

Northern Thailand

Mean Annual
Rainfall: 1,300 mm

Direct benefits from trees on farm?



Mieng Tea Garden

This is a traditional form of agroforestry, involving inter-planting of tea trees (*Camellia sinensis*) among trees in hill-evergreen forests, that is believed to have been practiced for more than 2,000 years in areas of northern Southeast Asia. Fermented tea leaves are called “Mieng”, which long been traded or sold as a source of income. An old tea tree can be harvested for a long time with a minimum of attention and zero irrigation. Products from the Mieng tea garden currently include leaves, seeds, and Chinese tea. Today some tea gardens are being inter-planted with some other domesticated trees that can be grown in the same manner as traditional tea trees.



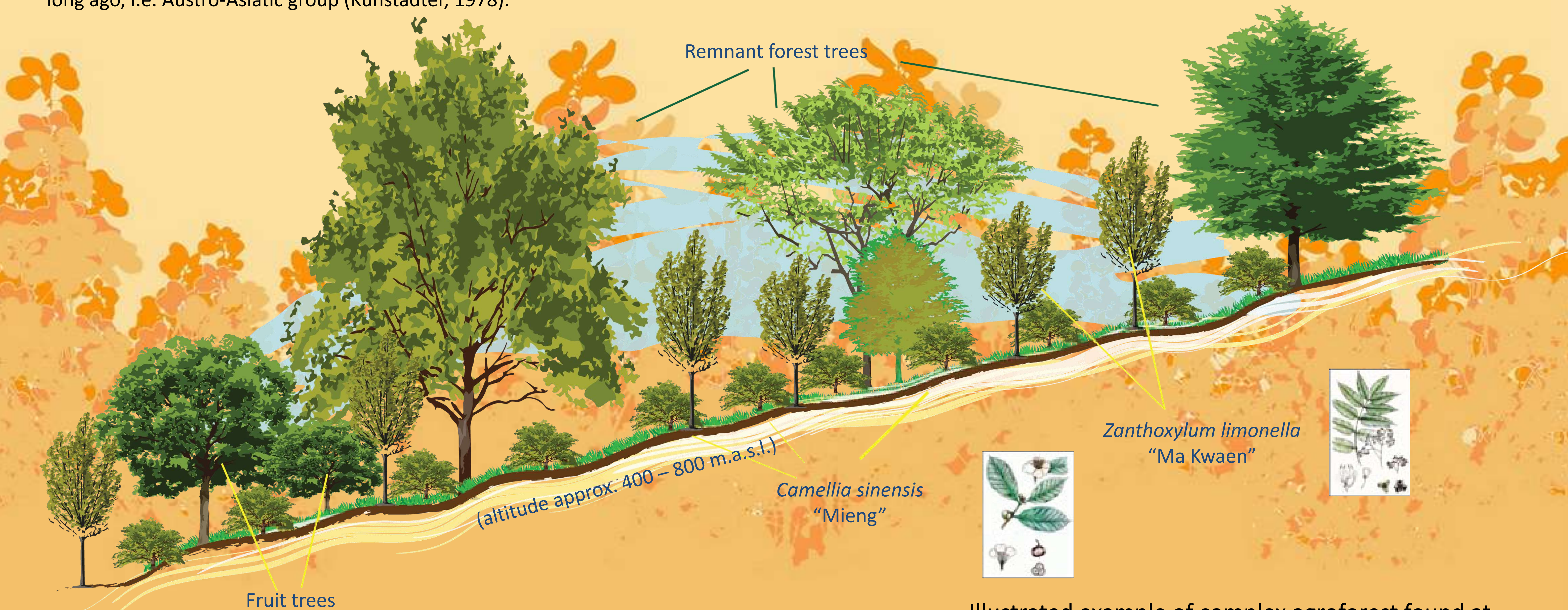
DO YOU KNOW?

Tea trees are the important factor contributing to environmental stability of these forest ecosystems because the tea trees grow underneath larger trees. If the gardeners still maintain their tea trees, the forests also remain. Thus, their folk knowledge about tea gardens contributes to forest protection. Elements of their folk knowledge also include check-dam management systems and tree-ordaining ritual ceremonies, which are practices that help promote respect for nature among members of local communities. Thus, a forest-conservation mindset has been passed from generation to generation, and some communities have also developed their mieng tea gardens for eco-tourism and agro-tourism, including historical nature trails, due to their intact forests with large trees.

Mieng tea gardeners are ethnic Thai people who immigrated to the highlands long ago, i.e. Austro-Asiatic group (Kunstadter, 1978).

Benefits of trees in the Mieng tea garden:

- High plant diversity, especially useful plants including edible plants and domesticated plants.
- Spreading crowns protecting soils from evaporation loss. Dense crowns result in mild sunlight reaching tea leaves and less transpiration. Tea leaves are, as a consequence, of good quality.
- Tree shade is good for litter decomposition.
- Mieng tea gardens can also act as a buffer for runoff, especially in hill-evergreen and pine forests. As a result, it can help protect the forest against fire and encroachment.



Reference :
Kunstadter, P. 1978. Institutional constraints on forest farming. In: Kunstadter, P. Chapman, E.C. and Sabhasri, S. (eds), Farmer in the forest. University Press of Hawaii, The East-West Centre, Honolulu, Hawaii. 41-42.
Preechapanaya, P. 2001. Folk knowledge about Agroforestry Ecosystems in watershed areas of Northern Thailand. Chiang Mai. Thanabun Publishing. 127 pages.

Illustrated example of complex agroforest found at
Pa Pae Village, Mae Taeng District, Chiang Mai Province

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