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1	Higher runoff and soil detachment in rubber tree plantations
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3	mountainous Thailand
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14 Abstract

Due to high rainfall erosivity and rapid land-use changes, South-East Asia is one of the hot spots of soil degradation worldwide. In recent decades, several studies showed that the expansion of rubber tree (RT) plantations into previously forested areas has caused a major increase in soil erosion. However, the effects of cropland conversion to RT plantations on surface runoff and soil detachment are still unclear. Here we show that mature RT plantations considerably increase runoff and soil detachment compared to annual crops or young RT plantations with intercrop, mostly due to the absence of understorey.

22 Monitoring 1 m² microplots over four years in mountainous Northern Thailand, we found 23 that runoff and detachment increased with time since the onset of the rainy season and with 24 rainfall height, but more so in mature RT plantations than in young RT plantations and maize. 25 This led to much higher annual soil detachment in mature RT plantations (5.7 kg/m² on 26 average) than in maize and young RT plantations with intercrop (0.36 kg/m²). We identified 27 two main factors explaining this difference: first, rubber tree leaf litter, although abundant, seemed ineffective in reducing runoff at the end of the rainy season. Secondly, the cover by low-growing plants in mature rubber tree plantation was usually sparse and provided little protection. In particular we showed that increasing the cover by low-growing plants from quasinull cover to >31 % cover decreased runoff coefficient by 32 %.

32 Our results demonstrate that afforestation by RT, at least under current management 33 practices and on steep slopes, is overall detrimental to soil conservation but that its effects 34 could be mitigated by the adoption of less intense weeding practices.

35 **1. Introduction**

36 In 2012, the UN Rio+20 conference on sustainable development acknowledged the importance of soil protection and sustainable land management (United Nations, 2012). 37 38 Following this recognition, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) pledged to "protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems [...] and halt and reverse land 39 40 degradation and halt biodiversity loss" (SDG 15). Maintaining soil functionality and resilience is 41 a major element of several sustainable development global challenges: food and water security, 42 climate change mitigation, ecosystem service provision, biodiversity protection, and energy 43 sustainability (Koch et al., 2013; McBratney, Field & Koch, 2014).

44 Southeast Asia is doubly exposed to land degradation, due to extreme meteorological 45 conditions and to rapid land-use changes (Van Lynden & Oldeman, 1997; Borrelli et al., 2017; 46 Panagos et al., 2017). Oldeman (1991) classified all South-East Asia as having medium to high 47 land degradation rates due to water erosion, especially due to adverse meteorological 48 conditions. For example, the Global Rainfall Erosivity Database classifies the area as one of the regions with the highest rainfall erosivity (> 7400 MJ ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹, Panagos *et al.* (2017)), and some 49 50 models predict that climate change will cause a continued increase in rainfall erosivity (Plangoen & Udmale, 2017). Besides, in 2012, the GLASOD (Global Assessment of Human-51 52 Induced Soil Degradation, Oldeman et al. (1991)) estimated that 18% of Asian lands had been degraded by humans (ISRIC 2012). More recently, Borrelli et al. (2017) predicted a 5% yearly 53 54 increase of soil erosion rates in most of South East Asia due to very high rates of land-use 55 change. In the area, deforestation (among the highest rates in the world, Zhao et al. (2006); Sodhi et al., (2010)) and the intensification of agriculture exacerbated environmental 56 57 degradation, especially in mountainous areas with steep slopes. In the uplands of Northern 58 Thailand, where subsistence agriculture was previously dominant, government incentives

59 started in the 1970s to encourage the transition to more intensive and market-oriented agriculture (Fox & Vogler, 2005). The intensification and the expansion of cash crops into 60 61 previously forested areas led to intense environmental degradation (Wangpakapattanawong et 62 al., 2016) increasing surface runoff and sedimentation (Mohammad & Adam, 2010) as well as 63 soil organic carbon losses (Häring et al. 2014). Maize and cassava cultivation systems were 64 found to be particularly prone to erosion (Valentin et al., 2008). Thus, more recently, national 65 and international organisations and programmes such as UNCCD and REDD+ encouraged the 66 replacement of annual cash crops by perennial cash crops, such as teak or rubber tree (RT). The 67 objective was to increase farmers' income and to expand tree cover in mountainous areas. The 68 replanting of trees in degraded areas was expected to restore favourable soil conditions and 69 water resources. Yet the effect of perennial monoculture expansion is far from consensual. 70 While natural forest regrowth decreases overland flow and soil erosion, the replacement of 71 annual crops by teak plantations in Laos led to a sharp increase of soil detachment and 72 overland flow (Lacombe et al., 2017; Ribolzi et al., 2017; Patin et al., 2018). Other ecosystem 73 services, such as carbon storage or support for biodiversity are also lower in tree plantations 74 compared to natural forests (Hall et al., 2012). Most studies investigating the impacts of RT 75 plantations on soil compared the plantations to forests or other tree plantations (Noguchi et al., 76 2003; Li et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2015; Nurulita et al., 2016). Yet, many plantations are planted on 77 previously arable lands (Holt et al., 2016): an adequate estimation of RT impact on soil erosivity should thus include annual as well as perennial crops. 78

Erosion processes must be measured and analysed at different scales. At the largest scale, variations in rivers flows, sediment loads and sediment redeposition can provide information about regional erosion processes. At the catchment scale, processes include water partitioning into overland and underground flow; the detachment and redeposition of sediments downslope; and runoff connectivity and redistribution by topographical features such as gullies or terraces. The catchment scale is particularly appropriate for tackling long-term issues, for instance regarding the impacts of land-use changes on erosion processes (Valentin *et al.*, 2008).

