

Forest Management by Villagers in a Hillside Village in Northeast Thailand

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The objective of this study is to report the present situation of forest management by villagers in a hillside village in northeast Thailand. The field research was conducted in a hillside village in Loei province, northeast Thailand. As of 2011, the village had a population of 206 divided among 56 houses. The people who lived in the study village engaged in shifting cultivation in the past. The present main subsistence and economic activity of the villagers is agriculture, and they mainly grow upland rice and hybrid maize for realization. Field research in this village was mainly conducted from March to May 2011, from October to November 2011, and from June to August 2012. With the help of a 2012 GPS survey, I made a map of land use in the study village. I also made a cultivated area distribution map of 1976 and 2003 using aerial photographs as a guide. In the study village, the introduction of corn cultivation for realization advanced after 2003. As a result, the amount of cultivated area increased rapidly, and there was a transition from shifting cultivation to continuous upland farming. In 2012, 77% of the village land was cultivated. Some households do not own any secondary forest or fallow land. In the situation that secondary forest and fallow land are disappearing as a result of the expansion of corn cultivation for realization, the villager leaves forests to gather bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and firewood. In the daily life of the villager, such forest products play an important role and form a significant part of their diet. I visited the common forest from where villagers gather mushrooms to observe how this is done. I found at least three places for gathering mushrooms in the village and selected one for observation. The forestland is privately owned, but there is open access to it. Villagers are allowed to collect mushrooms and firewood, but only dead trees could be taken for use as firewood; they are not allowed to cut down green wood. Mushrooms emerge only during the rainy season, and even this is not predictable. When villagers discover that mushrooms have begun to spring up in the forest, this information is shared with the rest of the village. Women gather mushrooms more often than men do. All mushrooms are edible. Open-access forests make up a significant source of gathering for the home consumption of local residents. If forests are lost, villagers will lose their access to mushrooms. Therefore, we can assume that villagers appropriately restrict and self-regulate their use of the forests.

Keywords: forest management, gathering activities, open-access, natural resource utilization, land use change, Northeast Thailand