

## Ecotourism of Upo Wetland and Perceptions of Stakeholders

Yong-Ho Roh and Sang-Ho Kim\*

*Department of Hospitality Management, Daekyung College, Gyung-san 712-851, Korea*

*\*Division of Hotel and Culinary, Daekyung College, Gyung-san 712-851, Korea*

*(Manuscript received 8 June, 2005; accepted 9 October, 2005)*

The purposes of this study were to investigate ecotourism goals of conservation and increasing residents' benefits based on perceptions from the stakeholders of the Upo wetland. The stakeholders are residents, five villages' representatives, people who were residents but now live out of the area, civil officials, and environmental NGO staffs of the Upo wetland.

The results of this study were as follows: While the perceptions of environmental conservation among interviewees were positive, the residents' perceptions about residents' benefits were very negative in the Upo wetland. People who used to reside and then moves out had pride about the Upo and they wanted to return to live in the Upo wetland area. Even though the wetland is named as one of the most well known ecotourism sites by the Ministry of Environment and Korean National Ecotourism Organization(KNTO), the Upo wetland area is not an ecotourism site yet based on the definition of ecotourism goals which seek generating conservation and residents' benefits in this study. There are suggestions for this wetland area. The conservation policy with the residents' benefits are strongly recommended.

Key Words : Ecotourism, Upo wetland, Conservation, Residents' benefits, Sustainable development

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. The Necessity of study

Ecotourism is nature based tourism and one of the sustainable development types. The UN named the year 2002 as the international ecotourism year.

Ecotourism contributes to environmental conservation and sustainable development of the developed countries. It is also one of important methods to generate economic benefits and conservation for the developing countries including Costa Rica, Belize and Kenya. Hearne and Salinas<sup>1)</sup> claimed that national parks and protected areas are the most important resources of foreign exchanges in Costa Rica.

Korea is the 11th largest economic country in the world and has become that since 36 years as a Japanese colony(1908-1945) and the Korean war (1950-1952). The UN recognized Korea as a successful model coun-

try which solved poverty in such a short time. The UN provided a conservation fund to Korea through UNDP Korea.

The importance of the Upo wetland is recognized by The Government of the Republic of Korea and United Nations Development Programme(UNDP). UNDP Korea listed three protected sites in Korea and one of them is the Upo wetland<sup>2)</sup>.

The Upo wetland is the only Ramsar site to which people can easily access among the two Korean Ramsar sites<sup>3)</sup>. It is one of the most well known educational ecotourism areas in Korea(KNTO).

While there was no generally accepted definition of ecotourism<sup>4)</sup>, the definition(goals) of ecotourism relates to providing educational tourism, generating environmental conservation, and the protected area residents' benefits<sup>6-9)</sup>.

Environmental education of ecotourism was emphasized by Butler<sup>10)</sup>, Buckley<sup>7)</sup>, Kim<sup>11)</sup>, Jeong and Roh<sup>12)</sup>. Its importance was originally discussed by Boo<sup>6)</sup>, then, by Buckley<sup>7)</sup>, Ross and Wall<sup>9)</sup>. The residents' benefits in particular were emphasized by Buckley<sup>7)</sup>, Kim<sup>11)</sup>, Ross

Corresponding Author : Yong-ho Roh, Department of Hospitality Management, Daekyung College, Gyung-san 712-851, Korea

Phone: +82-53-749-0569

E-mail: yhnoh11@hanmail.net

and Wall<sup>9)</sup>.

The assessment research of conservation and residents' benefits of ecotourism sites was done by Lindberg et al.<sup>13)</sup>, Ross and Wall<sup>9)</sup>, and Stone and Wall<sup>14)</sup>.

Parks and protected areas are ecotourism areas<sup>7)</sup>. The ecotourism sites in Korea consisted of 70s areas including the wetland like the Upo and caves<sup>5)</sup>.

The previous Upo wetland related studies consist of four categories. First, there was much research about plants and animals of the Upo wetland by Park et al.<sup>15)</sup>, Changyoung county<sup>16)</sup>, Kim<sup>17)</sup>, Changyoung county<sup>18)</sup>. Second, there were ecotourists' satisfaction studies. Some of them are Lee<sup>19)</sup>, and Roh<sup>20)</sup>. Third, Kim et al.<sup>21)</sup> had conservation area study. Fourth, there was also ecotourism event study for the site residents<sup>22)</sup>.