In this four-year study located in Northern Thailand, we investigated the combined effects of rainfall, soil surface conditions, ground cover and land use (maize, young RT plantations with intercrop, and mature RT plantations). We used 1 m² erosion microplots (Janeau *et al.*, 2003) which is a relevant scale for investigating very local, fine-scale processes of soil particle detachment and water infiltration (e.g. Lacombe *et al.* (2018)) and their relation to local soil surface characteristics. It provides key information about the erosion potential of a particular

92 field or land use. We characterised soil surface by quantifying the proportions of crusts, free 93 gravels and aggregates as well as soil cover by weeds and crops (Casenave & Valentin, 1992). The dynamics of soil cover by low-growing plants were quantified using weekly standardised 94 95 pictures. We hypothesised that the main factors affecting runoff and detachment would be the 96 presence of a high canopy associated with discontinuous ground cover; and thus that mature 97 RT plantations (high trees and sparse understorey) would cause higher runoff and detachment 98 than young RT plantations (with intercrop) and maize, unless ground cover by living plants was high. We aimed i) to quantify runoff and soil detachment on an annual and monthly basis (2015 99 100 experiment) in the different land uses; ii) to quantify the different runoff and soil detachment 101 responses of the different land uses to rainfall (2016 experiment) and iii) to quantify the effect 102 of ground cover by low-growing plants on runoff in mature RT plantations (2017-2018 103 experiment).

104 **2. Material and methods**

105 **2.1. Study sites**

106 Study sites were located in Huai Lang, Chiang Rai province, northern Thailand (100°27'E, 107 20°00'N). Soils belonged to Alfisols with clay to clay-loam texture. A detailed soil description is 108 provided in Table S1. The local climate is typical of tropical mountainous regions. It is 109 characterised by the succession of a dry season (December to April) and a rainy season (May to 110 November), which accounts for most of the annual rainfall. The meteorological station installed 111 for the study showed that total annual rainfall was approximately 1600 mm/year with a high inter-annual variability of 200 mm/yr. Mean annual temperature was 24.2 °C with a low inter-112 113 annual variability of 0.4 °C but a high amplitude between maximum and minimum daily values, 114 43.5 °C and 4.8 °C respectively. The total annual potential evapotranspiration was approximately 900 mm with an inter-annual variability of 30 mm. All studied plots were 115 116 deforested more than 20 years ago. In 2000, they were all already intensely cultivated with 117 open-field crops and the first RT plantations were planted in 2003.

118 **2.2. Location of erosion microplots**

119 In March 2015, microplots were installed in a maize field (M), a young rubber tree plantation 120 with maize intercrop (YR) and a mature RT plantation either within the RT rows (*OR_s*, where 121 canopy is usually dense and rainfall interception is high) or between the rows (*OR_i*, with usually 122 sparser canopy and lower interception). The owner of this mature plantation reported no 123 herbicide application. Three replicates were installed for each situation. M and YR were located 124 on different soil types than OR (Table 1, Table S1). To control for this potential bias, in 2016, 125 during the dry season, the microplots were moved to fields with similar land uses and the soil 126 types were switched compared to 2015. These new locations were also located closer to the 127 automatic meteorological station presented hereafter, allowing the use of high-resolution 128 rainfall kinetic energy data provided by the station. The baseline weed management in this new 129 plantation was two applications of glyphosate each year. In 2017 and 2018, we redistributed 130 the microplots in the two RT plantations studied in 2015 (OR₁) and 2016 (OR₂), thus in both soil 131 types. All microplots were located between tree rows. In each plantation, half the microplots 132 were treated with herbicides twice a year, while herbicides were excluded from the other half. 133 The effect of the treatment was not investigated per se but rather through its effect on weeds, 134 and more generally on cover by low-growing plants.

135 At the start of the experiment, all young RT were approximately 4 years old and mature 136 trees approximately 13 years old. Information on RT height and girth and plantation 137 management is provided in Table 1.

138

2.3. Meteorological monitoring

139 An automatic weather station (Campbell BWS200) has been installed since March 2015 in 140 the middle of a small flat grassland located at an elevation of 535 m AMSL. Meteorological 141 parameters were measured on a one-minute basis: temperature and air relative humidity with 142 CS215 Sensor; and rainfall with a tipping bucket rain gauge adjusted to tip once for each 0.2 mm of rain (Campbell ARG100). 143

144 The starting and ending time of an individual rain event was determined by a delay of at 145 least 20 min between two bucket tips. For each rain event, we calculated the El₃₀ and R indices established by Renard et al. (1997) to describe rainfall aggressiveness, as established within the 146 147 Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (Table S2). We also used two manual cumulative rain 148 gauges located in open areas close to M and YR fields (for the 2015 experiment) and to OR1 149 (2015 and 2017-2018 experiments).

2.4. Runoff and soil detachment monitoring 150

151 Erosion microplots were 1 m² metallic frames, driven into the soil to a 10 cm depth to avoid 152 any influence of hypodermic lateral flow. They have been widely used in studies of soil detachment in South-East Asia (Janeau *et al.*, 2003; Pierret *et al.*, 2007; Podwojewski *et al.*, 2008; Patin *et al.*, 2018). Their installation was realised carefully to avoid any disturbance of the soil surface along the frame or preferential infiltration along the sides of the frame. This allowed us to start monitoring just after installation, from mid-May 2015 onwards.

157 65 L buckets, located downward each microplot, allowed to collect the part of the rainfall 158 which runs over the soil surface (overland flow), as well as the transported soil particles 159 detached by splash erosion or by the velocity of the overland flow. The total volume of the 160 overland flow was calculated from the measurement of water height in the collecting bucket. 161 The concentration of soil particles was measured on a 300 mL aliquot, which was filtered and 162 dry-weighted at the Land Development Department laboratory in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The 163 maximum frequency of overland flow sampling was once a day. The events occurring within 164 this period were pooled as indicated in Table S2. For these cumulated rain events we 165 calculated:

166

167

- Cumulated rainfall height, cumulated kinetic energy and maximum EI30 as described in Table S2;
- Runoff coefficient, ratio between runoff volume collected for 1 m² (L/m² and hence
 mm) divided by rainfall height (mm);
- Soil detachment (g/m²) as the product of sediment concentration in the collected
 samples (g/L) by runoff volume (L/m²).

