

Current Status and Perspectives on National Parks and Protected Areas in Northeast Asia (Summary)

Mitsuo Usuki

Professor of International Tourism, Faculty of Regional Development Studies, Toyo University

This report first of all provides an overview of the status of the designation and establishment of national parks and protected areas in Northeast Asia, which are the world's largest nature- and eco-tourism resources and which can be viewed as the main destinations for visitors participating in such activities. More specifically, I have conducted a comparative analysis of the characteristics of the mechanisms in the ROK, China (apart from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao) and Mongolia and the development of relevant legislative systems in those countries, comparing them with the situation in Japan and the US, the country where national parks originated. Furthermore, while endeavoring to survey the perspectives for the development of soft infrastructure in the field of nature tourism, this paper aims to link these to proposals for regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. Moreover, as there is insufficient material available relating to this subject, the DPRK and Far Eastern Russia have been omitted from this report.

The countries of Northeast Asia have many unique national parks and protected areas that have diverse features and have undergone differing growth processes. Their physical relationship is such that, if visits between them intensified, it would be possible to promote mutual understanding through various experiences of nature- and eco-tourism. More specifically, with regard to the three countries on which this paper focuses, although its historical growth process has differed, a national park system similar to that in Japan has been created in the ROK, triggered by the 1st World Congress on National Parks in 1962 and in response to the establishment recommendation issued by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) in 1966. The ROK now welcomes many nature tourists from within Japan and overseas to its 20 national parks.

Since the 1980s, China has promoted the establishment of various nature reserves on the basis of socialist principles, which focus on the protection of nature and biodiversity for the state, rather than being national parks aimed at attracting foreign visitors. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, China has also devoted its energies to establishing and developing state parks and/on scenic areas where the

emphasis has been shifted onto tourism and which hardly differ at all from national parks in free capitalist countries.

The year when Mongolia, which has traditionally respected the protection of nature, shifted to a market economy happened to coincide with the 1992 Earth Summit. Consequently, since 1992 in particular, it has been promoting the establishment of US-style national nature conservation parks. While adopting measures that will facilitate the transition in terms of land use from extensive pastureland to forests and protected areas, it is promoting international cooperation with various developed countries, relating to the protection of the precious biodiversity of steppe areas.

Compared with other regions around the world, Northeast Asia is not yet really heading in the direction of forming a regional community in political and economic terms. In terms of the environmental aspects, it is conceivable that promoting intra-regional cooperation through the "green" field of national parks and conservation areas rather than "brown" fields directly linked to industry could contribute significantly to stable, peaceful development in this region. Measures in this area could include enhanced development of various international cooperative projects, similar to the successful reintroduction of *takhi* (Przewalski horses) in Mongolia. Furthermore, personnel exchange and joint training projects could be conducted with regard to the management of protected areas. The ASEAN Declaration on Heritage Parks and Reserves, which was signed in 1984, is said to have been the world's first such agreement in the field of nature conservation, separate from UNESCO's world heritage list. Accordingly, it is likely that the ASEAN region, which is promoting intra-regional cooperation in the management of national parks and protected areas, as well as actively undertaking cooperation with bodies outside the region, could serve as a point of reference. Similarly, the special protection areas list based on the EU directive on the conservation of wild birds that was adopted in 1979 and entered into force in 1981 is a system for cooperation in nature conservation upon which Northeast Asia could draw in fields relating to the protection of wild birds.