Ross and Wall<sup>9)</sup> did ecotourism definition and assessment study of Sulewesi, Indonesia.

Stone and Wall<sup>14)</sup> questioned whether ecotourism contributed to sustainable development and residents benefits. They investigated ecotourism from residents (residents and business owners), civil officials and ecosite civil officials at the two parks of Hainan, China. The results of the study showed that conservation of the two parks was good but residents' benefits was not established well enough. The researchers concluded that the area is not an ecotourism site yet.

Little research of the conservation and residents' benefits in Upo wetland area has been done among stakeholders. The differentiation of this study from other studies is that this study investigated the perceptions of environmental conservation and residents benefits from the Upo protected area residents, civil officials, environmental NGO members, and natives of the area who have since moved away who are stakeholders of the wetland.

### 1.2. Study objectives

The purposes of this study were to investigate conservation and regional benefits at one of the most well known ecotourism sites, the Upo wetland in Korea.

### 1.3. Research methods

The quality methods were used including interviews, site visits and interviews by telephone.

The samples of this study were three village residents, five village representatives, five civil officials who are in charge of environmental affairs, and three

environmental NGO members. They were interviewed to evaluate residents' benefits and conservation in the Upo wetland area.

The research was conducted for three months from February 10th in 2005 to May 16th in 2005. The questions which were asked to the residents include knowledge of Upo, conservation impact toward life and business, positive and negative impact, importance of conservation, participation of making decision about Upo, selling % of total profits to tourists among business runners. The civil officials and NGO officials were asked to answer about residents' economic benefits, limitation of visitors, and providing information about Upo, etc. The people who were born and lived but moved out at the moment they were asked questions including reasons of conservation, pride, and returning and living, etc.

## 2. Research Results

### 2.1. Studied villages and residents

#### 2.1.1. Jume village

Changyoung county has not only an eco-site like the Upo wetland but also diverse cultural and historical sites of Gaya, Silla, Goryeo, and Josun dynasty. The Hawang mountain is also well known for the beauty of reed and the Reed Festival. The well known historical soap opera of Janggumi and Hoejun were taken there.

The Roh family have lived at this village more than 500 years<sup>24)</sup>. This village has been divided into two parts. One of them is Andom and the other is called Moreanup(the wetland of Sand). Some of the farm land area has been flooded by the Nakdong River.

This village has two old tombs according to the

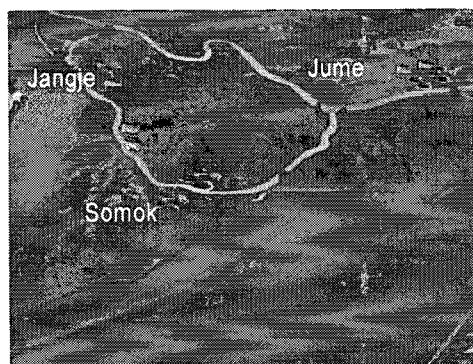


Fig. 1. The map of three villages.

## Ecotourism of Upo Wetland and Perceptions of Stakeholders

Table 1. Historical, cultural, and ecotourism of the Jume village

Historical resources	Cultural resources	Geographical resources	Upo
Old tombs, vessels	Handcrafts with straws, A shrine for meeting and study	Traces of a temple, Tiger cave, etc	Residents' life with Upo

county museum. Many Silla dynasty typical Changyoung earthen vessels were found early 1980s at this village.

There were drinking bars near Masantoe which are closely located to the Upo wetland (wetland of cows). There are a few inscribed stones of the Josun dynasty. During the Japanese occupation, the village people moved to Sajipo(Sand wetland) and Mokpo(Trees' wetland). There were fierce battles during the Korean war at these villages.

There is a shrine for the Roh family. There was a private institute for village students. There is a trace of the temple including a well. There is a cave which is called the cave of tiger. This village has a abandoned mine.

When researchers collect cultural and anthropological materials of this village, it could be possible to develop experience related events programs. It is also possible to make ecotourism event programs. While many people seventy years old and older can make hand crafts including shoes, and rainy coats by straws, many sixty years olds have difficulty to make those handcrafts. The experience oriented agricultural programs are also possible from the residents' ways of living.

There are 65 families and 150 residents. The residents' major income resources are rices, onions, and garlics and, sweet persimons. There is a restaurant which sells fish for the visitors.