172 The adjustments in the protocol, made to fit with the specific objective of the experiment 173 in each year, are described in Table S3. In particular, as we found large differences in 2015 174 between rainfall measured at the automatic weather station and at manual rain gauges, in 175 2016 we moved the plots closer to the station to be able to use rainfall kinetic energy and 176 El₃₀ calculated with the records of the automatic weather station. Besides, while in 2015 the 177 objective was to measure precisely soil detachment on a monthly or annual basis, in the following years we focused on event-scale analyses with a slightly different methodology for 178 179 soil detachment measurements (Table S3).

180 **2.5. Soil surface conditions**

181 We visually estimated the proportion of each soil surface type for each microplot from two 182 direct observations a year using the method proposed by Casenave and Valentin (1992) (Janeau 183 et *al.* 2003; Chaplot et *al.* 2005, Podwojewski *et al.* 2008b; Patin et al., 2012; Patin et al. 2018). 184 The assessment, both accurate and reproducible when applied by the same expert (Malam Issa 185 et al. 2011), identified:

- 186 • Free aggregates (Fag) not anchored to the soil surface, and readily detached by 187 gently brushing the soil surface;
- 188

• Crusts resulting from the slaking of aggregates and the sealing of soil surface 189 pores, including erosion crusts (ERO), gravel crusts (G) and structural crusts (ST);

190

• Litter and plant fragments lying directly on the soil surface.

191 In 2016, the same expert also analysed a series of detailed pictures (instead of direct 192 observation) to estimate the same parameters at the end of the rainy season.

193 Soil cover by low living plants

194 In 2017 and 2018, in addition to soil surface type estimations, we took weekly standardised 195 pictures of soil cover for each microplot, which corresponded to approximately 1 200 pictures 196 in total. All images were corrected for perspective deformation using the GIMP software. We 197 conducted precise segmentation using Fill (Fiji Is Just Image J) plugin Weka Segmentation on 198 350 soil cover images from both rubber tree plantations and other land uses, to account for 199 different soil and light conditions. The images were annotated at a pixel level and each pixel 200 was associated to one label (living plants, litter and bare soil). Annotating images at a pixel level 201 is time consuming, and takes between 5 to 15 minutes per image. We thus used a computer 202 vision approach to annotate the remaining images. We used the 350 labelled images to learn a 203 segmentation network, and then used the learned model to automatically predict the label of 204 each pixel (Figure S1 and supplementary methods). The segmented images were finally 205 analysed to measure the proportion of soil surface covered by living plants. The litter cover was 206 poorly distinguished from bare soil and was not used in the analysis. We then calculated the proportion of plant cover at the date of each runoff measurement by interpolation. Separate 207 208 interpolations were fitted for five periods corresponding to each herbicide sprayings (January-209 June 2017, June-August 2017, August 2017-June 2018, June-September 2018, and September – 210 December 2018).

211

2.6. Data processing 212

213 We completed all data analyses using the R software (R Core Team, 2018).

214 Corrections for biased data

215 In mature rubber tree plantations, some rain events with very high intensity or rainfall height could not be correctly recorded, for two main reasons. Firstly, the maximum possible 216 217 runoff volume recorded corresponded to the volume of the buckets, i.e. approximately 50 L. 218 Some exceptional events (e.g. with rainfall height > 100mm) created runoff larger than this volume, but the records had an artificial threshold of 50 L/m². Besides, some very intense 219 220 events created concentrated runoff coming from an upslope section of unknown area, which 221 entered over the frame of the microplots and led to overestimations of detachment and 222 runoff. We considered that runoff and detachment were likely biased if the runoff volume 223 reached the volume threshold (> 50 L), or if the runoff coefficient was higher than 2 (runoff 224 coefficient slightly higher than one is possible if there is some concentrated throughfall from the canopy). These "biased" measurements represented between 0.5% and 3.5% of the total 225 226 number of runoff and detachment data, depending on the year. To correct these 227 measurements, we re-estimated them based on mixed models with square-root 228 transformed runoff (or detachment) as the response. For runoff, the explanatory variables were meteorological variables (rainfall height, API, cumulated kinetic energy, and maximum 229 230 El₃₀) and their interactions with the year and plot. For soil detachment, available only in 2015 231 and 2016, the explanatory variables were runoff volume, API, cumulated kinetic energy, and 232 maximum El₃₀ and their interactions with year. The models also included the microplot as a 233 random effect. We fitted the models for all non-biased data and conducted stepwise model 234 selection based on AIC. The final models had an R² of 67% (69 % when including random 235 effects) for runoff volume and 83% (85% when including random effects) for soil 236 detachment. The missing runoff and detachment measurements were then predicted from 237 these models (function *predict*) and integrated into all following analyses.

238 Data analyses

239 We investigated the variation of monthly runoff coefficients using mixed linear models (R 240 package LMER) with month and land use as fixed effects and microplot identity as the random effect to take into account the repeated measurements within each microplot. We conducted 241 242 pairwise comparisons using the EMMEANS package and we corrected p-values for multiple 243 testing using the Tukey method. To investigate the relations between runoff and soil 244 detachment and meteorological variables, we discarded "small" events with rainfall height 245 under 2 mm. Fixed effects were rainfall characteristics (e.g. rainfall height) or date, and random 246 effects were the microplots. Surface runoff and soil detachment were non-normal and with 247 heterogeneous variance. We thus performed model-specific box-cox transformations:

248
$$y' = \begin{cases} \frac{y^{\lambda} - 1}{\lambda} & \text{if } \lambda \neq 0\\ \ln(y) & \text{if } \lambda = 0 \end{cases}$$

With *y* the runoff or soil detachment, y^{i} the transformed variable, and λ the optimised boxcox parameter (function *boxCox*, R package CAR). We then performed stepwise model selection based on AIC (function *step*, R package LMERTEST). Because maximum EI_{30} was highly correlated with rainfall height, we present only results for rainfall height, which is the most common rainfall variable used in erosion models. The date was coded as day number since January 1st.

