https://doi.org/10.5194/essd-2025-711
Preprint. Discussion started: 21 January 2026

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Mapping Paddy Rice Distribution and Cropping Intensity in South and Southeast Asia (1995 - 2024) at 30m Resolution

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https://doi.org/10.5194/essd-2025-711
Preprint. Discussion started: 21 January 2026

Abstract: South and Southeast Asia, a major global hub for paddy rice cultivation, exhibits the highest rice cropping intensity worldwide due to its favourable hydrothermal conditions, and also has experienced considerable spatiotemporal changes due to climate change and anthropogenic activities. However, the absence of long-term spatial distribution and cropping intensity of paddy rice hinders effective agricultural and environmental management. This gap is particularly critical especially in the 21st century, with enhanced impacts from changing climate, water resources, and food trade pattern. Using all the available Landsat and Sentinel-2 archives, we refined a phenology-based algorithm to generate 30-m rice maps and cropping intensity across South and Southeast Asia for the years 1995, 2005, 2015, and 2024. The algorithm overcomes the challenge of detecting rice cropping intensity in long time-series and comprises three core steps: (1) identifying pixel-level rice phenological peaks using an enhanced peak detection method, thereby defining potential transplanting windows and minimizing monsoon-induced cloud and precipitation interference; (2) detecting paddy flooding signals and delineating rice cultivation areas based on phenological rules derived from the relationship between the Land Surface Water Index (LSWI) and Enhanced Vegetation Index (EVI); (3) determining rice cropping intensity according to the number of valid crop peaks and associated flooding signals within a single year. The resulting maps were validated using 23,396 samples collectively derived from a field photo library, visual interpretation of Sentinel-1/2 satellite imagery, and a sample migration algorithm. Across the four periods, the maps achieved overall accuracies ranging from 83% to 87%. In addition, the resultant products were compared with existing regional and period-specific rice datasets (e.g., NESEA-RICE10 and Open-SEA-Rice-10) for further evaluation. The comparisons demonstrated that the refined approach achieved higher accuracy and robustness in mapping both rice distribution and cropping intensity, whereas the existing products performed well only in partial environments. When compared with the FAO official statistics for South and mainland Southeast Asian countries, the derived maps yielded R^2 values exceeding 0.9. This dataset holds great potential for applications such as methane emission

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estimation, water resource management, and crop yield monitoring, thereby supporting sustainable agricultural practices and policy development in the region.

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1. Introduction

Rice is a staple food crop across South and Southeast Asia, underpinning food security in a region characterized by rapid population growth and escalating food demand (Xiao et al., 2006). This demographic pressure has inevitably driven the expansion of rice paddies and intensified cultivation practices (Godfray et al., 2010; Foley et al., 2005). However, the expansion of agricultural land, including rice paddies, exacerbates environmental challenges, such as freshwater depletion, deforestation, and increased methane emissions, all of which threaten ecosystem functions (Mehta et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023; Zeng et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2024). Balancing food security with the preservation of ecosystem services is thus a critical component of achieving the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Persaud and Dagher, 2021). Understanding the spatial extent and cropping intensification patterns of rice agriculture is essential to provide robust data support for sustainable development policies (Potapov et al., 2022; Zabel et al., 2019).

Satellite remote sensing has emerged as a powerful tool for accurately mapping rice agriculture over large spatial scales (Dong and Xiao, 2016; Zhang et al., 2017). Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) data, with its 500-meter spatial resolution, has been effectively utilized to map rice distributions in monsoon Asia, including South and Southeast Asia (Zhang et al., 2020). However, the coarse resolution of MODIS limits its ability to capture fragmented rice paddies and introduces errors due to mixed-pixel effects, particularly in detecting multi-cropping systems (Han et al., 2021). Higher-resolution satellite data, such as those from Landsat (30 m) and Sentinel (10–20 m), enable more precise identification of rice paddies (Zhao et al., 2024). Current research employs phenology-based algorithms or machine learning approaches to leverage these higher-resolution datasets for rice mapping.

Phenology-based rice mapping methods primarily exploit the relationship between the Land Surface Water Index (LSWI) and the Enhanced Vegetation Index (EVI) derived from optical imagery to detect the unique flooding signals of rice paddies (Dong et al., 2015; Xiao et al., 2005). These methods have achieved high accuracy in regions such as Northeast China, Japan, and South Korea (Dong et al., 2016; Carrasco et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022). Recent studies have extended phenology-based approaches to Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) data, improving rice mapping in cloud-prone and rainy regions (Xu et al., 2023; Song et al., 2025). Due to their simplicity, computational efficiency, and robustness, phenology-based methods are particularly well-suited for large-scale applications and can be readily implemented on cloud-computing platforms, making them the most widely adopted approach for regional and continental-scale rice mapping studies (Zhao et al., 2025a).

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Machine learning-based rice classification methods have also gained prominence, as they leverage extensive training samples to achieve high accuracy in mapping paddy rice distribution (Dong and Xiao, 2016). For instance, several studies have achieved high-precision rice mapping in regions with complex cropping patterns, such as the crop rotation systems in Northeast China and the multi-season rice planting patterns in the Jianghan Plain, by integrating rice-specific phenological features with machine learning classifiers, such as One-Class Support Vector Machines (OC-SVM) and Random Forest (He et al., 2021; Ni et al., 2021). More recently, deep learning techniques, particularly convolutional neural networks like U-Net and eXplainable Mamba UNet, have been employed to process time-series Sentinel-1 SAR data, demonstrating remarkable robustness in capturing spatial patterns, even in cloud-prone regions where optical imagery is limited (Ge et al., 2025; Thorp and Drajat, 2021; Lin et al., 2022). Despite the achievements of the above two mapping approaches, none has yet provided a method capable of long-term, large-scale analysis with precise extraction of cropping intensity and spatial distribution to elucidate the spatiotemporal patterns of rice distribution in South and Southeast Asia. Traditional phenology-based rice mapping methods rely on prior expert knowledge to determine phenological stages, but interpreting phenological periods from several decades ago introduces considerable uncertainty. Machine learning methods, on the other hand, have shown potential for global-scale classification, yet the acquisition of large, high-quality historical training datasets remains time-consuming and resource-intensive (Zhan et al., 2021). Even though a fully automated, sample-free rice-mapping framework has been developed, its dependence on SAR-derived rice features limits its applicability to periods beyond the operational lifetime of Sentinel-1 (Gao et al., 2023).

