Paddy Fields and Burnt Fields:
Multi-Subsistence as Multi-Layered Subsistence Strategy

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Taking the Li group's hometown of Chubao in China's Wuzhishan Hainan as a case study, this paper attempts to offer a universal point of view of multi-subsistence, which goes beyond regional and epochal considerations. In discussing the characteristics of the Li group's multi-subsistence, it occurred to me that rather than stating each characteristic of their subsistence, it was necessary to think about the standards governing their use of natural resources, insofar as it relates to the cultivation of paddy fields and burnt fields, as well as hunting and gathering, and the use of plants. That standard is one of ownership, which is established by the act of "planting something by hand" and by "something growing". Through this standard of ownership the Li group has become able, at individual and village level, to make use of the land and natural resources in a multi-layered way.

From the point of view of the methods involved and irrigation requirements, the cultivation of paddy fields and burnt fields seem to be very different activities. However, I believe that the shared standard of ownership is the common factor at the root of the Li group's system of maintaining both these forms of subsistence.

When thinking about a regional community's subsistence strategy, taking account of the superficial differences of subsistence as well as historical transitions, it is necessary to discuss what form their basic system of subsistence strategy takes and what the strategy is posed on. The characteristics of regional multi-subsistence ultimately arise from the interrelation between numerous different factors, such as the constraints of the ecological environment, regional history, and the use of natural resources. It is necessary to display those relations in concrete terms.

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