### 2.1.2. Jangje village

This village is located in front of Mokpo(Namugebol: wetland of trees), one of the Upo wetlands. It has picturesque trees at the entrance of this village. It has many fireflies during summer which lives only in a clean environment in summer and has various migratory birds in winter. There are 15 houses and 30 residents at this village.

The people here originally lived at Jume village, the Roh's foundation. The village people were forced to leave after Japanese colonization(1908-1945) and most of the houses were burnt during the Korean war in 1950. The houses were rebuilt after 1950. Some of

them returned to the Jume village and some of them are still living here.

The main income resources are agricultural products and the harvest of sweet perssimons. The only Mr Oh has lived with catching fishes here for more than 50 years. Recently, two families which are in their 40s moved to this village from Daegu city. The beauty of the wetland is one of the major reasons why they moved to the village.

The Upo Literature Festival was held in front of Mokpo near this village in May. There is an environmental NGO center. There was no relationship between the residents and the NGO center. There were neither programs for the village people nor village people's intention to participate at the festival and the NGO at the moment. An inn relates to a environmental NGO make money. Except the inn, residents do not make any money and have negative perceptions about the protected area policy. They demonstrated against the Upo wetland's( including the Mokpo wetland's) being protected area. The residents are worried about being forced to move out.

### 2.1.3. Somok village

This is a fishing village. Officially this village is one of Jangje villages. Compared to Jangje village, this village has many young men.

The main income resource is catching fish and selling foods and soups by fishes. It was found that the residents have many complaints about the limitation of the fish quota with a limit of 5 nets. Only legally accepted families can catch fish in the the Upo wetland.

The Upo originally relates to Uowhangan(Cow's mountain). There is a shrine which is run by the Sung. The shrine is a meeting place for the Sung family.

The residents are the objects of photographers who come to the picturesque this eco-site.

## 2.2. The Evaluation of ecotourism: conservation and residents' benefits

This study investigated conservation and residents' benefits and the results are as seen Table 2 and 3. There are 130 residents of 50 families in Jume village, 18 residents of 13 families in Jangje village, and 20 residents of 15 families in Somok village.

### 2.2.1. Demographic characteristics of residents

#### 2.2.2. Perceptions of residents

While most of the residents supported the tourism

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of 3 village residents

Villages		Jume		Jangje		Somok	
Gender		M	F	M	F	M	F
Age	20-29	2	1				
	30-39	2			1		
	40-49			1		1	
	50-59		1	2	3	3	3
	60-69	7	8	4		1	2
	70-79	8	2	1			
	80-89	1					
		20	12	8	4	5	5
Total		32		12		10	

Table 3. Perceptions of residents' conservation and impact

	Positive answer (numbers)	Negative answer(numbers)
Knowledge of Upo' listed protected area	11 (big wetlands)	Don't know(43)
Conservation impact toward life and business	1( restaurants)	53 residents
Positive impact		54
Negative impact		Very negative
Promotion of tourism	49	5
Importance of conservation	50	4(not important)
Positive & Negative Impact from Tourism		54(negative and no)
Benefits/damage		54 No benefits (only damage)
Participation of making decision about Upo		54 (No and don't know)
Selling % of total profits to tourists(business owner only)	1 Jume (more than 30%)	4(Less than 10%)
Pride	48	6

development and recognized the importance of wetland conservation, many of the residents did not know the reason of being designated as the protected area. They perceived that there is more negative than positive impact. It was found that the negative impact was almost 100% except for one restaurant owner. Two of the more important things that this study found were that the residents did not know the Upo related information including building the Upo ecotourism park. In addition they could not participate in decision making which relates to the Upo wetland. The residents who knew little bit about the Upo and participated county meeting had complained about the Upo wetland policy because they did not involve in policy making.

It was found that there is no opportunity of jobs, road or infrastructure. Instead of that, there are negative impacts of property rights, low land value, transportation disturbance. While they supported the tourism development, most of them disagreed other regions' being protected areas.

### 2.2.3. Conflicts between Upo wetland residents and NGO officials

There are 200,000 or more visitors every year to the wetland<sup>23)</sup>. Its four seasons are beautiful. There are fresh new lives in spring, green in summer, fallen leaves in autumn and migratory birds in winter. The residents disagreed and demonstrated the site being named a protected area in 1996. The site was listed as a protected area by the Ministry of Environment in 1997 and then it was listed a Ramsar site in 1998.

