Comparative Study on Common Lands in Eight Countries and Regions in Japan, UK and Ireland from the Viewpoint of Changing Livelihood

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This paper demonstrates that common lands (iri-aichi—in Japanese) are living realities at the beginning of the 21st century in Japan, UK, and Republic of Ireland. To be precise of their institutional history, we classify Japan into three regions; (1) Okinawa, (2) Mainland Japan, and (3) Hokkaido and the United Kingdom into four countries; (4) England, (5) Wales, (6) Northern Ireland, and (7) Scotland. In addition to these, we also consider (8) Republic of Ireland which has the experience of having been a part of the UK.

(1) is a chain of small islands with subtropical soil and vegetation. In contrast to this, (2) and (3) under temperate climate are mostly mountainous and wooded with paddy rice cultivation being important in plain areas. (4), (5), (6), (7), and (8) also have temperate climate, but are mostly hilly covered by pastures. Given such human-ecological conditions of the eight countries and or regions, our major findings are summarized as follows.

In Okinawa and Wales, there are very recent cases in which rights of common effectively function as of preventing the municipal and/or industrial solid wastes disposal on common lands. In mainland Japan, a large number of common lands have been reorganized into property ward forests, and forestry in some of such forests have been contributing to the benefits of local economy. In England, common lands of medieval origin are now highly appreciated by the general public as open spaces for recreation. In Republic of Ireland, overgrazings of sheep on common lands have recently been a serious social problem and the measures of alleviating this problem is now being undertaken. A new wave of reevaluating of commonties (Scottish equivalent to English commons) is seen in Scotland where the feudal land tenure system finally abolished in 2000.

However, current states of common lands in Hokkaido and Northern Ireland are beyond our reach in this paper.