Pigs and Boars — A Study on the Use of Domesticated and Wild Animals From the Standpoint of the Li Tribe of Hainan Island —

NISHITANI, Masaru

There is a strong possibility that pigs were brought to the Japanese archipelago from the continent. However, the Chinese style of intensive agriculture with a singular rotational system that incorporated pigs into agriculture did not, with the exception of the Ryukyu Islands, exist in Japan during the Yayoi period or any later period in Japanese history. History also tells us that the raising of pigs ceased after the Nara period. This paper studies this question by comparing the history of pig farming on Hainan Island with the livelihood systems of the Li tribe that did not pay particular attention to pigs.

It is believed that it wasn’t until the Ming period that the Li tribe on Hainan Island began to raise pigs as part of their everyday lives. The reason for this is connected to the increase in demand for pork generated by population pressure on Hainan Island and it may be surmised that the acceptance of pig farming by the Li tribe is attributable to the added value that pigs had as goods that could be exchanged for iron products and salt.

However, the Li tribe did not introduce a method of pig farming that follows the Chinese style of intensive agriculture. Instead, they continued to maintain livelihoods that involved wet rice paddies, slash-and-burn fields, hunting and gathering and domesticated livestock. The distinguishing feature of this style of livelihood was the use of "large traps" that were built in slash-and-burn fields that are part of the natural world, and the way they created a system for the daily trapping of wild animals within their agricultural system. This is vastly different from the Chinese style of intensive agriculture that relied on a man-made rotational system, and is believed to be one factor that made it possible to maintain a way of life that did not pay much attention to pigs.

Not only was the Japanese archipelago, with the exception of the Ryukyu Islands, the same as Hainan Island in that it did not turn to the Chinese style of intensive agriculture, but slash-and-burn fields that had already disappeared from regions where the continental Chinese style of intensive agriculture had been prominent continued to be used after the
Second World War up until the 1970s. The question of just how far back slash-and-burn fields date in the Japanese archipelago is a topic for future research, and the diverse utilization of nature in slash-and-burn fields is an aspect that deserves attention.