254 To test the relationship between soil surface characteristics and runoff in the different land 255 uses during the different stages of the rainy season, we first calculated early (until August 14th) and late (from August 15th) semi-annual runoff coefficients. We then conducted mixed model 256 257 analyses of the semi-annual runoff coefficient with soil crusting per microplot in each stage of 258 the rainy season. We also tested the effect of ground cover by low-growing plants on runoff 259 volume (square-root-transformed for ensuring normalisation of the residuals) of individual rain 260 events during the rainy season 2017 and 2018 (May-November) in a mixed model with rainfall 261 height (square-root transformed), soil cover and plantation (OR_1 or OR_2) as fixed effects. In both 262 cases, microplots were included as random effects.

3. Results

264 **3.1. Meteorological conditions**

265 Annual rainfall varied from 1 270 mm in 2015 (measured from March onwards) to 1 836 mm 266 in 2017. It was intermediate in 2016 (1 539 mm) and 2018 (1 447 mm). The rainy season was 267 clearly bimodal in 2015 and 2018, with rainfall peaks in April-May and August, but less so in 268 2016 and 2017, with a large rainfall peak in August and a smaller one in May-June (Figure 1a). 269 The monthly erosivity factor R (10^2 kJ mm/m²/h, corresponding to the monthly sum of EI₃₀ 270 divided by 100, Renard et al. (1997)) peaked in April and August 2015 and June and August 271 2016, July and August 2017 and August and October 2018 (Figure 1b). Rainfall events larger 272 than 25 mm were particularly numerous in 2017 (Table 2).

3.2. Effect of land use and rainfall on runoff and soil detachment (2015-2016)

274 Yearly runoff and soil detachment for each microplot are summarised in Table 2.

275 In M (and YR respectively), annual runoff coefficient was 7.7% (median for the three M 276 microplots; resp. 8.1% in YR) in 2015 and 6.1% (resp. 7.8%) in 2016. Monthly runoff coefficients 277 in 2015 in M and YR were the lowest in M microplots in June (2.7 %) and peaked at 22% in M 278 microplots in October (Figure 2a), when monthly rainfall height was low but rainfall erosivity 279 density still high (Figure 1). In 2016, monthly runoff coefficients remained stable throughout 280 the rainy season, around 6% (Figure 2b). Median annual soil detachment was 0.43 kg/m² in M (resp. 0.31 kg m⁻² in YR) in 2015 and 0.36 kg/m² (resp. 0.26 kg/m²) in 2016: it remained 281 282 relatively low throughout the rainy season in 2015 (Figure 2c).

283 In mature rubber tree plantations, annual runoff coefficient was highly variable. It ranged 284 from 24% (median of the three OR_s microplots in 2015) to 51% (OR_{1,h} in 2017). Both 2015 and 285 2016 considered, there was no significant difference in monthly runoff coefficient between OR_i 286 and OR_s (P > 0.3). In both years, monthly runoff coefficient ranged between 4.4 % (June) and 287 65.6 % (September) in OR_i, and between 4.7 % (May 2016) and 65 % (September 2016, Figure 288 2a,b). It was low at the beginning of the rainy season (until August) and was significantly higher 289 afterwards (P < 10⁻⁶). From June onwards in 2016, runoff coefficient in OR_i and OR_s was always 290 higher than in M or YR and increased steadily over the rainy season. Annual soil detachment 291 varied from 3.1 kg/m² (OR₁ in 2015) to 7.9 kg/m² (OR_s in 2016). It was significantly higher in the 292 late rainy season (P = 0.003), with no difference between OR_i and OR_s . All rain events in 2015 293 and 2016 combined, runoff and soil detachment for individual rain events were also 294 significantly higher in OR_i and OR_s than in M and YR (Figure 3).

We investigated the relationships between rainfall height and runoff and detachment only in 2016, when detailed data from the weather station was available. Both runoff and soil 2016 detachment (boxcox-transformed) significantly increased with rainfall and date in all land uses, 2016 but with larger slopes coefficients in OR_i and OR_s than in M and YR (P < 10⁻³, Figure 3). This was 2017 also the case for other descriptors of rainfall, such as maximum EI_{30} (data not shown).

Besides, log-transformed soil detachment increased linearly with log-transformed runoff (P < 10^{-6}); with a steeper slope in OR_i and OR_s (slope coefficient confidence interval: 1.93 g L⁻¹ ± 0.05 g/L) than in YR and M (slope coefficient confidence interval: 1.20 g L⁻¹ ± 0.9 g/L; interaction: P < 10^{-12} ; R^2 for fixed and random effects: 84 %; Figure 4).

304 **3.3. Effect of soil crusting and ground-level plant cover on runoff**

305 In both 2015 and 2016 in M and YR, structural crust covered most of the ground surface 306 except at the end of the rainy season 2016, when free aggregates were particularly abundant in M (Figure 5). Runoff coefficient was not affected by the amount of crop residues (Figure S2, P > 0.05) but slightly increased with the proportion of crusts (P = 0.046), in both the early and late rainy season. However, the soil was rarely bare but covered by weeds or by the crop (Figure 6), therefore a high interception by vegetation occurred during the rainy season.

