

CHANGES IN SUBSISTENCE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS IN VILLAGES PRODUCING *MIANG* (CHEWING TEA) IN NORTHERN THAILAND

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Abstract

In the forested hill region of northern Thailand, traditional tea cultivation fields, known as “*miang* tea gardens,” have been maintained in the forests, and used to produce fermented tea, known as “*miang*,” which is used for chewing. The tea trees in the *Miang* gardens are grown under tall shade trees and small patches of forest, and these gardens are thus recognized as a system of agroforestry. In our previous paper, we reported on changes in subsistence and land-use patterns in *miang* villages following social changes. This paper seeks to elucidate the recent situation of subsistence and its changes in *miang* villages. Research focused on two villages in Chiang Mai Province; PMO village in where villagers began to convert their subsistence from *miang* production to drinking tea production, and MA villages, where villagers have maintained *miang* production as their subsistence activity. Comparing the two villages, we discuss the socioeconomic factors affecting changes of subsistence between them.

We found the following differences in the *miang* marketing systems and site conditions between the two villages. (1) Compared to PMO village, *miang* farmers in MA village established a marketing system with a shorter process of *miang* production but a higher selling price, (2) The establishment of a tea plantation and local tea factory by a drinking tea company in an adjacent village enabled the *miang* farmers in PMO village to acquire techniques for drinking tea production and to secure routes for marketing their new products, and (3) The increased selling price of drinking tea fixed by new middleman who began to trade with PMO village in 2004 also encouraged the *miang* farmers there to convert their products from chewing to drinking tea.

Although the products have been converted, the villagers of PMO village have maintained the structure of their *miang* tea gardens, because it enables them to convert their products into drinking tea with a minimum investment, and to make the best use of the experience they have accumulated in tea cultivation.