There were conflicts between residents and an environmental NGO. Especially, when the Daedae bank for agricultural farming was destroyed by the Maemi typhoon. The site farmers strongly demonstrated to the Gyungnam Province Hall and even broke windows of the Changyoung Whangyung-yonhap(The Union for Environmental Movement), the environmental non-governmental organization(NGO) building.

There is only one civil official who is in charge of the wetland at the Changyoung county. It was found

that there was no conservation related educational program for the residents from the county environmental officials at the moment.

2.3. Perceptions of ecotourism from 5 village representatives.

This study researchers interviewed 5 village representatives, Bonchori, Daedaeri, Jume, Somok, and Soya of the wetland area. The representatives had negative points of view toward residents' benefits of ecotourism. They perceived that the civil officers and environmental NGOs do not care about the residents benefits. Specifically, they strongly complained toward providing and sharing of information about the Upo wetland and overall residents' benefits. While they agreed on the promotion of tourism, they did not agree on the positive impacts of tourism.

2.4. Perceptions of Civil servants and NGO staffs

This study interviewed 5 civil officials and 3 NGO staffs about ecotourism as seen Table 4. They are 2 civil officials who are in environmental affairs of Gyungnam Province and 3 Changyoung county civil officers who are in environmental affairs.

The two groups agreed about nature based tourism and providing environmental education. They also admitted the problems of residents' economic benefits. Specifically they recognized that the lack of providing and sharing information about the wetland were big problems.

An environmental NGO had run the Upo Eco-educational Institute. The recontract of the Upo Eco-educational Institute which was for education of the visitors of the Upo wetland was canceled. The Upo wetland residents strongly opposed the recontract of using the the former elementary school, Haeryong.

This is a case of failing NGO activity. The NGO

could not follow the win-win strategy with the residents of the protected area. In terms of entrance fee and limitation of visitors, the results are as the above table. They perceived that limitation of visitors are necessary.

There was just a civil officer who is in charge of the conservation of the Upo wetland at the county.

2.5. Perceptions of people who used to reside and then moves out

To investigate perceptions of people who used to reside and then move out, the researchers interviewed 10 Jume village and 5 Jangje people as seen Table 5 and 6. The questions were reasons of preservation of the wetland, tourism, pride of the wetland, and intention of returning and living again.

The non-residents who used to reside and then move out quite knew well about the reason of conservation. In terms of conservation, they supported conservation without regional damages. They also agreed to tourism promotion. Most of them have pride about the wetland and also want to return and live near the wetland in the future.

3. Suggestions for sustainable development

Ecotourism emphasizes generating the protected areas' conservation and well being of residents including residents' economic benefits.

The following could be suggested for the residents and for conservation of the Upo wetland in sustainable development age based on this study results.

It was found that residents and civil officials and those who born near the wetland and moved away perceived that conservation of Upo wetland is important and positive. So it could say that the conservation policy was successful.

Table 4. Perceptions of civil officials and NGO staffs about conservation and residents' benefits

Questions	Civil Officials	NGO
Residents' economic benefits	No 3 Don't Know 2	Yes 2 No 1
Nature oriented travel	Yes 5	Yes 3
Environmental education	Yes 4 Little 1	Yes 3
Benefits & Cost	Both 4 No 1	Both 3
Donation for Conservation when income occur	Necessary 5	Necessary 3
Entrance fee	After facility 5	Necessary 2 Don't know 1
Limitation of Visitors	Yes 3 Don't know1 No mention 1	Yes 2 Impossible 1
Providing information about Upo	No 2 Little 3	Not well 3
Sharing information about Upo	Share 2 Little2 Part 1	Not yet 2 Little 1

Table 5. Demographical characteristics of former residents

Villages		Jume		Jangje	
		M	F	M	F
Gender					
Age	<30				
	30-39		2		
	40-49	6		2	2
	50-59		2	1	
	Numbers	10		3	2
Education	Elementary			2	
	Bachelor	7		2	
	Master or more	3		1	
	Numbers	10		5	
Total		15			