311 Rubber leaf litter covered a significant part of all microplots in RT plantations, while the rest 312 of the soil was mostly structural crust (Figure 5). Runoff coefficient between 2015 and 2018 313 significantly increased with soil crusting and decreased with crop residues at the beginning of 314 the rainy season in OR plantations (May to Mid-August, Figure S2, $P = < 1 \ 10^{-2}$). Contrarily to M 315 and YR plots, herbicide application in late July 2016 in OR_i and OR_s had lasting effects, 316 maintaining a quasi-null living plant cover until the end of the rainy season and corresponded 317 to a leap in runoff coefficients (Figure 6 and see runoff leap in August on Figure 2b). Focusing 318 more specifically on ground cover by low-growing plants in 2017 and 2018 we found that it was 319 often relatively sparse, with one third of the ground cover estimates under 2.9% (low cover), 320 one third between 2.9 and 31% (medium cover), and one third over 31% (high cover). When 321 controlling for rainfall height and for the plot, low ground cover generated significantly higher 322 runoff coefficient (34% +/4%) compared to medium (28% +/4%) or high (23% ± 4%) soil cover (P 323 < 0.05). Besides, runoff (square-root transformed) increased with rainfall height (square-root 324 transformed) with a larger slope coefficient when ground cover was low than when it was high (Figure 7). Runoff was also usually higher ($P = 6 \ 10^{-4}$), and increased more strongly with rainfall 325 326 $(P = 1 \ 10^{-4})$, in plot OR_2 compared to OR_1 .

327 **4. Discussion**

328 **4.1. Erosion monitoring on steep slopes**

329 It is common in soil erosion studies to discard small rainy events as insignificant (generally 330 less than 0.5 inch, i.e. 12.7 mm, (Wischmeier & Smith, 1978; Renard et al., 1997)) and focus on 331 medium to large events to quantify erosion. We found that indeed, medium and large events 332 accounted for a large part of the runoff and erosion. These large events are the most visible for 333 farmers and public authorities as they can cause gullies, floods or even landslides. On the 334 contrary, small events tend to be overlooked because they have little individual impact. 335 However, we found that events under 25 mm, the most numerous, added up to on average 336 34% of annual rainfall. All years and land uses together, they accounted on average for 20 % of 337 total runoff and 15 % of total detachment. This last figure was probably underestimated

because from 2016 onwards we did not measure detachment for events generating runoff < 2 L m^{-2} . Such results are likely to depend on the context of a given event: for instance, a small event occurring when the soil is still saturated from previous rainfalls is likely to produce relatively high runoff. Besides, small events mobilise particles, which will then be more easily displaced by later events (especially on steep slopes such as the fields investigated here) thus contributing to high detachment during large rain events. Thus, overlooking the cumulative effect of small events could introduce significant underestimations of soil loss assessments.

345 **4.2. Afforestation by RT plantations increases runoff and soil detachment**

346 Maize is widely recognised as a very erosion-prone crop in South-East Asia (Valentin et al., 347 2008). Detachment rates observed under maize in this study were slightly lower than those 348 usually reported in the region (e.g. 6 t/ha/year in Patin et al. (2018)), possibly due to relatively 349 high cover by weeds in our study plots and to the absence of mechanical soil preparation. 350 However, we found that in both 2015 and 2016, and despite variations in soil types and 351 meteorological conditions, runoff and soil detachment were consistently higher under OR than 352 M or YR with annual soil detachment rates in OR_i and OR_s on average 10 times (in 2015) and 23 353 times (in 2016) higher than in M and YR.

354 The extent of the difference between OR and M/year was lower in 2015 than in 2016, which 355 can be related both to soil and climatic factors. Firstly, a later monsoon in 2016 with higher 356 rainfall and erosivity at the end of the rainy season (when RT leaf litter had partly disappeared 357 but weeds protected soil surface in M and YR) can explain the stronger effect of land use on 358 runoff in 2016 than in 2015. Secondly, there might be an impact of soil variability: the two soil 359 series found in the area are quite similar, both Haplustalfs characterised by moderate runoff 360 and permeability (Moormann et al., 1966). Nevertheless, Ultic Haplustalfs (M and YR in 2015; 361 OR_i and OR_s in 2016) are thinner soils often truncated by erosion; in such case initially deep 362 clayey horizon can reach shallow position. The effect of soil type on runoff was confirmed in 363 2017 and 2018, were the more clayey soils observed for OR₂ (same plantation as in 2016) 364 generated higher runoff for similar rainfall than the more loamy soils observed for OR1 (same 365 plantation as in 2015). We changed soil series-land use pairing between the 2015 and 2016 and 366 obtained similar results: the annual runoff and soil detachment observed at 1m² scale were systematically higher for OR_i and OR_s than for M or YR. Thus, while direct comparison between 367 368 2015 and 2016 is not possible, the higher rates of runoff and detachment for OR_i and OR_s 369 compared to M and YR are consistent; and the possible soil- or weather-related variation in

370 sensitivity to erosion did not exceed nor compensate land-use effects.

371 The higher rates of soil detachment and runoff for OR_i and OR_s were combined with notable 372 soil surface degradation. In 2016, the a_1 coefficients of the linear regressions (Y= a_0+a_1*X) 373 between runoff or detachment and rainfall were higher for OR_i and OR_s than for M or YR. 374 Runoff coefficient and soil detachment rates also increased with time along the rainy season 375 with larger a₁ slope coefficient for OR_i and OR_s than for M and YR. This could be explained by 376 higher soil moisture in the late rainy season under mature RT. However, we also found larger a₁ 377 coefficients for the regression of detachment versus runoff for OR_i and OR_s than for M and YR. 378 All these elements suggest a gradual decay of soil cohesion and infiltration capacities during the 379 rainy season in mature RT plantations, and overall a higher susceptibility of RT plantations to 380 soil detachment. It is thus important to quantify the resilience of these soil characteristics and 381 to investigate physical (e.g. drying, cracking) or biological (earthworm activity, plant growth) 382 factors that may contribute to the regeneration of both infiltration and cohesion for such 383 degraded soils.

