



Saving the Last Tea Forests – Project Bulang Mountains, Xishuangbanna, China

How Climate Protection Helps to Conserve Biological Diversity and to Offer New Opportunities for Ethnic Minorities

Background In west China at the border to Laos and the Union of Myanmar, ethnic minorities like Akha, Lahu and Bulang still exist. The land of the Bulang Mountains, foothill of the Himalaya, has been overused for years e.g. by opium cultivation. Now, there is a golden opportunity to establish the sustainable Rainforestation Farming, a land use system which has already been tested on the Philippines. The TianZi Biodiversity Research & Development Centre and the Bulang Heritage Foundation have therefore concluded an agreement on the renaturation of an area of six square kilometres. In this area, remains of the original tea forest are still growing. Tea, like we know it today, goes back to the first use of the plants by the Bulang people. The project combines ecological objectives, especially concerning the conservation of the unique biodiversity, and cultural and social aspects.

Starting with six square kilometres, there is an option to expand the area to 1,016 square kilometres. During a few years, jobs are to be created in this region through close-to-nature recultivation, a careful use of the secondary forests, and high quality tourism which is ought to be established during that time. Today, wide parts of forests in China have to face high pressure. Therefore, this project is a completely new and exemplary model. It is the first chance to show how tropical forests can be used sustainably and thus can be permanently conserved.

The whole area is situated in the border triangle of China, Laos and Burma (Myanmar) and includes the northern parts of the Chinese tropical forests. It has an altitude of about 1,800 metres and is part of the Greater Mekong Subregion.

The Project Within the framework of the model project and in collaboration with the local village communities of the Akha, it is possible to recreate speciose forests in the area. These forests function as buffer zones for the last original tea forests and provide a habitat for highly endangered plant and animal species, e.g. the slow loris. The near-natural forests which thus come to existence will bind about 300 tons of carbon dioxide per hectare in the course of ten years. Furthermore, a sustainable use of the speciose and high-structured secondary forest offers new perspectives to many of the mountain people. All in all, about 100 different local tree and bush species are planted.

Another way to fight against poverty is the development of responsible tourism. All measures to reach this aim are carried out under scientific support by the Tian Zi Biodiversity Research & Development Centre together with the Centre for Agriculture in the Tropics and Subtropics of the Hohenheim University.



Objectives

- Establishment of the Rainforestation Farming method in order to create speciose secondary forests in the Bulang Mountains in the Xishuangbanna Prefecture; to have space for opium cultivation, such forests have been more and more repelled during the last years
- Sustainable development and new perspectives for ethnical minorities
- Maintenance of cultural traditions
- Protection of biodiversity through the establishment of new near-to nature habitats
- Environmental education through transfer of knowledge and training of young multipliers from the ethnical minorities

First Measures

- The area has been scientifically examined and evaluated
- In the first phase of the project, about 150,000 tea tree seedlings, 20,000 cinnamon tree seedlings, and 10,000 mulberry seedlings have been planted

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