

**“THIS FOREST IS OUR SUPERMARKET”  
COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH THE LENS OF BATEK  
NEGRITO OF KUALA TAHAN**

**Teh Kate Yng**  
**School of Communication**  
**Universiti Sains Malaysia**  
janekyteh@gmail.com

**Nik Norma Nik Hasan**  
**School of Communication**  
**Universiti Sains Malaysia**  
niknorma@usm.my

**ABSTRACT**

The *Batek Negrito* is one of the *Orang Asli* groups who primarily inhabit the rainforest in Peninsular Malaysia. This paper attempts to discuss the unique relationship of the *Batek* with the forest, their daily sustainability practices and their perceptions of development. Arguing that the forest is their native lands, this study also focuses on the impacts of the national park on livelihoods of the aborigines. The data were collected from in-depth interviews with *Batek* respondents and participant observations at one of the *Orang Asli* settlements, Kampung Dedari. The findings reveal that the livings of the *Batek* people were highly inseparably linked to the forest; the forest is their true home with great dependence on the forest resources which they also claimed as their ‘supermarket’. Not just important for food subsistence, it has been found that the forest also shapes their customs, traditions, and beliefs about the spirits of the nature. They also regard themselves as the ‘wildlife’ of the jungle whose protect the natural resources in their care. Although the ecotourism development surrounding Kampung Dedari has been benefiting the *Batek* in term of economic returns, at the same time it has also put pressure on their natural living environment. Hence, understanding how they communicating their sustainability practices can contribute to even greater understanding of local sustainability discourse which could help preserves the cultural rights of the aborigines, their ‘supermarket’ and the national park, at the same time.

**Keywords:** Malaysia, sustainability, *Batek*, aborigines, national park, ecotourism.

**INTRODUCTION**

Forests and wildlife are of great importance to humans on this planet. According to World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) - Malaysia, among the most productive type of forests, the tropical rainforests of Southeast Asia have been recognised as the oldest and the most biologically diverse in the world. Especially for those rapidly developing countries, however, the fast growth of socio-economic development for the betterment of society has become the most critical threats that causing the collapse of environmental biodiversity and various ecosystems. For example, biodiversity of the countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos has been lost due to conversion of forest frontiers caused by high population growth (Scherr & Yadav, 1996).

The Star Online (2015) reported that Malaysia had the world's highest rate of forest loss at 14.4 per cent between the years 2000 to 2012, followed by Paraguay at 9.6 per cent. As a result of deforestation from unsustainable logging, illegal encroachment, as well as establishment of aquaculture and agriculture projects, Malaysia's total forest loss equals to about 47,278 square kilometres. Being an average of 393,900 hectares of forest felled each year, it was absolutely a big loss of the biodiversity. According to the statistic indicated, deforestation to create greater space for agricultural activities was a major concern. The reason was that during the period of 12 years, Malaysia's oil palm estates grew by approximately 50 per cent or 17,000 square kilometres.

With the aim to save the diverse biological resources and to mitigate environmental impacts of development activities, the governments across the world have taken approaches to emphasize the concept of sustainability. Malaysia was initially positive towards conservation and sustainable development, after the publication of the World Conservation Strategy in 1980 by the IUCN, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) (Hasan, 1992). Hezri and Hasan (2006) argue that two factors influenced Malaysia to embrace sustainable development: First, the influence of country's growing diplomatic as economic success had earned Malaysia the respect and confidence from the developing world. Second, the international controversies erupted over wanton deforestation at Baram-Limbang in Sarawak.

As one of the primary instruments for the nature conservation worldwide, many tropical forests have been nominated for protected areas such as national parks. The new conservation concept argues that sustainable development should integrate the sustainably manage of natural resources use and social equity by improving the quality of life of the local people. However, the interactions between mans and environment is arguable since the protected areas have been promoted as international conservation strategies. This is due to the creation of national parks has led to the removal of local inhabitants and their exclusion from traditionally used resources (Adams & Mcshane, 1992).

Therefore, this study focuses on how the establishment of a national park has impacted the livelihoods of the *Batek Negrito* who are living next to the Taman Negara Pahang in Kuala Tahan. In order to efficiently achieve the sustainability in development as mentioned in above paragraph, it is important to target the indigenous people as respondents in this research to recognize their rights over social, cultural, religious and spiritual values on protected areas. IUCN in the Article 7 and 15 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 concerning Indigenous Peoples in Independent Countries, states those aborigines' rights to land traditionally occupied by them and they should participate in the use, management and conservation of renewable and non-renewable natural resources (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004).