Table 6. Perceptions of former residents' conservation and tourism

Questions	Positive Answer(Numbers)	Negative Answer(Numbers)
Reason of conservation	International wetland(6) Various plants and animal(5)	4 dont know
Conservation	Conservation(15) (Conservation without regional damages(6))	
Tourism	Agree tourism promotion(15)	
Pride	Pride(13)	No(2)
Returning and Living	Intentions of returning(13)	No(1) Do not know(1)

Most of the residents perceived that there is no positive impacts in terms of the Upo wetland. It means that residents' economic benefits is limited. There are many complains about parking during farming season. The Jume and Somok residents have complained a lot about visitor cars' entering to the villages. It has damaged residents' farm lands. Somok circulating lot disturbs farming. To prevent pollution and disturbance of farming, there should be a parking lot at the entrance of Somok village a bus stop and at the end of Jume village which is the starting points of Ibang myun (sub-county).

It is necessary to plan festivals which can increase residents' well being including generating economic benefits for the residents. In case of planing and performing festival, residents' life and residents' culture are important resources of events and festivals. Experience oriented ecotourism festival which contain educational programs can sell agricultural products and handicrafts made by the residents should be considered.

The environmental education and residents' benefits

are important. It is recommended there is education for organic farming, environmental education for the second and third generations, guided education for the residents, and selling places for agricultural products, etc should be considered.

It is also necessary to relate providing facilities of selling regional agricultural products and opportunity of preserving regional culture including handicrafts, etc.

In terms of providing, sharing, and participating of making decisions about Upo, residents did not and could not get information related to the Upo wetland. In terms of current situations related to the wetland, following was indicated and suggested:

First, in terms of the Upo ecopark, the local county should give and share information about the Upo wetland development plan to the residents. Only few committee members including professors, NGO members, and civil servants know the process. Local county should expose the process of the Upo Eco-park.

Second, local county announced that it will build Upo Water Plant Park. There should be a clear vision

and compensation for the residents. The residents are curious whether they should move to other place or not. The residents are wondering what they should do if they should sell their farm lands.

Third, organizing an association for the residents is necessary for expressing the residents' rights, participating in decision making, and sharing information about the wetland.

The residents perceived they have pride of the wetland. Making the Upo Museum is one of ways to show how the residents have lived. The residents' agricultural and fishery goods used for many years by the residents should be collected for the residents' pride, visitors' sightseeing and education about the residents.

Also, building Upo Regional Eco & Cultural Research Center is necessary. It can not only research Upo residents' cultural and ecotourism related goods and materials, legends, but also study ways of the residents' lives, anthropology and plan and develop how to increase economic benefits. It could develop what we call "Upology".

In addition, naming the Upo Day and The Upo Ambassador could be ways to promote the ecotourism of Upo wetland.

#### 4. Conclusions

Sustainable development is one of important key issues in this age and ecotourism is regarded as one of alternative tourism methods to achieve sustainable development by the United Nations(UN). The UN named year 2002 as the international year of ecotourism.

While there are quite a few ecotourism researches, there is little research about Upo wetland ecotourism and especially in terms of researching conservation and residents' benefits of ecotourism with a qualitative research method.

The purposes of this study were to investigate perceptions on the Upo wetland ecotourism including environmental conservation and regional benefits based on three village residents, five village representatives, people who then residents and live out of the area at the moment, civil officials, and environmental NGO staffs.

The results of this study were as following:

While the perceptions about conservation toward the wetland is positive and successful, increasing residents' benefits were unsuccessful. There was no fund

from tourism for the wetland. Even though, it has been named on ecotourism site by Korea National Tourism Organization(1998), it could be not a ecotourism site based on strict definition of ecotourism of Boo<sup>6)</sup>, Buckley<sup>7)</sup>, Ross and Wall<sup>9)</sup>.

While tourists' numbers was increased, it did not contribute to residents' income increasing at all. Only a few businessman received benefits.

Especially, the perceptions of residents' benefits were negative. There should be more strategies to improve residents' benefits with accommodation facilities, visitors' more consumptive expenditures, food and beverage plans, and gift products.

While an environmental NGO staffs perceived the Somok residents' economic benefits was increased, the residents did not agree. There should be strategic plans to solve the problem for the residents.

This study only investigated the conservation and residents' benefits which are part of ecotourism goals. It is necessary to include more interviewees of other villages in Upo wetland area.

