

Special Issue: The Pamirs

Preface

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Seven years have passed since mountain scientists devoted their attention to various issues related to mountainous regions in the International Year of Mountains 2002 (IYM 2002). In 2000, a few Japanese scientists started conducting IYM 2002 activities in Japan with initial help from the United Nations University (UNU). In 2001, they established the IYM Japanese National Committee and helped many scientists as well as climbers and citizens to get involved in IYM 2002 activities (Emoto, 2004). More than 50 symposiums and workshops were organized and some special issues were printed in related journals that year. Most activities undertaken in Japan, however, are not necessarily well known worldwide.

As a part of these activities, the Japanese National Committee hosted joint forums, symposiums, and photograph exhibition with the UNU. This strong tie with the UNU included collaboration on development project led by the UNU/GEF/UNEP, i.e., the Sustainable Land Management in the High Pamir and Pamir-Alai Mountains (PALM) project.

This special issue of the Pamirs consists of seven papers written mainly by Japanese researchers, and it aims to introduce collaborative ongoing research projects in Kyrgyz, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China. The project in Kyrgyz and Tajikistan led by Hokkaido University, Sapporo, started as recently as 2005 with full support from local counterparts in Kyrgyz (National Center of Mountain Regions Development) and Tajikistan (Tajik National Park). This research project, in part, intends to provide academic support to the PALM project. In 2005, reconnaissance surveys were conducted in the Tajik Pamirs and in the Pamir-Alai Mountains, Kyrgyz; subsequently, broader disciplines of researchers have been added to the project. The papers in this issue provide preliminary views of some of the results of the first phase of the project; subsequent papers appear separately over the next half of the decade. This issue also includes one paper that reports on an independently conducted study on glacial changes and GLOF occurrence in Kyrgyz.

Moreover, since 1987, Nihon University, Tokyo, has taken the lead in conducting field surveys in Gojal, northeastern Pakistan, together with additional surveys in Afghanistan and China. They have accumulated an enormous amount of data-sets; however, thus far, most results have been reported in Japanese, except for some geomorphological studies (see Ochiai's paper in this issue). This issue includes two papers from this project.

From the viewpoint of research, the vast region of the Pamirs of these five countries is important in some respects. For instance, Kreutzmann (2008) found the region to be historically and geopolitically significant. A small tribe called the Wakhi that originated from the Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan has spread in these countries (e.g., Kreutzmann, 2003), which is also one of the major concerns of the research project led by Nihon University. Moreover, since the 1990s, discussions have begun on conserving nature and developing tourism in the Tajik Pamirs by creating a transboundary park with

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Kyrgyz, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan (e.g., Cunha, 1993). This initiative, after some modifications and improvements, has led to the ongoing EU-financed Pamir-Alai Transboundary Conservancy Area (PATCA) project.

Many scientific publications have focused upon this region, especially northern Pakistan (e.g., Miller, 1984; Shroder, 1993; Stellrecht, 1998; Ehlers and Kreutzmann, 2000). Further, extensive fieldwork has been conducted in the Tajik Pamirs by members of a team from the University of Bern. Their result including important Master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations (e.g., Hangartner, 2002; Droux and Hoeck, 2004; Haslinger, 2004; Hergarten, 2004; Breu, 2006) have already been published. Nevertheless, there still remain issues to be learned in this region, and further efforts to understand this region are required. It is hoped that this issue will help readers to find out about some Japanese research efforts towards the 'IYM and beyond', especially 'IYM Plus 10' in 2012.

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