

**TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND  
NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: THE JAKUN OF THE  
SOUTH-EAST PAHANG PEAT SWAMP FOREST, MALAYSIA**



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ABSTRACT

Anthropologists for the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century romanticised about indigenous peoples as stewards of the forest. They argued that human actions towards forest biodiversity were greatly influenced by a set of intricate forest-related knowledge systems and values. The values, ethics and motivation of indigenous peoples in biodiversity conservation are being challenged in the academic circles, eroding the notion of the 'ecologically noble savage'. The debate on the existence of environmental ethics amongst traditional communities is rekindled in this thesis. The setting of this thesis is in an indigenous community in the South-East Pahang Peat Swamp Forest, Malaysia, called the Jakun. This research on human ecology explores the Jakun traditional knowledge on the natural environment and the existence of environmental ethics based on their traditional knowledge and practices. However, possession of forest-related knowledge need not necessarily be synonymous with environmental ethics and is subject to community motivation and attitudes. This is the core focus of this thesis, apart from seeking to understand the relevance of the Jakun traditional knowledge to local ecological integrity and the possible causes for the erosion of this body of knowledge. This study reveals that the Jakun, like most indigenous peoples have become less ecologically sustainable as traditional resource management systems are highly influenced by external pressures such as exposure to modern technologies and market economy. Erosion of indigenous traditional belief systems and detachment of young indigenes from their forests is common in most indigenous populations today, including the Jakun. The changes in the so-called 'traditional' indigenous ways of the Jakun and its relationship with forest biodiversity and the conditions which limit or encourage conservation were also examined. The significance of this thesis lies in its attempts to provide a broader view than the current dichotomy of conservationist/non-conservationist, focusing instead on the role of the communities in community based conservation.

KEY WORDS: BIODIVERSITY/ ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS/ JAKUN/  
SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT/ TRADITIONAL  
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