This study addresses this gap by employing a refined phenology-based method that eliminates the need for extensive training samples while accurately identifying planting intensity and phenological windows. Through optical imagery fusion and false peak elimination techniques, we aim to precisely identify rice cropping systems and their spatial distributions, while quantifying changes over the past three decades. This approach provides critical data to reconcile the conflict between traditional rice cultivation expansion and sustainable development goals, offering robust support for informed policy-making in South and mainland Southeast Asia.

2. Materials

2.1 Study area

The study area encompasses South and mainland Southeast Asia countries, specifically Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan (Fig. S1). These eight countries are predominantly

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characterized by a tropical monsoon climate (with the exception of Balochistan Province), featuring distinct wet and dry seasons. Rice is the predominant crop in this region, with the highest cropping intensity globally. In 2024, the total rice harvested area in this region accounted for approximately 47% of the global rice harvested area, making it the world's most critical rice production base.

2.2 Data and preprocessing

2.2.1 Satellite imagery

To develop long-term rice mapping products for South and mainland Southeast Asia, we acquired all available Sentinel-2 (S2_HARMONIZED) and Landsat T1_L2 imagery data from the Google Earth Engine (GEE) platform for specific time periods (Table 1). Invalid observations, including clouds, cloud shadows, and snow cover, were filtered out using the Sentinel-2 QA60 and Landsat QA_PIXEL bands. However, because imagery from a single year was insufficient to reliably support rice information extraction across South and mainland Southeast Asia, we applied a multi-year median compositing approach for the periods 1993–1997, 2003–2007, 2014–2016, and 2023–2025 to mitigate data gaps (see Table 1). Specifically, each year was segmented into half-monthly intervals (e.g., January 1–15 and January 16–31, with some intervals spanning 14 or 16 days due to monthly variations), and all valid observations within the selected time periods for each interval were used to generate a single median composite image. Additionally, linear regression was employed to harmonize the spectral bands of Landsat and Sentinel-2 data (Yang et al., 2023), resulting in the generation of half-monthly time-series curves.

Table 1: Satellite sensors and composite periods for rice mapping in South and mainland Southeast Asia

Reference Year	Satellite Sensors	Composite Period
1995	Landsat-5	1993-1997
2005	Landsat-5, -7	2003-2007
2015	Landsat-5, -7, -8	2014-2016
2022	Sentinel-2, Landsat-8	2023-2025

Based on the generated half-monthly time-series curves, we further calculated relevant vegetation indices to identify the spatial distribution and cropping intensity of paddy rice, including NDVI, LSW, and EVI (Eqs. 1–3).

$$NDVI = \frac{NIR - Red}{NIR + Red} \tag{1}$$

$$LSWI = \frac{NIR - SWIR}{NIR + SWIR} \tag{2}$$

$$EVI = 2.5 \times \frac{NIR - Red}{NIR + 6 \times Red - 7.5 \times Blue + 1} \quad (3)$$

2.2.2 Auxiliary data

Cropland Mask. To investigate changes in rice planting patterns in South and mainland Southeast Asia, a region that has undergone significant land-use transformations, including cropland expansion and forest loss over recent decades, we selected high-quality land cover and cropland products aligned with the target mapping years. Four global products were chosen to mitigate uncertainties in rice mapping arising from cropland expansion. The specific cropland products selected for each year are detailed in Table 2 (Zhang et al., 2021; Karra et al., 2021; Potapov et al., 2022) (https://zenodo.org/records/5571936).

Table 2: Cropland Products Used for Cropland Mask in South and mainland Southeast Asia

Reference Year	Cropland Products
1995	GLC_FCS30 (1990, 1995)
2005	GLC_FCS30 (2005), GLAD 30 (2003)
2015	GLC_FCS30 (2015), GLAD 30 (2015)
2024	ESA (2021), GLAD (2019), ESRI (2021)

Rice products and statistical data. To evaluate the reliability of our mapping results, we conducted spatial comparisons with several established rice mapping products, including: (1) the JAXA High-Resolution Land-Use and Land-Cover Map, including the 2020 Vietnam and 2023 Southeast Asia products (https://www.eorc.jaxa.jp/ALOS/en/dataset/lulc_e.htm); and (2) Li et al. (2025) and Sun et al. (2023), whose datasets (NESEA-RICE10 (Han et al., 2021) and OPEN-SEA-RICE10 (Ginting et al., 2025)) focus on regional-scale rice area mapping. The comparisons allowed us to assess the spatial consistency and intensity agreement across products. In addition, national-level statistical data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) were used to validate the mapped rice areas.

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2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Identification of valid crop peak dates

To accurately identify multiple rice cropping cycles, we first determined the peak date of each valid crop cycle (i.e., the number of times a plot is cropped within a year). The specific steps are as follows (Fig. 1):

Data Interpolation and Smoothing. First, using the half-monthly composite imagery and derived vegetation indices, NDVI outliers were removed based on the mean and three standard deviations. Linear interpolation was then applied to fill gaps in the time series of LSWI and NDVI. Subsequently, the NDVI time series was smoothed using the Whittaker smoothing algorithm (Whittaker Smoothing, lambda=300) to generate a smoothed time series.

Peak Detection. Peak detection was achieved by identifying local maxima and minima through iterative analysis of the smoothed NDVI time-series curves. Specifically, each NDVI value was compared with its preceding value to determine an increasing or decreasing trend. A point was recorded as a peak (local maximum) when the NDVI transitioned from an increasing to a decreasing trend. Conversely, a point was recorded as a trough (local minimum) when the NDVI shifted from a decreasing to an increasing trend.

