

Rice Terraces and the Mountainside Irrigation Network

According to legend, Takachiho's rice fields began when the grandson of Amaterasu Omikami, Ninigi no Mikoto, scattered precious rice stalks across the land. A statue of the famous progenitor with two local men who helped him stands atop the scenic outlook at Kunimigaoka. Today, the vista embraces rice terraces that cover more than 1,800 hectares and are irrigated by a manmade network of ditches. In 2015, the rice paddies and the mountainous Takachihogo-Shiibayama agriculture and forestry region supporting them were recognized by the United Nations as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS).

But for centuries, the lack of an adequate water supply meant the main crops here were millet and other grains rather than rice. In the Meiji era (1868–1912), resourceful residents sought to remedy the water supply problem by building by hand an intricate network of ditches to transport water from the mountains. Today, these waterways, some of them over 100 years old, comprise a network more than 500 kilometers long, all maintained by the local community. The ditches act not just as irrigation sources, but also help to drain away rainwater and prevent flooding.