*Orang Asli* in Peninsular Malaysia is classified into three tribal categories of *Negrito*, *Senoi* and *Aboriginal Malay*. Batek is one of the ethnic sub-groups classified under the *Negrito* tribes (Subramanian, 2012). They named themselves as *Orang Asli*, which means the "original people" or "first people" in Malay language, collectively refers to the rainforests as their native lands. As the forest people, the settlements of *Batek* are within the remote forests. Therefore the natural resources such as wildlife, plants and crops are of essential sources for this indigenous community. Argued themselves as the original inhabitants of the national park, the *Batek* defended their rights over their ancestral lands which they have traditionally owned even before the establishment of the national park.

## STUDY OBJECTIVES

Exploring the relationship of the *Batek* with the rainforest is the primary objective of this paper. From their relationship with the forest, the findings provide evidence to understand the importance of forest resources for the daily survival of the *Batek*, meanwhile their traditional practices to ensure the sustainability of the forest as well. The data collected are also used to study the perspectives of the aborigines towards development and modernization, the impacts of the national park on their livelihoods, specifically the ecotourism activities in Kuala Tahan.

## METHODOLOGY

### **Study Area: Taman Negara Pahang, Kuala Tahan Malaysia.**

Taman Negara is Malaysia's first national park which makes up the central spine of the Peninsular Malaysia by a combination of three protected areas in three states, Pahang, Kelantan, and Terengganu. The park was established in 1938/39 as King George V National Park, and then named Taman Negara after Malaysia's independence from British rule in 1957, which literally means 'national park' in Malay. The park has a reputation as the world's oldest and the largest remaining tract of tropical rainforest in Malaysia (Worldwide Fund for Nature Malaysia, 1986). Meanwhile, Taman Negara Pahang covers the largest area at 2,477 square kilometres or 57 per cent of the whole Taman Negara. The rich in flora diversity of the park maintains a natural habitat for hundreds of wildlife species has developed this conservation site as a well-known ecotourism destination in Malaysia.

Kuala Tahan is the corridor or the main entrance into Taman Negara Pahang. Along the Sungai Tahan and Sungai Tembeling, the local communities who live in villages around Kuala Tahan are including the local Malays and aborigines called *Batek Negrito* (Abidin, 1999). Since the establishment in 1938/39, nature tourism surrounding the national park has provided a direct economic benefit to the local people.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data was collected for this study using two qualitative methods: in-depth interviews and participant observations. Qualitative research is concerned to provide an understanding of human experience, interactions and behaviour patterns (Bursztyn, 2006). The strength of this method lies in the depth for the understanding of the points of view of particular groups, including the indigenous people (Seidman, 1991). Firstly, in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face and all the questions asked were entirely open-ended to explore in detail the respondents' own beliefs, perceptions and attitudes with respect to forest and conservation, the impacts of development such as national park foundation and ecotourism industry.

To identify research population, certain criteria for selecting the target villages were set to determine their appropriateness. The researchers have applied purposive sampling to sample out four *Batek* men from three villagers, Kampung Dedari, Kampung Pagi and Kampung Trenggan. These villages were selected because they are next to Taman Negara Pahang, more accessible to the tourists, and the socio-economic activities of the villages are depending on the ecotourism business. *Batek* men were more receptive to being approached while the

women were embarrassed and reluctant to participate in the interviews. The reasons could be the men were always exposing themselves with the outside community. The interviewees included two hunters, a nature guide and an elder.

All the tape-recorded in-depth interviews were transcribed to a written text. The transcripts were then analysed based on the narrative analysis approach. Generally, narrative represents a story way of knowing and communicating (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997). It provides researchers with a rich framework which they can investigate the ways of humans experience through their stories telling. Structural analysis model of narrative according to Labov (1982) was used to interpret the qualitative data.

Secondly, participant observations were done at the most visited *Orang Asli* settlement, Kampung Dedari. This method was utilized to provide more evidence to understand the physical and social environment of their living place. For example, the behaviours, body language, ways of living and daily sustainability practices amongst the aborigines were observed and noted down. Observation is another way of collecting qualitative data which cannot be gathered by the interview approach alone. The findings help to clarify, confirm, and support the data from the in-depth interviews.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

### **Forest as a Basis of Survival**

When asking to elaborate their opinions about the rainforest, all of the respondents gave a positive response for the question and said that they love to stay in the jungle, a place where they were originally from. In the eyes of the indigenous people, they see everything in the forests including the trees, rivers, mountains, and wild animals are 'beautiful and attractive'. Therefore, they admitted that they felt 'OK' and more comfortable staying inside the forest if compared to the city. The lifestyle in the city was considered as unpleasant living condition for the *Batek*, with the high cost of living and various kinds of pollution. One respondent mentioned:

*...we love the forest, love to go for hunting, and love to move from place to place in the forest. Sometimes Batek people do not want to go to the town, if go there then we will only stay for one or two nights and come back. But in the forest, ok, for example said two days only, but we can go inside until five days. The view in the forest is the most attractive. When come to the town, this and that, too noisy to sleep, need money to buy food, need money to pay for hotel, if staying in the forest, what to pay?*

One of the *Orang Asli*'s settlements, for example, Kampung Dedari is opposite to the Taman Negara Pahang with the Sungai Tembeling in between. From the observations during the visit, the village is surrounded by deep forest and it is absolutely a good place to enjoy the peace and serenity. The villages made their '*atap*' house by bamboo, dried leaves and woods. The houses looked like small huts, without water and electricity supplies. There were no beds and even simple furniture inside, only mattresses that could be observed. However, the *Batek* were generally felt satisfied to stay under this condition.

The positive impression of forest was confirmed by the villagers who participated in the in-depth interview, because of their survival was very much depending on the rainforest in providing them not only the place to stay, but also the food. According to one of the respondents, the national park contains a wide range of wild animal species and makes the hunting easier for him. In other words, staying close to the park makes him closer to various forest resources, he said.

*I really love the national park because there were a lot of my experience in searching food and going for hunting... It is the easiest when go inside the forest to the woods and plants, easy to get the birds and monkeys, easy for hunting. I able to hunt animals in a short while, it is the easiest in the national park.*

In addition, the other respondent used the word ‘supermarket for the *Batek*’ to define the importance of this rainforest for the indigenous people. Traditionally, they depended mostly on hunted and forest gathered food for example small mammals, fruits, woods and plants for herbal medicines and other purposes. Saying that his primary mode of subsistence was through gathering jungle produces for own usage and sometimes selling them to earn a living, the *Batek* man cited the quotation as below.

*For my daily life, kayu wangi [gaharu wood] is the most important for making the oil. I also go inside the forest to collect the fruits, pine leaves, rattans, damars and others for own use. Sometimes also sell to the Malay villagers, or the forest products are also being exchanged for salt, rice and other foodstuffs. We would say that this forest is our supermarket, every time the men will go inside the forest for two to three days and we could bring out many things for daily usage.*

According to Teh and Nik Norma (2015), the protection of the biological resources in the national park has caused a conflict between the park and the indigenous people living near to Taman Negara Pahang. The *Batek* expressed their dissatisfaction because after the foundation of the park, they were prohibited to do commercial hunting and sell the park resources to make own income. Concerning the rules and regulations, the *Orang Asli* are only allowed to make use of the forest products for own consumption.

The findings show that the respondents have understandings that the natural resources in the national park should be preserved for their daily survival. As the quote below indicates, they expressed disappointment since the development in terms of roads, highways and other infrastructures have caused the forest destructions. More and more logging activities from those days until now, the wildlife as well as the *Batek* people have lost their homelands. Defined themselves as the wildlife of the forest, hence the logging of greatest forest was not only killing the wildlife, but also the endangered tribe. One said:

*Before we have this national park, Batek community was the only population in the national park... As the Orang Asli, we are like the boss of the national park. For me, the government wants to open the national park, the things that they want to do, for example the RISDA, they built the roads, highways. With all these developments, with the logging activities here and there, so where*

*the wildlife are going to stay? All the wild animals want to stay in the forests! And the forests have been opened, the trees have been cut down, so the wild animals have no place to stay. This is the same with Orang Asli, Batek people are the same as wildlife, and we want to stay where we are original from, now we have lost our residences.*

### **Beliefs about the Forest**

For the purpose to improve the well-being of the aboriginal group, a development project has been implemented by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs or JAKOA to provide a proper settlement in Kampung Kuala Atok, which is outside of the national park boundaries. However, it was truly failed to get the support from the *Batek* people. The reason was directly related to their relationship and traditional belief about the forest. Even though the social facilities such as toilet and clinic have been provided, but they were being uncomfortable with all kinds of the arrangement. When asking their opinions about the government-subsidized settlement in Kampung Kuala Atok, one of the *Batek* respondents commented:

*The toilet that they built, we cannot use it indeed. We are not familiar with toilet since we were kids, and this is our customs and traditions since our grandparents. We are not used to sit in the toilet; we cannot pee in the place with cover or inside the house. We used to pee in the forest, the place which is an open area.*

Due to its traditional values to the aborigines, forest plays a vital role in shaping the customs and cultures of the *Batek* community. According to the interviewees, moving from place to place in the forest is another one of their traditional practices. When food resources were run out or finished, they would migrate to other place in order to find new sources. Besides searching for food, these indigenous forest people would also move to another place when there is something happens, for example a death or severe illness of their family members.