Elimination of False Peaks. To detect and filter phenological peaks, we employed a method based on LSWI and NDVI time series that identifies true phenological peaks while excluding false peaks caused by noise or non-vegetation signals, thereby ensuring robust cycle detection. A complete crop growth cycle was decomposed into one peak and two troughs (Yang et al., 2023). The first criterion required that the NDVI amplitude of the right trough, relative to the annual maximum amplitude, exceed 35%. Second, the NDVI value at the right trough had to fall below the NDVI threshold ($NDVI_{thld}$), calculated according to Eq. 5. In addition, the time span between the left and right troughs had to exceed 120 days to ensure that the cycle represented a biologically reasonable rice-growing season in South and mainland Southeast Asia. Each growth cycle meeting these criteria was recorded, including the peak dates (day of year, DOY), while all other signals were discarded as noise.

$$NDVI_{thld} = NDVI_{min} + (NDVI_{max} - NDVI_{min}) \times 0.15 \tag{4}$$

Where $NDVI_{thld}$ is the NDVI threshold, $NDVI_{min}$ is the minimum NDVI value within the considered period, and $NDVI_{min}$ is the maximum NDVI value within the considered period.

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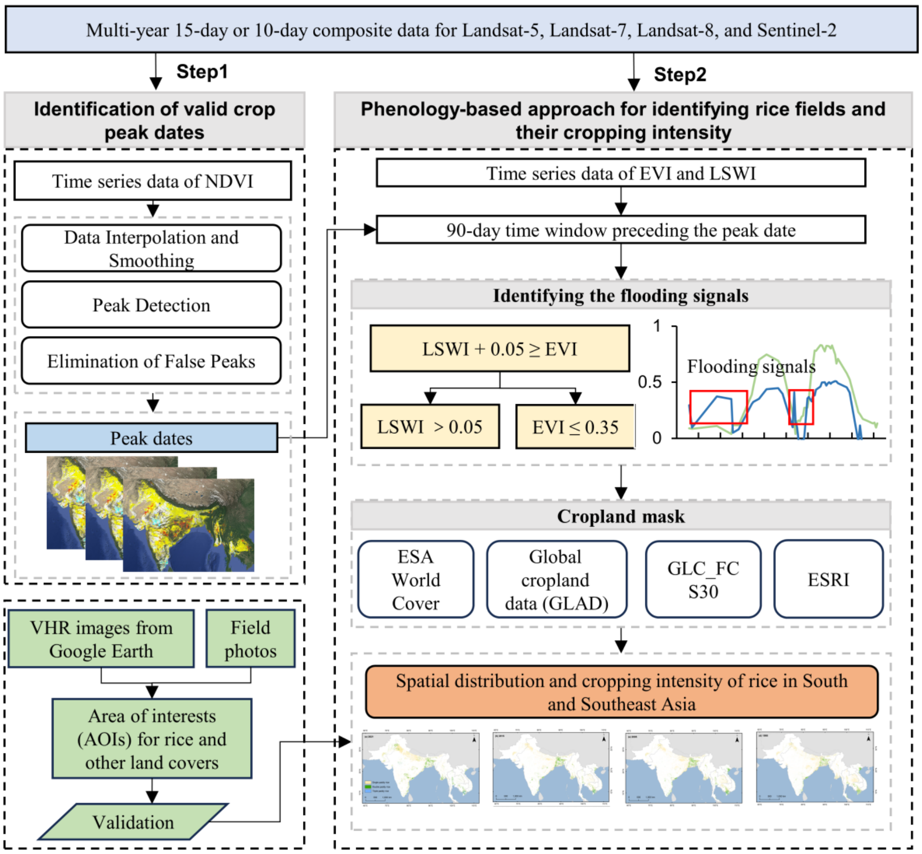

Figure 1. Flowchart of the mapping process for long-term rice spatial distribution and planting intensity in South and mainland Southeast Asia

2.3.2 Phenology-based approach for identifying rice fields and their cropping intensity

The phenology-based rice mapping method identifies rice by detecting the unique biophysical characteristic of fields being flooded during the transplanting period. In this study, we first selected imagery data within a 90-day time window preceding the peak date of each growing season. Subsequently, flood signal detection was performed on the imagery data within this time window by applying the rule LSWI + 0.05 ≥ EVI. Notably, the LSWI and EVI used here differ from those employed in crop peak identification, as these vegetation indices (VIs) do not require smoothing. Additionally, to minimize interference from factors such as precipitation and soil background value, we applied the rule that, when a flood signal is detected, EVI must be ≤ 0.35 and LSWI must be > 0.05. Pixels meeting these conditions were classified as rice (pixel value = 1).

For rice cropping intensity, we integrated multi-season rice data by calculating the number of times a pixel was classified as rice (value = 1) within a year. This process generated the final rice cropping intensity distribution map, with values ranging from 1 to 3, representing single-, double-, or triple-season rice, respectively.

2.3.3 Accuracy assessment and comparisons

Sample points for 2024 were primarily collected through visual interpretation using multiple data sources. First, false-color composites of Sentinel-2 imagery (R/G/B = SWIR1, NIR, RED) representing multiple rice growth stages were generated, in which rice fields during the flooded transplanting stage appeared dark green. Second, following the approach of (Sun et al., 2023), we used Sentinel-1 VH time series to compute the maximum, minimum, and variance values, and composed them as R: VH_max, G: VH_min, and B: VH_variance. In these composites, flooded rice fields typically appeared purple, which is particularly useful for identifying rice in persistently cloudy and rainy tropical regions. An example of this visualization approach has been implemented and is available at the following link: (https://code.earthengine.google.com/7dd210998c6812da2e79ebebc1536822). Based on these two sets of composites, rice sample points were manually labeled and further cross-validated using ultra–high-resolution Google Earth imagery and the Global Geo-Referenced Field Photo Library (http://www.eomf.ou.edu/photos/). In total, 4,000 rice samples were collected across the study area.

For the remaining 4,000 non-rice samples, random sampling was first conducted within the study area, and each point was then visually verified using the same image composites to ensure the absence of rice-related features.

