



The Association of Academies of Sciences in Asia (AASA)

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ASIA

NATURAL RESOURCES

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With 27 figures

 Science Press
Beijing

 Springer

Author

The Association of Academies of Sciences in Asia (AASA)
KAST Building, 7-1, Gumi-Dong
Bundang-Gu
Seongnam-Shi
Gyeonggi-Do, 463-808
Republic of Korea
E-mail: aasa@kast.or.kr

ISBN 978-7-03-028996-4
Science Press Beijing

ISBN 978-3-642-16677-8 e-ISBN 978-3-642-16678-5
Springer Heidelberg Dordrecht London New York

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010937229

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Cover design: Huabin Huang

Printed on acid-free paper

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Thematic Report of the AASA Project “Sustainable Development in Asia”

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ASIA: NATURAL RESOURCES

Coordinating Lead Authors

Lei Shen	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China
Cahit Helvacı	Geology Department, Dokuz Eylül University, Turkey

Lead Authors

Lei Shen	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China
Jiyuan Liu	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China
Litao Liu	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China
Tao Dai	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China
Hongqiang Li	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China
Yang Zhao	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China
Lan Fang	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China

Contributors

Cahit Helvacı	Geology Department, Dokuz Eylül University, Turkey
Christopher C. Bernido	The Central Visayan Institute Foundation, Philippines
Nikolay P. Pokhilenko	Institute of Geology and Mineralogy, Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
Gaohuan Liu	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China
Zhijun Yao	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China
Yao Lv	Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, China

Luguang Jiang

Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources
Research, CAS, China

Zengrang Xu

Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources
Research, CAS, China

Reviewers

Namik K. Aras

Turkish Academy of Sciences, Turkey

Anna Stabrawa

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Alper Baba

Izmir Institute of Technology, Turkey

Ashfaq Ahmad Chattha

University of Agriculture, Pakistan

Harsh Gupta

National Geophysical Research Institute, India

Foreword

Asia is not only the largest and most populated continent in the world, but also the region with the most diverse development models and most dynamic economies. In the past half century, Asia has been witnessing rapid economic growth and playing an increasingly more important role in world's political and economic arena. At the same time, Asia has developed the commonly-called "Asia Model", which has attracted worldwide attention. The Asia Model shows a new way for the developing nations or late-development countries on how to realize industrialization and modernization. All these achievements are made by Asian countries with a focus on the advantages of their late development, re-examination of their internal cultural values, active absorption of modern S&T and management experiences and constant exploration and innovation.

These social progresses have made great contributions to the realization of the UN Millennium Development Goals and have played a pioneering and demonstration role on what can be accomplished in today's world. However, Asia is facing big challenges. The most prominent one is that the rapid development of Asian economies is based on large input of production factors at the huge expense of natural resources and environment, which has been sharpening the conflicts in population, resources, environment, socio-economic development. The sustainable development in the region is being severely threatened and challenged. The rethinking and questioning of the Asia Model in the international community is growing especially in the era of post Asia Financial Crisis and Global Financial Crisis.

It is not only a common challenge for the governments of Asian countries, but also a common task for the Asian scientific communities to cope with the resources and environment crisis and to seek a new way of sustainable development in Asia. AASA, as a non-governmental and regional international scientific organization with 26 member academies, is mandated to initiate and conduct investigation on issues concerning S&T, economic and social development. As early as April 2007, AASA proposed to initiate a project on "Sustainable Development in Asia" (SDA) within AASA framework in the hopes to provide consultation and advice for national and regional governments in Asia and relative international organizations. This study proposal was approved at AASA board meeting held in Russia in August 2007 with the Chinese Academy of Sciences as the initiator. The project covers environment, energy,

resources and culture with the establishment of four working groups among AASA member academies.

Soon after, the SDA project was officially launched and implemented at different levels. The efforts include the clarification of the research content, emphasis, structure and division of tasks. Various meetings at the working level and international workshops have been held to coordinate the research activities and project progress: the first international workshop under this project was held in February 2008; the AASA Workshop on Sustainable Energy Development in Asia in November 2008; the AASA Workshop on Agricultural Culture and Asian Sustainable Development in August 2009; and the AASA Workshop on Environment and Resources in September 2009.

With the joint efforts of AASA member academies, the SDA project has now come up with a series of studies including four thematic reports, namely, “Towards a Sustainable Asia: Energy”, “Towards a Sustainable Asia: Environment and Climate Change”, “Towards a Sustainable Asia: Natural Resources”, and “Towards a Sustainable Asia: The Cultural Perspectives”. Based on these four reports, a synthesis report has also been written entitled: “Toward a Sustainable Asia: Green Transition and Innovation”. All these reports have looked deeply into the common issues and challenges for the Asian sustainable development from different perspectives.

The synthesis report is an integration and extension of the four thematic reports. It aims at the major resource and environmental challenges and issues in Asia in the general context of the challenges of financial crisis and climate change, and in line with green transition and innovation in Asia. Of its major findings, it includes: the diagnosis of key resource and environmental issues in Asia, such as water, minerals, land resource, environmental pollution, eco-degradation, energy and environment and climate change, the revelation and reflection of the diverse, different, complicated and severe nature of resource and environmental issues in Asia, the systematic analysis of the main driving forces and future trends of resource and environmental changes in Asia, the empirical analysis and discretion of current evolution of the relationship between environment and development in Asia with the establishment of theoretical and conceptual models, the initiation of principals, strategic framework, focus and advice for promoting the green development of Asia on the basis of summarizing Asia’s advantages and disadvantages.

The synthesis report differs from other similar reports. It focuses more on the combination of theoretical and empirical research in the evolution of environment and development, on the combination of trends analysis in time series and comparative study at spatial scale, and on the combination of Asia’s integrated analysis and regional and national differences. Besides, attempts have been made here on the innovative modeling of the evolutionary and theoretical relationship between environment and development, analysis of the driving