) are also held. Finally, the *b'faluy* is turned into tourist homestay accommodations, managed by the families themselves as part of a cultural tour of the area. Thus, the families may preserve their *b'faluy*, showcase their culture to visitors, and also gain much-needed monetary income. This project has been replicated a few more times with funding from various public and private sources.

A more rice-oriented initiative is being implemented quite successfully by Revitalize Indigenous Cordilleran Entrepreneurs (RICE), Inc., and its American partner company, Eighth Wonder, Inc., through their Cordillera Heirloom Rice Project (CHRP). This project, which involves a network of farmers in the terraced areas of Kalinga, Ifugao, and Mountain Province, has the following vision:

The establishment of a cooperative business that produces and sells the heirloom rice of the high elevation rice terraces; a renewal of social stability through the building of farmers' cooperatives and the skills and capacity building training of the farmers; the implementation of a business model for a vertically integrated, shared-equity rice business, which will give farmers an opportunity to be equal partners with a meaningful stake in the success of the business; the building of an economic enterprise that is environmentally sustainable; the revitalization, maintenance and use of the high-elevation terraces and watershed areas for their historic purposes (Eighth Wonder 2008)

The CHRP business model also follows the heritage-as-income concept, in this case applied to traditional rice varieties. The project assists farmers in planting, milling, and selling their heirloom rice both locally and abroad. Because the farmers are paid premium prices for their produce, they are encouraged to plant more and to continue the ancient rice-growing traditions of the Terraces. The CHRP also manages a terrace restoration project to complement its rice planting activities. But whereas this model has brought about good outcomes for many farmers, others (e.g., Glover and Stone 2018) have critiqued it as another mode of cultural commodification.

Because the Terraces are a living food cultural landscape, efforts have also been made to continue other traditions found there. The Save the Ifugao Terraces Movement (SITMo 2008; Martin, Acabado, and Macapagal in press) has assisted local communities in reviving discontinued harvest customs like the *bakle* (thanksgiving). It has also created rice-cycle tours, through which visitors can participate in terrace agricultural activities like seedling transplanting, ploughing, and restoration of damaged terrace walls. These activities bring tourist money into the area while giving the locals opportunities to continue their traditions. SITMo has been most active in promoting research and education on indigenous knowledge. Its most recent project established an Ifugao heritage centre, located in the town of Kiangan, which serves as a venue for the Department of Education's Indigenous Education Program. SITMo has also assisted government universities in implementing projects funded by the International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative.

When a cultural landscape is valued for its food-producing character, it can also teach others more ecologically sustainable ways to grow food. For example, elderly women who have acted as the seed guardians of generations of Cordilleran families may teach indigenous seed selection and seed-keeping techniques (Santiaguel 2010). Indigenous farmers may teach vernacular terrace engineering and hydraulics, allowing other marginal mountain areas to be developed for upland farming. Additionally, because many rice terraces still practice natural or organic farming, they may be able to train other rice terrace farmers who would like to return to the traditional planting methods.

## **POTENTIAL FOOD CULTURAL LANDSCAPES FOR INCLUSION IN THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST**

Several unique food cultural landscapes around the world serve as good candidates to join those already acknowledged by UNESCO. They have both the strong food culture and the beautiful setting that can be considered a part of the world's living gastronomic heritage.

Prime examples are the *montado-dehesa* areas straddling Portugal and Spain. These marginal, rolling terrains of oak trees gave rise to an enduring peasant cuisine with wild herbs as its hallmark. It is the world's main source of cork for

wine bottling, and also has a traditional vinification culture that employs gigantic Roman jars for fermentation and storage. Most important of all, these are the grazing lands of the black Iberian pig, which eats the acorns of the several ancient oak species that abound in the beautiful landscape. It is from this swine breed that the world-famous Jamón Iberico ham is made. It is also a threatened landscape, currently under consideration as a UNESCO world heritage site.

As Taylor (2012) has noted, Asia is unequally represented in the UNESCO WHL; it is thus appropriate to consider some Asian food cultural landscapes for inclusion. For example, the floating markets of central Thailand (particularly in the Mae Klong River area) should be considered world heritage food cultural landscapes. These are living examples of how humans have worked with nature and subsequently evolved an exquisite and complex gastronomic culture; they are also threatened ways of life. The introduction of roads and land vehicles in these areas has rendered many waterways obsolete. Thus, the markets have moved away from the canals and tributaries and onto other terrestrial areas. UNESCO recognition of these markets would encourage support for the continued practice of these unique markets.

### **CONCLUSION: ARE FOOD CULTURAL LANDSCAPES REDUNDANT AND SUPERFLUOUS?**

Though it could be argued that a separate category for food cultural landscapes would confuse existing WHL definitions, the fact that many of the world's ecologically sustainable food practices must be preserved is incontestable. True, it may seem that generating another set of rules and regulations to govern the naming of food cultural landscapes may require too much time and work; it could appear more strategic and economical to simply nominate these areas under the current cultural landscapes system. However, in this author's opinion, the food-oriented character of these cultural landscapes must be highlighted so that subsequent protection and conservation mechanisms may work to ensure the continued existence of these gastronomic treasures of humankind.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The author would like to acknowledge the generous support of the University of the Philippines Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, which provided an Enhanced Creative Work and Research Grant entitled "Native House Restorations and Rituals Toward Community-Based Tourism in the UNESCO World Heritage Batad Rice Terrace Cultural Landscape" (grant number 2015-02-08, from 2015 to 2016).



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