Although the above approach was effective for sample generation, manually labeling samples for periods before the launch of Sentinel-1 and Sentinel-2 satellites was labor-intensive and constrained by the limited availability of valid imagery. Therefore, a sample migration algorithm (Huang et al., 2020) was employed to transfer the 8,000 manually labeled samples to other target years.

3. Results

3.1 Validation of the spatial distribution accuracy of rice in South and mainland Southeast Asia

The spatial distribution and cropping intensity of rice across South and mainland Southeast Asia are illustrated in Fig. 2. The interactive version of this map can also be accessed and visualized using the GEE platform at: https://ee-zhaozizhangcau.projects.earthengine.app/view/rice-planting-intensity--south--southeast-asia.

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Based on validation using 23,396 sample points, the mapping accuracies for different years are summarized in Table 3, with overall accuracies ranging from 83.74% to 87.60% and F1-scores between 0.7872 and 0.8628. The 2024 results achieved the highest accuracy, primarily because the higher temporal frequency of Sentinel-2 observations enabled more effective detection of flooding signals compared with the earlier Landsat sensors. Mapping accuracies for other years did not show a declining trend over time, mainly due to the aggregation of multi-year image archives and the use of biweekly composite imagery, which stabilized rice extraction performance. Although Landsat-8 data were incorporated for the 2015 (2014–2016) period, residual striping effects from Landsat-7 imagery slightly degraded the classification accuracy.

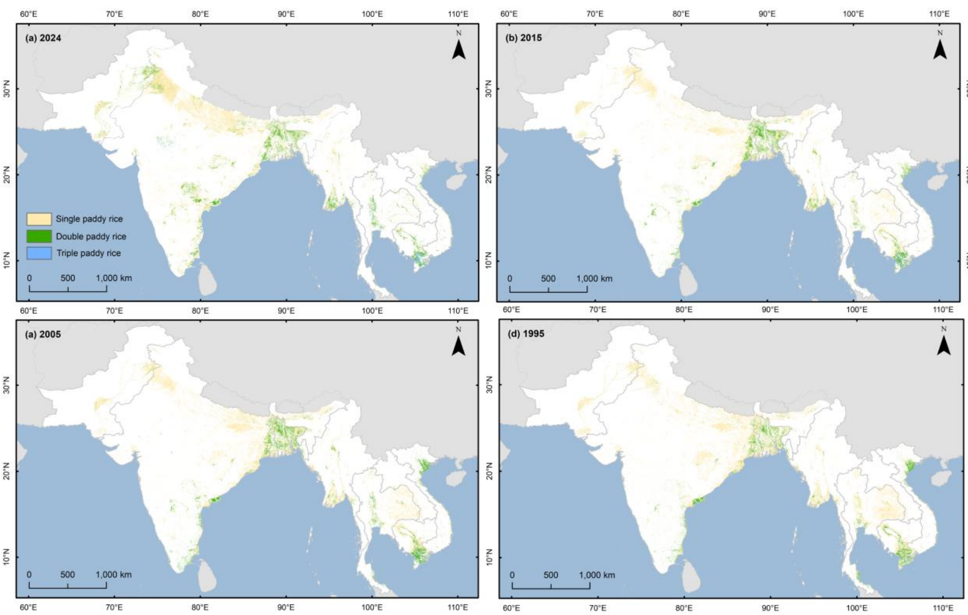

Figure 2. Long-term spatial distribution and planting intensity of rice in South and mainland Southeast Asia (1995, 2005, 2015, 2024)

Table 3 Accuracy assessment of paddy rice mapping results in South and Southeast Asia

Year	Overall Accuracy	User Accuracy	Producer Accuracy	F1 Score	Sample size
2024	0.8760	0.9668	0.7788	0.8628	8000
2015	0.8374	0.9500	0.7129	0.8143	7821

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2005	0.8461	0.9122	0.6936	0.7881	3814
1995	0.8378	0.9011	0.6993	0.7872	3761

