

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF HONGHE HANI TERRACES IN CHINA

In 2013 the [UNESCO's World Heritage Committee](#) inscribed China's *Cultural Landscape of Honghe Hani Rice Terraces* into the prestigious World Heritage List.

The Honghe Hani Rice Terraces in Southern Yunnan, China, covers 16,603-hectares. These spectacular terraces cascade down the slopes of the towering Ailao Mountains to the banks of the Hong River. The terraces rise by 3,000 steps, forming a magnificent landscape.

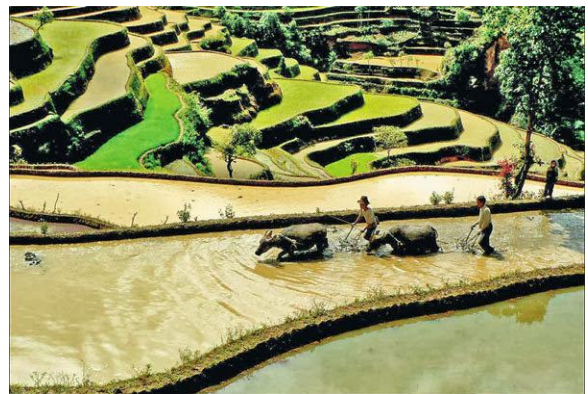
Clefts in the rocks channel the rain, and sandstone beneath the granite mountains traps the water and then later releases it as springs. A complex system of channels has been developed to spread this water around the terraces in and between different valleys. Four trunk canals and 392 branch ditches which in length total 445.83km are maintained communally.

The Hani people first came to the steep mountains some 1,300 years ago and they struggled against the difficult terrain, successfully establishing the terraces, where they grew rice in order to make a living. In recognition of the technology of developing fertile land on rugged mountain slopes the Ming Dynasty emperor granted them the title of *Skillful Sculptor* and their reputation was passed down from generation to generation.

The Hani people have developed a complex system of channels to bring water from the forested mountaintops to these terraces. They have also created an integrated farming system that involves buffalos, cattle, ducks, fish and eel and supports the production of red rice, the area's primary crop. The landscape reflects an integrated four-fold system of forests, water supply, terraces and houses.

82 small villages with between 50 and 100 households are constructed above the terraces just below the mountain top forests. The traditional vernacular buildings have walls built of rammed earth, of adobe bricks or of earth and stone under a tall, hipped, roof thatched with straw that gives the houses a distinctive 'mushroom' shape. At least half the houses in the villages are mainly or partly of traditional materials.

Red rice, the main crop of the terraces is farmed on the basis of a complex, integrated farming and breeding



system within which ducks fertilize the young rice plants, while chickens and pigs contribute fertilizer to more mature plants, water buffalo slough the fields for the next year's planting and snails growing in the water of the terraces consume various pests. The rice growing process is sustained by complex system that strengthens peoples' relationship with the environment, through obligations to both their own lands and to the wider community, and affirm the sacredness of nature.

By virtue of cultural landscape, rich ecological landscape and biodiversity, intricate farming techniques and scientific and rational ecosystem structure, Hani Rice Terraces, secures food livelihood in the mountainous areas with sharp human-land contradictions and represents the culmination of ecological culture after the extensive adaptation to the nature.

Hani Rice Terraces have been recognized in China as National Wetland Park in 2007. In 2010 the Honghe Hani Rice Terraces were also enlisted in the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) Initiative.

As underlined in the official documents related to these important international recognitions, the extraordinary land management system of the rice terraces offers valuable experience for the current and future society to address climate change and ease the crisis of water, soil and forest resources.

The extraordinary beauty of the landscape created by the complex system of natural engineering built by the Hani people, visited and documented by photographers coming from all over the world, shows another important aspect that will be not only preserved, but above all disseminated, as our nowadays world will be a nice place where to live.

To know more

[UNESCO website](#)

[UNESCO gallery](#)

[GIAHS Initiative](#)

[Ministry of Agriculture-China website](#)

[Article in Amusing Planet](#)