4.3. Factors affecting runoff and detachment in RT plantation

Other recent studies suggested a strongly negative impact on soil erosion of afforestation by tree plantations without convenient understorey management. The transition from open environments to teak plantations caused a large increase of overland flow and soil detachment (Ribolzi *et al.*, 2017) and mature RT are known to be quite prone to erosion (Lacombe *et al.*, 2018). The combination of three main factors, i.e. the presence of a high canopy, ground cover by litter, and the low ground cover by living plants, can explain these high erosion rates.

391 Canopy effect

392 Even though the size of the leaves of RT and teak trees are very different, both canopies 393 concentrate raindrops, and hence increase their kinetic energy (Liu et al., 2016b; Lacombe et 394 al., 2018). In particular, the tree canopy is usually dense close to the tree lines, but sparser 395 between rows, resulting in increased kinetic energy close to the trees. Microplots within tree 396 rows (OR_s) were also located closer to the trees, thus more prone to disturbance from 397 trampling and tapping operations. Thus, we expected higher runoff and detachment within RT 398 rows (OR_s) than between rows (OR_i). However, we did not observe higher soil detachment or 399 runoff under OR_s. This was possibly due to high local variability in the response of individual 400 microplots, as well as in the proportion of cover by leaf litter.

401

Soil surface: residues and soil crusting

402 While higher cover by residues under mature RT plantations compared to M or young RT 403 was expected to provide better protection against soil crusting and to decrease runoff 404 (Podwojewski et al., 2008; Patin et al., 2012, 2018), we found that on the contrary runoff and 405 detachment were overall higher under mature RT plantations. This apparent paradox suggests 406 that it is not possible to directly compare the effects of different types of crop residues. Indeed, 407 rubber leaves are waxy (Prüm et al., 2013) and form a tight tiling on the soil surface. Although 408 this cover is still likely to effectively protect the soil from falling raindrops, it might be less 409 effective in controlling surface runoff than (for instance) maize residues, especially in steep 410 areas.

411 When considering only RT plantations, runoff significantly increased with soil crusting and 412 decreased with crop residues cover at the beginning of the rainy season. It was not possible to 413 precisely distinguish between the effect of residues and crust: due to the method of evaluation 414 of soil surface characteristics, a lower crust cover might be due either to actual "uncrusted" 415 surface or to the presence of abundant litter partly covering the crusts. Soil covered by residues 416 is, though, usually less crusted due to direct protection against splash effect and to the 417 presence of microorganisms improving soil structure. Crop residues also slow down runoff, 418 limiting further detachment and favouring redeposition of soil particles. For instance, on gentle 419 slopes, Liu et al. (2015) showed that in the early rainy season, runoff and soil detachment were 420 much lower in control RT plantations (>70% litter cover) than in RT plantations with litter 421 removal. However, the dynamics of litter cover under RT are quite specific. In most forests of 422 the area, trees shed leaves continuously ensuring permanent cover. Conversely, defoliation in 423 RT plantations occurs over two weeks in February-March and is rapidly followed by leaf flush. 424 Thus, in our study plots, soil cover by leaves was high at the beginning and middle of the rainy 425 season (>75%); but leaves were progressively destroyed by microorganisms, insects (termites, 426 ants...) or abiotic processes (fragmentation, displacement...). This might explain why the 427 relationship between residues and runoff was not significant in the late rainy season, as the 428 partly decomposed leaves failed to effectively protect soil surface and the proportion of bare 429 soil (on average 45% of the surface) was sufficient to cause surface crusting and high 430 detachment. This supports previous findings by Liu et al. (2017) who showed that rubber litter 431 was efficient in controlling runoff and soil detachment only when it covered >70% of the soil 432 surface – hence at the onset of the rainy season.

433 Ground cover by living plants

434 Soil cover by plants or leaves is known to decrease splash erosion (Liu et al., 2016a; Lacombe 435 et al., 2018) and to increase infiltration rates. In 2016, while ground cover by weeds was 436 relatively important in M and YR, it was very low in OR_i and OR_s and quasi null from August 437 onwards. Very low ground-level plant biomass in this area has been reported elsewhere (e.g. 438 Neyret et al., 2018) and is probably due to low light availability under the canopy and to a low 439 resilience of the system after herbicide application (part of the usual management process of 440 RT plantation owners in the area). Low ground cover by plants was thus a major factor of high 441 runoff and detachment rates in mature RT plantations.

442 Our estimations of soil cover, available with an extremely high temporal resolution, allowed 443 us to quantify precisely this effect on a rain event basis. We showed that increased cover by 444 ground-level plants significantly reduced soil vulnerability to large rain events. Above 30% of 445 soil cover by ground-level plants, runoff was strongly decreased, suggesting high infiltration 446 capacities. Besides, ground-level plants not only slow down runoff but can also act as sediment 447 traps. Even though soil detachment was not measured for this last experiment, data from 448 previous years showed that detachment increased exponentially with runoff volume. It is thus 449 likely that the effect of soil cover by ground-level plants would be even stronger on soil 450 detachment than on runoff.

451 **4.4. Soil detachment rates in tree plantations of tropical mountainous regions**

452 While high runoff and soil detachment in mature RT plantations are supported by the 453 literature, the amount of runoff and soil detachment we found in this study was higher than previously reported. Our estimation of annual soil detachment in mature RT plantations ranged 454 from 2.8 kg/m²/year to 8.6 kg/m²/year in 2015 and 2016, which was relatively high compared 455 456 to previous results. At the catchment scale, Ribolzi et al. (2017) found a raise of soil loss from 98 457 to 609 t/km²/year in a Laotian mountainous catchment, after conversion from upland rice to 458 teak plantations. On a larger scale, and using a generic soil erosion model, Borrelli et al. (2017) 459 estimated erosion rates ranging between 0 and 1 t/ha/year (i.e. 0.1 kg/m²/year) in 460 mountainous Northern Thailand. Nevertheless, it is not possible to directly compare soil 461 detachment measured at the 1m² scale with gross soil loss measured at the catchment or 462 regional scale. Indeed, depending on the rainfall and topographical characteristics, a large part 463 of the sediment is redistributed shortly after detachment. Using 1m² microplots on similarly 464 steep slopes (40-55% on average) and under similar meteorological conditions, Patin et al.,

465 (2018) also found lower annual soil detachment under upland rice or maize (resp. 604 \pm 86 466 g/m²/year and 796 \pm 83 g/m²/year) than under mature teak tree (2 948 \pm 523 g/m²/year), and 467 this last figure was significantly lower than our data.