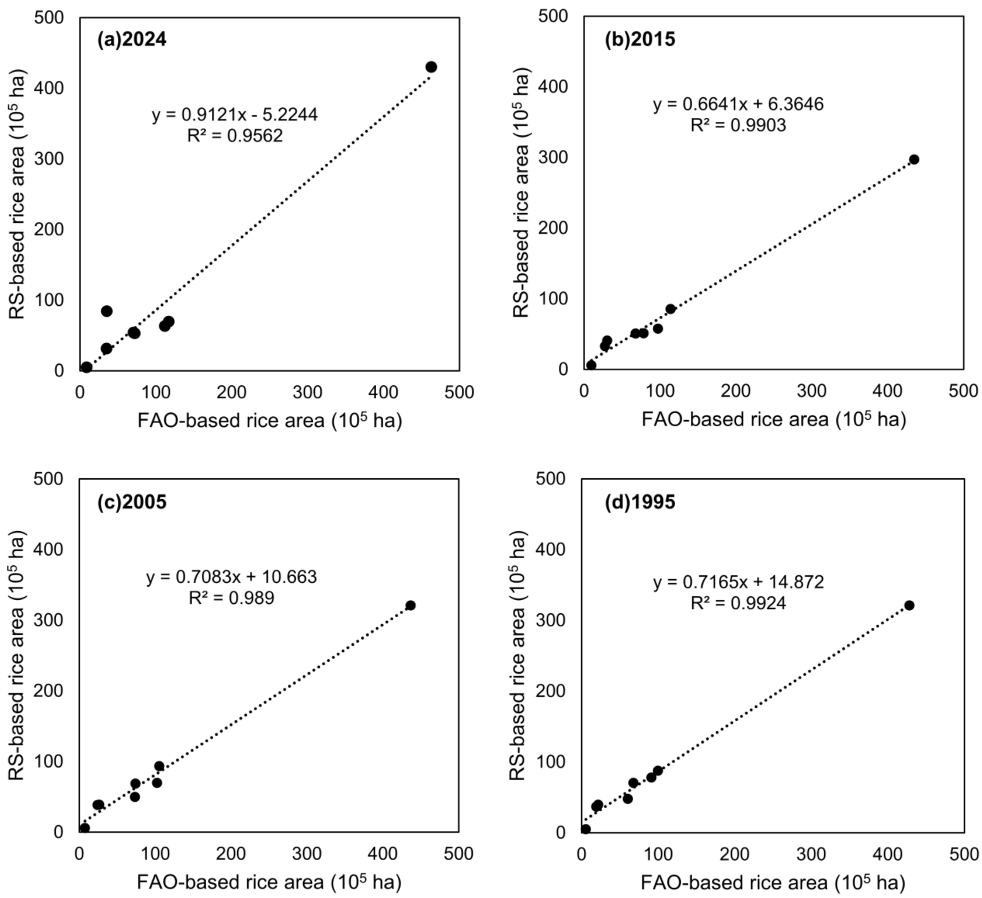

Figure 3. Comparison of RS-based rice area estimates with FAO statistics for South and mainland Southeast Asia (1995, 2005, 2015, 2024)

To further evaluate the accuracy of our results, we compared the estimated rice area from our generated rice product with FAO statistical data (Fig. 2). The results showed that the R^2 values for all four years exceeded 0.9, with a multi-year average RMSE of approximately 4.15 million hectares. Based on remote sensing retrievals, the rice planting area across South and mainland Southeast Asian countries has increased by approximately 22.5 million hectares since the 1990s, with the largest increases observed in India and Bangladesh. Among these, the

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2024 results exhibited the smallest discrepancy with statistical data. In Bangladesh, the remote sensing estimates were relatively lower, potentially due to the influence of frequent flooding and cloud cover in the region.

3.2 Comparison with other rice maps

We selected typical rice-growing areas within the study region for visual comparison with other rice mapping product. Specifically, in Vietnam, we compared our results with the land cover product (including rice layer) released by JAXA. The spatial distributions were highly consistent across multiple years. In the 2005 results for northern Vietnam, our product reduced some noise through image compositing and phenological identification (Fig. S2). In the 2024 product for India, our results exhibited spatial distributions comparable to those of Li et al. (2025) (Fig. 4). However, in the 1995 mapping of Punjab and other northern Indian provinces, Li's results were notably affected by limited observation conditions, which manifested as strip-like artifacts in the output. By contrast, our approach, which employed multi-year data compositing, effectively mitigated this issue. Differences observed in the southeastern coastal regions of India further highlight the advantages of multi-year compositing for rice mapping in the 1990s.

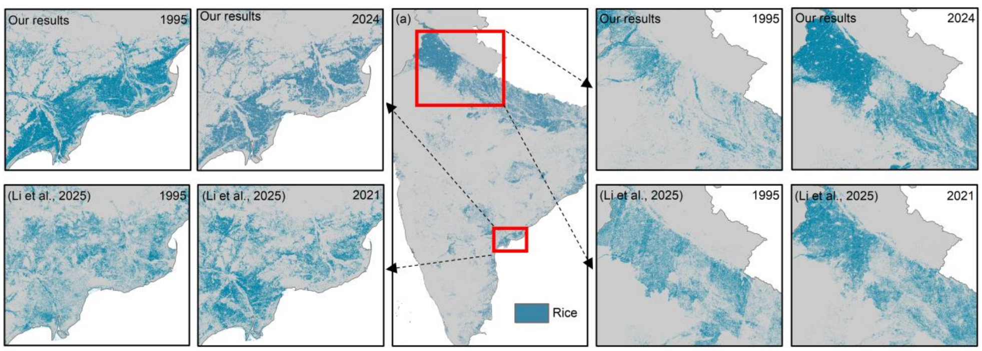

Figure 4. Comparison of rice distribution maps: Our Results compared to Li et al. (2025) for South Asia (1995, 2021)

Notably, Fig. 5 presents a spatial comparison of five rice mapping products across Southeast Asia, including our results. Among them, products a1, b1, and e1 exhibit relatively similar spatial distributions, whereas the NESEA-Rice10 product captures the smallest rice extent. In contrast, c1 and d1 identified a greater number of rice pixels, particularly in central–eastern Thailand, where both products detected extensive rice areas. We attribute these differences mainly to the distinct responses of irrigated (paddy) and rainfed rice systems. The e2 panel, derived

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from the JAXA LULC dataset, provides supporting evidence for this interpretation, as it delineates these regions predominantly as paddy fields (see Section 4.1 for further discussion).

Panels a3–e3 illustrate the rice-growing regions in western Thailand, where three intensity-based products consistently identified multi-season rice cultivation. However, the c3 product shows clear image boundary artifacts, likely due to inconsistencies in image mosaicking. Spatially, the b3 product—derived from a single-year dataset—identified a smaller extent of rice cultivation, while the d3 product appears to have overestimated rice coverage. In contrast, along the moisture-rich coastal areas of Myanmar, all products exhibited relatively consistent spatial patterns with minimal discrepancies.