For future study, it is necessary to develop programs for the residents benefits. It is also necessary to investigate the perceptions of ecotourism from civil officials of the Ministry of Environment and experts of wetland. It is recommended to study visitors' satisfaction to increase ecotourism quality and residents' benefits. More specifically, it is necessary to do research visitors' motivations, activities, and guides' interpretation, etc as expectations factors and performances, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. It is recommended to develop firefly festival in summer and birdwatching festival during in winter.

#### Acknowledgements

The researcher appreciate this study interviewees. The more research will be conducted with more interviewees in the future study.

#### References

- 1) Hearne, R. R. and S. M. Zenia, 2002, The use of choice experiments in the analysis of tourist preferences for ecotourism development in Costa Rica, *Journal of Environmental Management*, 65, 153-163.
- 2) UNDP Korea, 2005, Project Document Conservation of Globally Significant Wetlands in the Republic of Korea, Distributed at the International Wetland

- Day (Feb 2nd) in Changyoung, Korea.
- 3) Gyungnam Province, 2005, Inviting You to 2008 Ramsar Convention in Gyungnam Province, Korea, 5.
  - 4) Weaver, 1998, Ecotourism in the Less Developed World, Wallington, U.K., Oxon International, 25.
  - 5) Korea National Tourism Organization, 1996, The Direction of Development and Prediction of Ecotourism, 152.
  - 6) Boo, E., 1990, Ecotourism: The Potential and Pitfalls, Washington D.C., World Wildlife Fund, 55.
  - 7) Buckley, R., 1994, A Framework for Ecotourism, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 21, 629-642.
  - 8) Higgins, B. R., 1996, The Global Structure of the Nature Tourism Industry; Ecotourists, tour operators and local business, *J. of Travel Research*, 35(2), 11-18.
  - 9) Ross, S. and G. Wall, 1999, Ecotourism: towards Congruence between Theory and Practice, *Tourism Management*, Butler, R., 1989, *Alternative tourism : Pious Hope or Trojan Horse?*, *J. of Travel Research*, 28(3), 40-45.
  - 11) Kim S. S., 1998, Economic Impact of a Birding Festival, *Festival Management & Event Tourism*, 5, 51-58.
  - 12) Jeong, G. H. and Y. H. Roh, 2003, The Appraisal of the Muju Firefly Festival(-99--01), *J. of Tourism and Leisure Research*, The Korea Academic Society of Tourism and Leisure, 14(4), 445-460.
  - 13) Lindberg, K, J. Erena and K. C. Sproule, 1995, Ecotourism Questioned case studies from Belize, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23(3), 543-562.
  - 14) Stone, M. and G. Wall, 2003, Ecotourism and Community Development: Cases Studies from Hainan, China, *Environmental Management*, 33(1), 12-24.
  - 15) Park, S. Y., S. Y. Yoon, G. C. Lee and G. G. Kim, 2000, Introduction to Wetland(Korean wetland), Kyeungnam Development Institute, 287-288.
  - 16) The Changyoung County, 1997, The Direction of Ecosystem of the Upo and Mokpo.
  - 17) Kim, S., 2000, An anlysis of Avifauna and Community Structure of Waterbirds at Woopo Wetland, Prov. Kyung-nam, Master Thesis of Kyungpook National University, 1-32.
  - 18) The Changyoung County, 2002, Living Natural Mystrious the Upo wetland, 20-32.
  - 19) Lee, K. O., 2000, A Study on the Relationship of Ecotourist's Individual Characteristics, Tourism Activity Participation and Satisfaction, Doctoral Dissertation of Taegu University, 1-142.
  - 20) Roh, Y. H., 2004, The Determinants of Ecotourists Satisfaction and Behavioral Responses, Doctoral Dissertation of Kyungpook National University, 1-130.
  - 21) Kim, S., J. Cho and S. Kim, 2000, The Conservation of Woopo Swamp Ecosystem Conservation Area and Ecotourism(1), *The Korean Academy of Parks & Recreation*, 2(1), 13-20.
  - 22) Roh, Y. H. and Y. Jo, 2004, Event Programs for Ecotourism: The Case Study of the Upo Wetland, *J. of Korean Society of Event*, 4(1), 41-60.
  - 23) Kim, K. S., 2004, Competition with Regional Brand, *The Busan Daily Newspaper* October 29, 6.
  - 24) The Changyong Country, 1998, The Short History of Dehap sub-county of Changyoung County, [www.me.or.kr](http://www.me.or.kr), 84-86.