468 We consider that the high soil detachment rates observed in this study result from a 469 combination of management practices and topographical characteristics. Indeed, Liu et al. 470 (2015) found that in RT plantations of SW China, bare soil and soil covered with leaf litter 471 produced soil detachment of 4 700 and 1 900 g/m²/year, respectively, on gentle slopes. While a 472 steeper slope may decrease soil erosion on bare soils and in open field conditions (Janeau et al., 473 2003; Ribolzi et al., 2011), in this case we think that combined with clear-weeding it favours the 474 exposition of bare soil by partially washing away RT leaves. It has also been observed that the 475 proportion of bare soil under trees increased with slope in both temperate and tropical areas 476 (C. Valentin, personal communication).

477 **Conclusion**

478 Afforestation by RT is currently ongoing in various marginal areas of Southeast Asia. We 479 showed that in mountainous areas, far from promoting soil conservation, this transition 480 increased soil susceptibility to erosion. Particularly high soil detachment under mature RT 481 plantations, either intra- or inter-rows, was related to high proportions of bare soil, especially 482 at the end of the rainy season with little or no understorey and largely degraded litter. Yet we 483 showed that these very high erosion rates could be mitigated by the adoption of less intense 484 weeding practices, encouraging the growth of understorey in RT plantations. We propose three 485 main research axes to work towards better protection of soils in mountainous areas. i., 486 investigating farmers' motivations and practices in understorey management, in order to 487 identify new sets of agroforestry practices more favourable to soil protection and involving less 488 intense weeding. ii., further understanding of climatic parameters influencing soil detachment 489 and runoff is needed to identify high-risk periods and areas; in this regard, large-scale modelling 490 should always be supported by extensive field measurements. Specifically addressing these 491 erosion hot moments and hot spots may reduce efficiently gross erosion rates by focusing soil 492 conservation efforts on the most erosive periods and on lightly degraded areas, to avoid the 493 expansion of strongly degraded areas and compensate their detrimental outputs. And iii., 494 additional analyses of the relationships between plant cover and soil erosion processes are 495 needed, especially regarding plant traits that are most appropriate to mitigate erosion. These 496 three axes will shed light on better solutions for striking a balance between soil conservation 497 and farmers' income.

498

499 **Data accessibility**

500 Code and data will be made available online (GitHub and Zenodo) upon acceptance.

501

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620 Figure 1: Seasonal variations of a. rainfall height (mm) and b. rainfall erosivity between 2015 and 2018. Note that 621 monthly records started in March 2015.

622Figure 2 Monthly variations of surface runoff coefficient in 2015 (a), in 2016 (b) and soil detachment in 2015 (c) in maize623fields (M), young RT plantations with intercrop (YR), and mature RT plantations inter (OR_i) and within (OR_s) tree rows.624Differentletters indicate differencessignificant at 5% within each month.

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 tree rows. Runoff and detachment were transformed using model-specific box-cox transformations, which λ parameter is
 indicated in each subfigure.

Figure 4 Increase of log-transformed soil detachment with log-transformed surface runoff for all individual events causing detachment in 2016 in maize fields (M), young RT plantations with intercrop (YR), and mature RT plantations inter (OR_i) and within (OR_s) tree rows. The effects of log-transformed runoff ($P < 10^{-12}$) and land use ($P < 10^{-12}$) were significant. The slope coefficient in OR_i and OR_s (confidence interval: 1.70 g L⁻¹ to 1.95 g L⁻¹) was significantly higher than in YR and M (confidence interval: 1.05 g L⁻¹ to 1.52 g L⁻¹; interaction: $P < 10^{-7}$). *R*² for fixed and random effects was 85 %.

Figure 5 Variations of soil surface type during the 4 years of experiment in a. maize fields (M), young RT plantations
 with intercrop (YR), and mature RT plantations inter (OR_i) and within (OR_s) tree rows and b. the two studied RT plantations,
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- 637Figure 6 Evolution of soil cover between May and November, 2016 in maize fields (M), young RT plantations with638intercrop (YR), and mature RT plantations inter (ORi) and within (ORs) tree rows. Symbols indicate actions realised during639the considered month.
- Figure 7 Effect of rainfall height (mm, square-root transformed) and soil cover by ground-level plants, as assessed from photographs, on runoff (mm, square-root transformed). Each point represents the runoff for one rain event in one microplot, between May and November, in 2017 and 2018. Microplot identity and month were included as random effects. Coloured areas represent the confidence intervals, based on marginal effects (i.e. after controlling for the plot). Proportion of cover P = 1. 10⁻⁶, Rainfall P < 10⁻¹², Plot P = 6 10⁻⁴. Interaction between the proportion of cover and rainfall: P = 1 10⁻⁸. Different letters indicate significant slope differences (P< 0.05).
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Table 1 Plot characteristics in maize fields (M), young RT plantations with intercrop (YR), and mature RT plantations inter (OR_i) and within (OR_s) tree rows. Soil belonged to two soil series: Molklek (MI) and Wang saphung (Ws). Soil series and textures were obtained from Jumpa (2012). Gly = glyphosate, Gra = gramoxone, Atr = Atrazine. Tree girth was averaged over at least 25 trees, numbers preceded by "~" indicate too few measurements to provide a very precise estimation.