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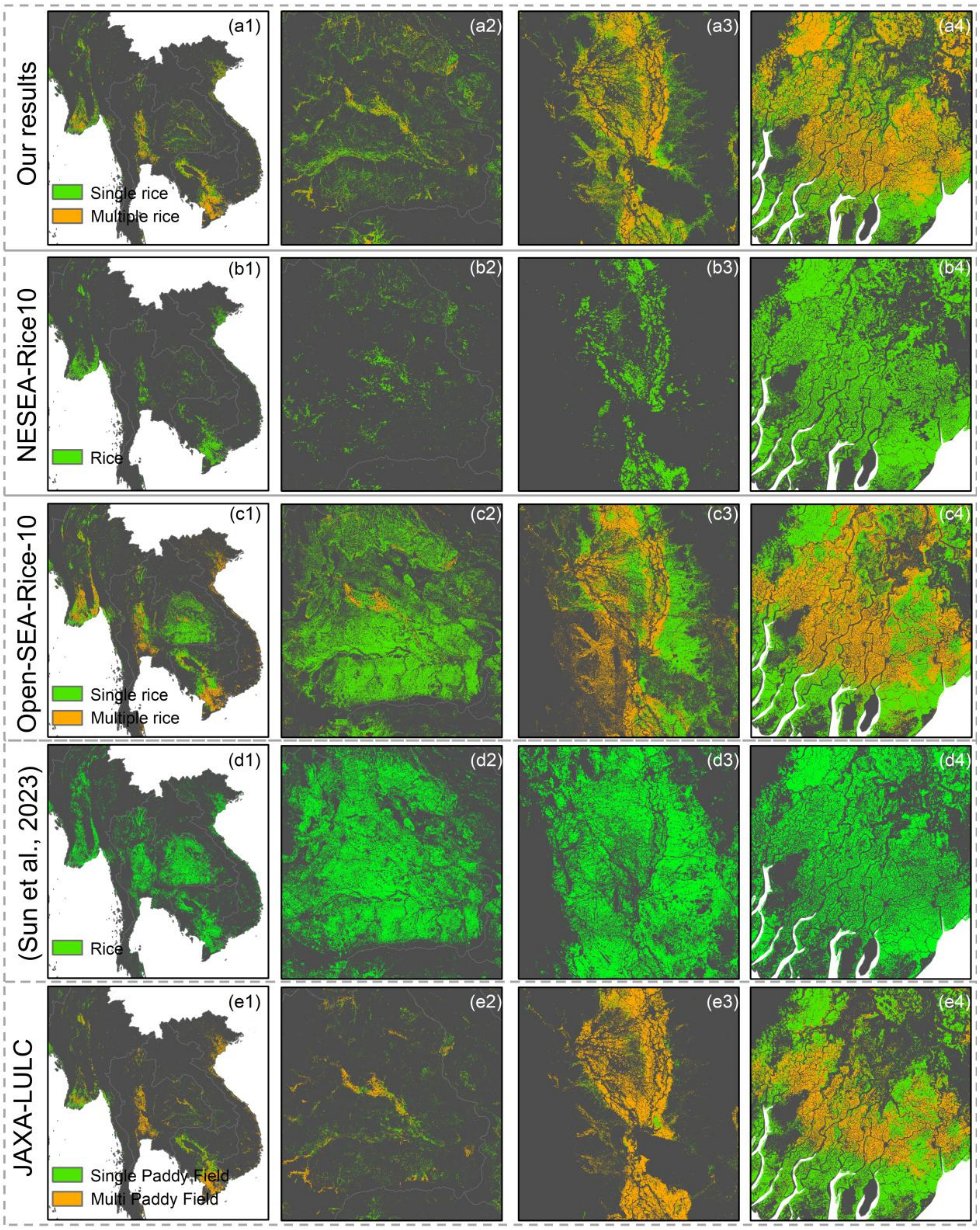

Figure. 5 Comparative analysis of single and multiple rice field Distribution in Southeast Asia. Panels (a1)-(a4) display results from our proposed method, (b1)-(b4) from NESEA-Rice10, (c1)-(c4) from Open-SEA-Rice-10, and (d1)-(d4) from Sun et al. (2023). Panels (e1)-(e4) show JAXA-LULC data, retaining the original land cover classifications of Single Paddy Field and Multi Paddy Field.

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3.3 Spatial patterns and change trends of rice cultivation over the past 30 years

In South and mainland Southeast Asia, rice is predominantly distributed in plains and riverine areas with abundant freshwater resources. Since 1990, there has been a significant expansion trend in rice planting areas, primarily in central-western India and Pakistan (Fig. 2). Rice cropping intensity is dominated by double and single rice (this study's statistics focus solely on rice cropping intensity, excluding other crops). The Mekong Delta region in Vietnam is predominantly characterized by triple rice cultivation.

Based on the analysis of Figs. 2 and 6, substantial changes in rice cultivation patterns have occurred across South and mainland Southeast Asia over the past three decades. In these regions, intensification within existing rice croplands—manifested as increased planting intensity in stable areas—has become a more prevalent trend than the expansion of rice-growing areas. For instance, regions previously dominated by single-cropping systems, such as southern Thailand, have transitioned toward double-cropping regimes. Likewise, northern Pakistan and eastern India have shown a pronounced increase in rice cropping intensity. In contrast, the Mekong Delta has experienced a shift from double- to triple-cropping systems. Areas with reduced rice extent are primarily associated with cropland degradation or conversion to other crops rather than a decline in planting intensity. The most notable reductions are concentrated in eastern Thailand and the southern Mekong Delta estuary, corresponding respectively to shifts from irrigated to rainfed systems and a loss of arable land.

As shown in Fig. 6, we further quantified changes in rice cultivation area and mean cropping intensity at the national scale. Among all countries, India exhibited the most substantial expansion in rice cultivation area, whereas most Southeast Asian countries experienced a general decline over the past three decades. In terms of cropping intensity, India showed an average increase of approximately 0.1, while most Southeast Asian countries exhibited a decrease of less than –0.05, reflecting intensified cultivation in South Asia and widespread contraction in Southeast Asia.

