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Changing Landscapes, Changing Lifestyles in Xishuangbanna, SW- China identifying Farming-Systems and Emerging Inequalities in Naban National Nature Reserve

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Abstract

Xishuangbanna, a prefecture in the southern part of Yunnan Province bordering Laos and Burma, has always been- in many ways- a transition zone between Mainland Southeast Asia and Mainland China. Over the last centuries this remote area has evolved into a highly diverse natural, socio-cultural and agricultural landscape. Despite its peripheral location, Xishuangbanna has never been uncoupled from the developments in other parts of China and as a consequence of the rapid development, rubber growing has become a major occupation in the (sub)tropical area. The repercussions of population growth and rising demands in food and cash crops have strong impacts on the area; for example a sharp decline of biological and agricultural biodiversity is observed

However, profound institutional changes since the end of the collectivisation-period, for example the emergence of market structures and the introduction of the household responsibility system, have lead to an increasing diversity of income generation of notoriously poor rural households. Our paper is based on current research in the Naban National Nature Reserve, an area which is well reflecting the overall diversity of Xishuangbanna, in terms of ecosystems, altitudes, socio-cultural diversity and agricultural capacity and viability.

After presenting the political and cultural institutions and frameworks governing land-use in the Reserve Area, we will focus on different farm-types, which were identified in a quantitative household survey conducted in 2008. Three different farming-systems were identified, which show huge differences in rubber shares, income generation, farming activities, land-availability, sustainability of natural resource use, etc.

In combination with research based on qualitative methods, the paper attempts to explore the multiple causes for the emergence of local distinctions and inequalities and particularly importance of monoculture. Furthermore, we will discuss approaches and options to enhance rural development without compromising the Natures Reserve´s task to conserve and protect natural resources as an economic base and biodiversity.

Keywords: Farming-systems, Institutional change, land-use change