659Table 2 Cumulative rainfall height separated by rain event size from 2015 to 2018 in maize fields (M), young RT660plantations with intercrop (YR), and mature RT plantations inter (ORi) and within (ORs) tree rows. In 2015, 2017 and 2018661results are presented separately for M/year and OR i/ORs (2015) and OR2/ OR4 (2017-2018) because of rainfall spatial662variability. Rainfall in 2015 was measured only from March onwards; for the following years it is measured from January6631st. For runoff and detachment data, each line shows the data for one individual microplot.

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b.



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(c)



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(a) Runoff



(b) Detachment



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(a)

(b)



Figure 6 Evolution of soil cover between May and November, 2016 in maize fields (M), young RT plantations with intercrop (YR), and mature RT plantations inter (ORi) and within (ORs) tree rows. Symbols indicate actions realised during the considered month.



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Year	Land use	Soil series	USDA soil texture	Tree girth (cm)	Tree planting grid (m)	Baseline herbicide application		
	М	Ml	Clay	/	/	Gly (April), Gra (May)		
	YR	Ml	Clay	~ 20	3 x 6.5	Gly (April)		
2015	ORI	Ws	Clay		3.5 x 7	None		
	ORs	Ws	Clay	48.9 +/- 6.1	3.5 x 7	None		
	М	Ws	Loam	/	/	Gly + Atr (May), Gra (July)		
	YR	Ws	Clay-loam to loam	20.0 +/- 5.2	3 x 6.5	Gly (April)		
2016	ORI	Ml	Clay to clay-loam		3.5 x 7	Gly (July, October)		
	ORs	Ml	Clay to clay-loam	~ 54	3.5 x 7	Gly (July, October)		
2017-	OR ₁	Ws	Clay	56.1 +/- 5.8	3.5 x 7	None*		
2018	OR ₂	Ml	Clay to clay-loam	58.8 +/- 10.4	3.5 x 7	Gly* (July, October)		

* Baseline application. It was modified in half the plots in 2017 and 2018, resulting in half the plots receiving no herbicides and the other half receiving glyphosate in July and October in both plantations.

Table 2 Cumulative rainfall height separated by rain event size from 2015 to 2018 in maize fields (M), young RT plantations with intercrop (YR), and mature RT plantations inter (OR_i) and within (OR_s) tree rows. In 2015, 2017 and 2018 results are presented separately for M/year and OR i/ORs (2015) and OR2/ OR4 (2017-2018) because of rainfall spatial variability. Rainfall in 2015 was measured only from March onwards; for the following years it is measured from January 1st. For runoff and detachment data, each line shows the data for one individual microplot.

		Rainfall	l (mm) & (n ı	umber of	events)		Runoff (L/m2)			Soil detachment (g/m2)			
Year	Land use	<25mm	25-50mm	>50mm	Total	<25mm	25-50mm	>50mm	Total	<25mm	25-50mm	>50mm	Total
						5	24	13	42	1	47	87	136
	м					10	60	26	95	5	735	143	883
			470	24.4	4220	18	65	40	123	11	250	173	434
		552	4/2	214	1238								
		(80)	(14)	(3)	(97)	28	57	38	122	60	249	157	466
	YR					25	55	20	101	105	149	51	305
						12	32	13	58	9	89	9	107
2015						75	170	65	200	C 2F	2072	402	4000
						75	1/0	65	309	625	2973	492	4090
	ORS					79	165	81	325	409	3137	1799	5344
		583	490	221	1295	58	115	62	234	268	1846	1236	3350
		(81)	(13)	(3)	(97)	64	251	62	276	196	2220	267	2701
	OBI					04	201	42	422	700	2230	207	2704
	URI					97	283	43	423	709	4819	305	2000
						64	266	24	354	181	2348	569	3098
						_							
						18	19	28	65	17	79	267	364
	м					20	24	31	75	48	125	189	362
						38	42	36	116	92	134	137	363
						24	31	41	97	41	86	202	330
	YR					26	33	40	99	50	103	102	255
		634	499	406	1539	26	30	27	83	57	125	81	263
2016		(79)	(14)	(6)	(99)	100	100	222	F10	coc	1020	4044	C 47C
	0.01	()	ζ, γ	()	()	122	163	233	518	606	1029	4841	6476 7007
	ORI					199	201	216	616	1/11	1811	4365	/88/
						165	168	210	543	1487	1625	4812	7923
						125	152	200	106	075	1746	5000	8621
	OPS					101	110	170	200	975 742	1211	27/2	5709
	UK3					101	119	202	550	1024	1000	4020	7002
						139	107	203	508	1024	1020	4920	7803
						58	285	322	664				
	OR1,h					56	257	219	532				
		336	751	898	1985	57	260	273	590				
		(35)	(23)	(11)	(69)	50	227	226	F1F				
	0.01	. ,	. ,	. ,		52	237	127	212				
	ORI,nn					35	1/9	137	351				
2017						58	261	208	528				
2017						164	450	398	1013				
	OR2 h					156	455	314	055				
	082,0					105	2455	271	724				
		391	781	702	1874	105	547	271	724				
		(38)	(22)	(9)	(69)	85	290	188	564				
	OR2.nh					155	414	373	943				
	···-,···					95	371	291	757				
						55	571	231	/3/				
						77	200	101	205				
						//	208	101	385				
	ORI,n					81	230	104	414				
		541	681	409	1631	68	217	112	397				
		(56)	(19)	(5)	(80)	35	127	43	204				
	OR1 nh					33 17	127	43 // 2	204				
	011,111					4/ E0	150	+2 61	213				
2018						52	9CT	01	271				
						171	318	162	651				
	OR2,h					95	301	137	533				
		402	627	207	1477	74	206	105	385				
		493	(10)	297	1427 (01)								
		(56)	(19)	(0)	(81)	62	192	97	351				
	OR2,nh					78	242	130	450				
						86	186	108	381				