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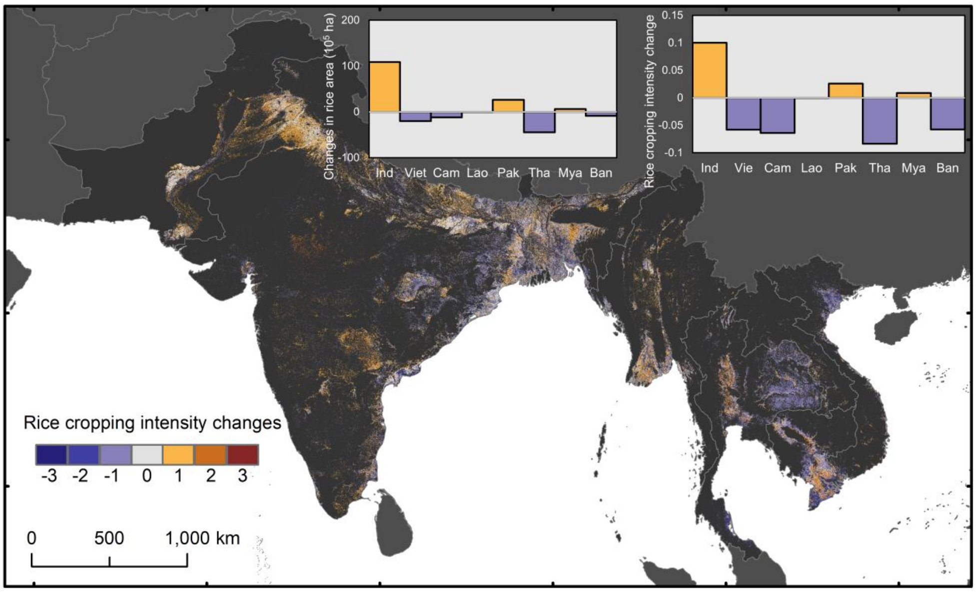

Figure 6. Spatial Distribution and Planting Intensity Changes of Paddy Rice in South and mainland Southeast Asia (1995–2024). Orange represents pixels with decreased paddy rice area in 2024 compared to 1995 (contraction), green indicates increased areas (expansion), and gray-white denotes stable areas (paddy rice present in both periods). Rice cropping intensity changes are shown for stable areas, with red indicating increases (+1 for one additional season, +2 for two additional seasons) and blue indicating decreases (-1 for one season less, -2 for two seasons less).

4. Discussion

4.1 Differences between Rainfed and Irrigated Rice

In the results, substantial discrepancies among rice mapping products were observed in central–western Thailand. To investigate the underlying causes, we analyzed the time-series profiles of selected sample points over three consecutive years using the JAXA land-cover product, our phenology-based rice maps, and the Open-SEA-Rice-10 dataset (Fig. 8).

From the optical time series, it is evident that rainfed rice fields do not maintain stable surface water coverage during the “transplanting” stage. Consequently, they often fail to produce sufficiently low SWIR reflectance relative to the RED band, which is required for satisfying the condition LSWI ⩾ NDVI—the key indicator of flooding used in phenology-based optical algorithms such as NESEA-Rice10. This explains why our optical-based

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approach and other similar methods tend to identify fewer rice pixels compared with radar-based products shown in Fig. 5.

By contrast, radar observations capture a distinct VH backscatter trough, indicating an increase in soil moisture that alters the soil dielectric constant. As crop growth progresses, VH backscatter gradually rises, resulting in large VH time series variations. This enables radar-based methods to detect rainfed rice, even in areas without persistent standing water. Moreover, these VH minima typically coincide with the onset of the monsoon season, marking the beginning of the rice growth cycle (Fig. 7).

For Irrigated rice, each valid cropping cycle is accompanied by a strong flooding signal that can be effectively identified by all water-related optical indices (e.g., combinations of SWIR, RED, or GREEN bands; Zhao et al. (2025)). In radar observations, paddy fields exhibit deeper VH troughs than rainfed fields, and the subsequent increase after the trough (rice growing stage) reflects higher canopy water content (VWC) and a stronger dielectric response, which amplifies VH time series variations. Unlike rainfed rice, the timing of Irrigated rice cultivation is typically decoupled from monsoon onset, owing to irrigation management.

However, we also note a potential source of misclassification when relying solely on Sentinel-1 VH backscatter for rice mapping, especially in temperate regions outside tropical zones. Although radar-based algorithms perform well in persistently cloudy and humid environments, our previous findings—and those of other studies—indicate that several non-rice crops (both rainfed and irrigated, such as maize and soybean) can exhibit amplitude variations comparable to those of paddy rice (Zhao et al., 2024). Consequently, such V-shaped radar signatures are not unique to rainfed or paddy rice, but rather represent a general biophysical response to canopy development and surface moisture dynamics.

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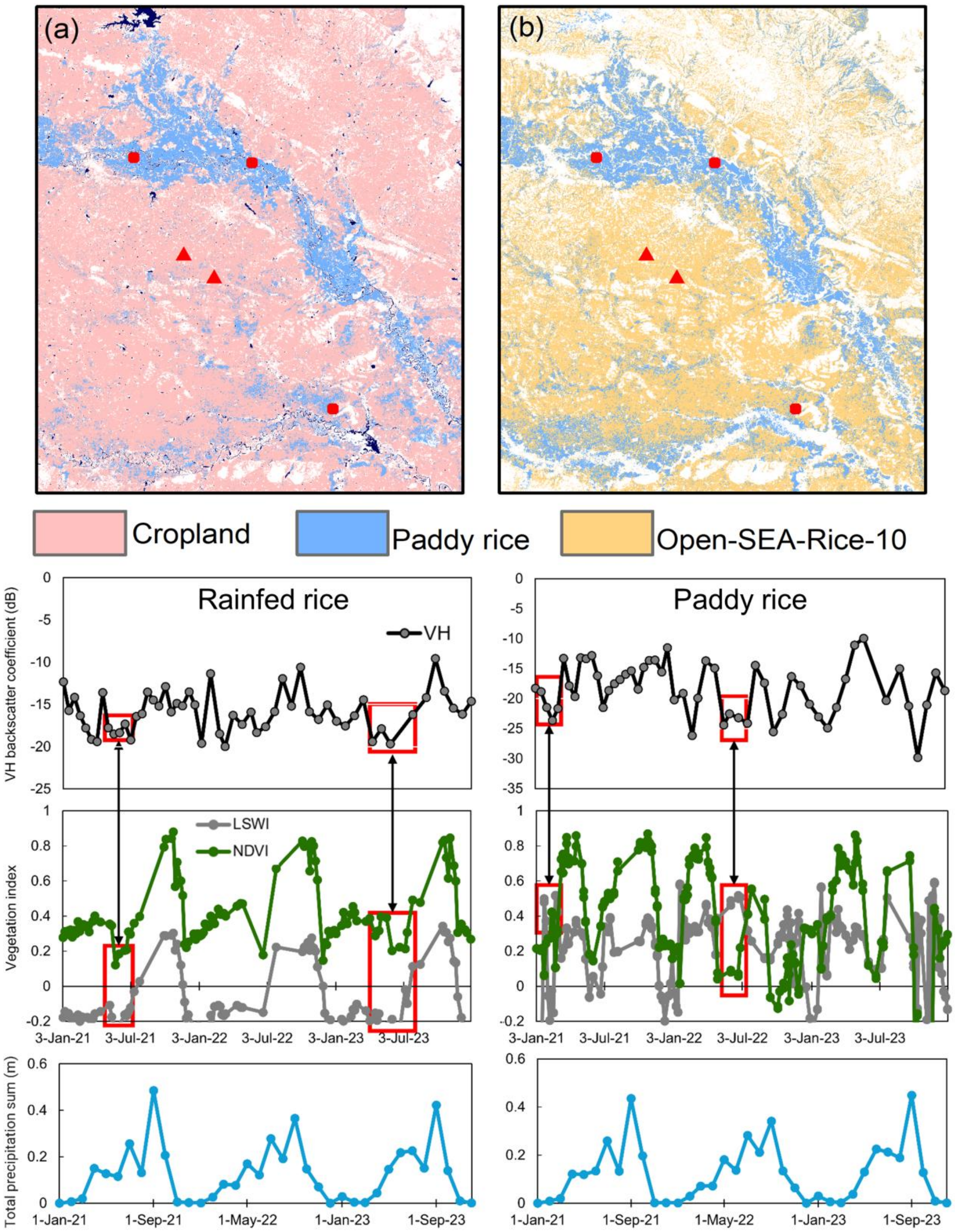

