

The Relationship Between Religious Uses of Plants and Forest Preservation Among the Tai Dam in NW Laos, PDR. (Poster)

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Introduction

The Tai Dam are an animist ethnic group living in the Namtha province of Laos, PDR. Their sacred cemetery forests have been preserved since plants can only be harvested for funeral ceremonies. These virtually untouched forests now represent the last remaining mature forest patches in the Namtha valley.

Objectives

This study's objective was to investigate the relationship between plant use in Tai Dam funeral ceremonies and forest preservation. Understanding these relationships may lead to improved forest preservation models that incorporate traditional cultural practices and encourage community involvement in environmental protection and reforestation. Although the forests are protected by the cultural practices of the Tai Dam, it is not clear how much the villagers participate in active management within these forests. Additionally conservation efforts are underway to conserve a wildlife corridor along the Namtha River and determining best management practices will be important for the projects success.

Methods

The objectives were achieved through a combination of key informant interviews, field interviews and plant specimen collection and identification.

Results

While most villagers are unaware of active forest management or the need for conservation, it was found that the head of the village is the principal forest manager, and therefore keeps careful track of tree species populations. The village head will only allow trees, which are abundant to be cut for funerals. In addition, it was found that five tree species are important in Tai Dam funerals, although not all of them are found in the cemetery forests.

Conclusion

The village head is the principal forest manager in Tai Dam funeral forests, he makes sure the diversity of tree species is conserved and the forest remains intact for future generations. His influence and knowledge could be used to make an integrated management plan to connect cemetery forests into a continuous wildlife corridor along the Namtha River. Unlike previously suggested by local conservation groups in Nam Tha, using the indigenous knowledge from the village head may prove more beneficial to conservation than using villagers alone. Along with the new highway that runs through the region, connecting Thailand to China, the proposed conservation area will hopefully bring increased tourism to the area.

Keywords: Conservation, Funeral Forest

Selected References

None

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