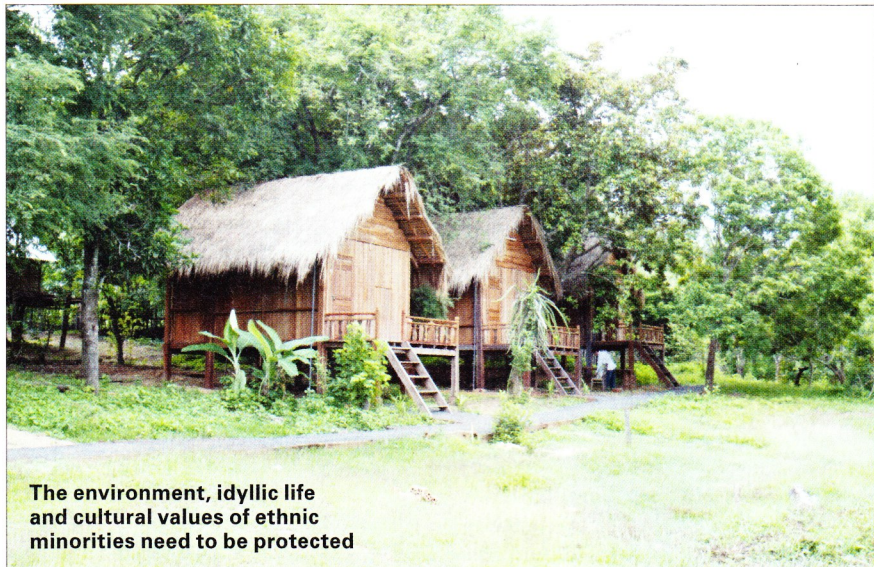


Japanese researchers encourage protection of the environment and cultural value of ethnic people in the Central Highlands



The environment, idyllic life and cultural values of ethnic minorities need to be protected

THANH TUNG

## For An Evergreen Highland

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With the commitment to helping ethnic minorities in Vietnam's highland broaden their knowledge and quickly escape poverty and backwardness, a group of Japanese researchers who are professors and scholars of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies recently came to Vietnam and carried out their research project concerning the knowledge of ethnic minorities in the highland. They penetrated the lives of local people and worked with them for a long period of time.

Dr. Toshihiko Shine, who has been doing research in Vietnam for 18 years, considering Vietnamese his second language and communicating fluently in K'ho ethnic language, has expressed his vehement love for the lands where he had been to during his field trips. Every year, he is eager to leave his luxurious homeland in Japan for remote villages and communes in the highland of Vietnam to socialize with local people and help them improve their poor life. For this project, he has dedicated all his time and energy to convey to local policymakers the message of protecting natural environment, the idyllic life and cultural values.

It would be impossible to understand the unique cultures of mountainous minorities without visiting every nook and cranny of villages here. If you can once enjoy the rice of H're people, its

sweet flavor will linger extensively on your taste. The dark red-colored and solid rice seeds are even more appetizing while we chew and swallow them gradually. That's "steel-plated rice." It is said that this type of rice is grown on the versants (terraced fields) in the absence of fertilizers or insecticides, needs no weeding and only one crop is harvested a year. After being harvested, all the rice stems are stocked in rice sheds for drying naturally. When in use, they are husked and pounded with hands. The output is, therefore, very low — at only 1.6 to 1.7 tons per hectare. However, the quality of the rice is invaluable. According to a report by Bui Thi Thanh Van, director of Culture-Information and Tourism Department of the province, the rate of malnourished kids in this commune is much lower than that of the other regions.

In Hieu Commune, salmon and sturgeons have been raised at the springs with natural pure water. At the moment, there are three ponds and each pond contains around 800 fish. The sale price on the spot is VND200,000/kg for salmon. The same type of fish is sold for VND370,000/kg in HCM City and sturgeons reach VND420,000/kg. The sturgeon spawns are sold at even much higher price, US\$1,500/kg. According to experts, it usually takes five years to get the spawns. It is said that Russian experts have embarked on technical training for the fish breeders in order to buy all the quantity exclusively from them in the future.

With pure and cool air which never exceeds 20°C, Mang Den is named as the second Dalat of Vietnam. Dang Thanh Nam, vice president of Konplong District, wishes to receive more visitors to his area. He is making every effort to encourage businesses to grow clean and fresh vegetables for export. Currently, local farmers are growing high-yield cassava. However, the sale price is quite low, just VND300/kg. With this dirt cheap price, they are not eager to harvest the products but only leave them on the mountain fields. Meanwhile, H're communities prefer only their type of manioc. Despite the low yield, it can be eaten without getting sick. Besides, it can be used for brewing wine which has unique taste able to make drinkers intoxicated in the traditional festivals.

The life of people in Hieu Commune is still very difficult but security there is always assured, as people are very honest and plain. Motorcycles can be left outside the house overnight without being stolen. People are assigned by the government to take care of the forests. Most of the region is covered with virgin forests and is very ideal for ecotourism. In the high mountains of Kontum also hides another asset: Ngoc Linh ginseng. According to scientists, this is a precious and rare drug.

Leaving Kontum, Japanese researchers still feel appealed to the wildness of forests and mountains, the regular sound of rice pounding and the hospitality of highland people.