Figure 7. Spatial comparison and time-series analysis of vegetation indices, VH backscatter, and total precipitation between rainfed and irrigated (paddy) rice in Thailand. (a) JAXA land-cover product, where pink represents non-paddy croplands and blue indicates paddy fields. (b) Comparison between the Open-SEA-Rice-10

dataset (orange) and this study's paddy rice product (blue; overlaid on orange). The lower two panels present the corresponding time-series curves for rainfed and paddy rice, respectively.

4.2 Advantages of the proposed product

Recent advances in remote sensing have produced numerous high-accuracy rice mapping algorithms (Deng et al., 2025). However, their application to long-term, large-scale mapping remains constrained by data availability and computational demands. For instance, although SAR can effectively improve mapping accuracy (Adrian et al., 2021), its use is limited in earlier periods due to the absence of Sentinel-1 observations. In addition, the computational complexity of large-scale mapping remains a considerable challenge, even when implemented on cloud-based platforms such as Google Earth Engine.

To overcome these challenges, this study employs a streamlined and phenology-based rice mapping framework specifically optimized for the biophysical and climatic conditions of South and Southeast Asia. Instead of extracting detailed phenological phases (e.g., tillering or harvest), the method focuses on detecting key phenological peaks, providing a robust solution under conditions of high cropping intensity, short intervals between multiple rice cycles, and persistent monsoon-related cloud cover. For instance, in the Mekong Delta, the interval between two consecutive rice seasons is perhaps shorter than 15 days (Fig. S3), meaning that even a slight temporal offset in detecting the flooded transplanting stage could miss the short-lived flooding signal. Thus, identifying phenological peaks offers a more reliable and practical strategy than full-season tracking using Landsat imagery.

4.2 Uncertainty Assessment

The primary source of uncertainty or error in the products generated by this study stems from the observation quality and the number of valid observations from the optical imagery data used. Specifically, the striping issue in Landsat-7 data led to omission errors in some rice fields. Despite using all available imagery over a five-year period for compositing, striped gaps persisted in certain areas, resulting in the failure to effectively identify rice fields, particularly in the results for 2005 and 2015.

Additionally, validation based on sample points revealed omission errors in northern India, due to limitations in valid optical observations. Based on the extracted rice phenological peaks, this region is characterized by a rice–wheat double-cropping system, with rice transplanting typically occurring between June and July. However, as

https://doi.org/10.5194/essd-2025-711
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shown in Fig. S4, many pixels in this region have very few valid observations during this period because of persistent cloud cover. Consequently, optical imagery often fails to capture the flooding signals of rice, leading to underestimation of rice extent and reduced accuracy in northern India.

To address this issue, we re-mapped the 2024 rice intensity and spatial distribution for northern India using our previously developed Rice-Sentinel algorithm, which effectively integrates Sentinel-1 radar observations to compensate for missing optical data. Nevertheless, the original optical-based results are also retained and provided for comparison and reference by other researchers.

5. Data availability

The Spatial distribution and cropping intensity maps of rice in South and mainland Southeast Asia can be accessed in the Zenodo data set from the following DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17615341 (Zhao et al., 2025b). We welcome other researchers to validate these products and collaborate in improving the accuracy of rice mapping in this region.

6. Code availability

The code independently developed of this study is available at the following link:

https://code.earthengine.google.com/d410ce31604e93518ef9281097e71cc5.

7. Conclusions

This study employed an improved phenology-based rice mapping algorithm, leveraging the full archive of Landsat series and Sentinel-2 satellite data, to generate high-resolution maps of rice planting areas and cropping intensity across South and mainland Southeast Asia for the years 1995, 2005, 2015, and 2024. By applying optical image compositing and a fake-peak filtering technique, the challenges of extracting long-term rice cropping intensity in tropical regions were effectively addressed, yielding relatively reliable results. The resulting products achieved overall accuracies ranging from 83.74% to 87.60% across the four periods, validated against 23,396 independent samples, and exhibited R^2 values exceeding 0.9 when compared with FAO statistical data for South and mainland Southeast Asian countries. In conclusion, this study fills a critical gap in high-resolution, long-term rice mapping,

https://doi.org/10.5194/essd-2025-711
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providing a robust foundation for sustainable agricultural practices and policy development in South and Southeast Asia, with broader implications for global food security and environmental sustainability.

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