When asking about the animistic belief of this ethnic minority, one respondent pointed out the interaction of the *Batek* with the rainforest, especially emphasized the important meaning of trees in their everyday life. They have a unique tradition of hanging the body of death on a big tree in the deep forest, he mentioned.

*Batek do not conduct any funeral ceremony for the death people. We normally do everything on a big tree, we will build a platform which looks like a canopy, make it like a small hut. After wrapping the body of death with tree leaves and bark, we will pull it up to the hut on the tree. In the hut on top of the tree, we will prepare a mat and some clothes to make a sleeping place for the death. Actually we do not tie the body on top of the tree, but we make a platform for sleeping.*

The *Batek* people have no religion, however they are still gripped with animistic religious beliefs and practices interrelated with the natural environment. When they enter the jungle for hunting and gathering forest produces, they are strictly following their traditional

religion or they called it as '*pandang-larang*' in Malay, including the following: (i) do not boast or brag in the forests, (ii) do not laugh or talk loudly in front of the big animals. They have to always maintain good relationship with the forests by respecting all the flora and fauna around them, as they do believe in the spirit (*semangat*) of trees, plants, rivers, mountains, animals and others. One of them said:

*Let say when we go inside the jungle, if there is a big animal in front of us, we cannot laugh or make fun of it. This is our belief; we do believe that our God will be angry and punish us with thunder and lightning... or during we want to take something from the forests, we shouldn't 'talk big' [cakap besar] when we saw anything. What we need to do is just take it with silent. For example, if I saw the gaharu wood, I will keep quiet as this is my secret and my luck. That's all.*

The observational data also recorded the traditional belief towards the forest amongst the *Batek* community. Other than hunting and collecting jungle produces, it has been observed that these aborigines were also involved in farming by planting the corn near their houses for own consumption. Besides, the men would also go to Kuala Tahan jetty to buy commercial food like fresh meats, rice, and sugar while the women would cook it for their families. The *Batek* normally live together like a big family in the forest, and they love to share the food among them. The villagers mentioned that sharing of food is also one of their cultural practices since their ancestors; for example when they cook a hunted monkey, the cooked meat will be divided into portions according to the size of each family. Their community believed that all the wild food belong to the forests, so that everybody has right to share the resources.

### **Daily Sustainability Practices**

The findings showed the traditional knowledge of *Batek* community to utilize forest resources in a sustainable manner. From the personal observations, this indigenous people practiced the hunting using their traditional hunting method which is so-called blowpipe (*sumpit*) for birds, squirrels, and monkeys. The blowpipe is made of bamboo and the bullet or mouth piece is made from damar. Damar is the resin obtained from the *dipterocarp* trees. According to them, a part from its usefulness in making the blowpipe, damar is the most important resource to find in the forest of its value and market demand because they can sell it at high price.

During the visit to Kampung Dedari, the researcher was lucky to see two of the traditional practices of the *Batek*: the blowpipe demonstration and the making of fire by woods. One of the villagers was demonstrated his fire making skill and correct technique on how to use the blowpipe. It was very impressed that the demonstrator managed to make a fire within a minute and the materials used were all from the plants. The villagers also mentioned that *Batek* people won the first price of fire making competition among the *Orang Asli* in Malaysia for the year 2003.

Furthermore, the interview results depict that the respondents have understanding that the natural resources in the national park should be preserved to maintain their native lands and

to achieve sustainable tourism as well. One of the men argued their ancestors settled on this area for more than thousand to million years. He used “we control”, “we seriously control” and “we could not allow” to emphasize their responsibilities to protect the forest as their territories. In addition, he also expressed his positive conservation perspectives by saying that the *Batek* would only hunt the small animals like monkeys for food. However, the big mammals such as elephant, tiger and deer would be protected in order to attract more tourists to the national park. He claimed:

*... The Batek will only eat the monkey, so we do not kill the big animals like deer, tiger and all that. And actually we leave them for the tourists who come... Although we do not have same responsibilities as Perhilitan, but we control, we control in the national park, we control for our daily lives and for maintaining our native lands, the lands for more than thousand or maybe million years in the park. We could not allow whoever comes to destroy the animals, and especially the outsiders who shoot the tiger and elephant and sell them out. Now we seriously control, so if anything happens in the national park, we will ask the help from the Perhilitan.*

### **Impacts of National Park and Ecotourism Development**

The open-ended question “How does the national park or the ecotourism affect your daily life” looking at the impacts of the national park establishment on the livelihoods of the *Batek* community, and the changes of their daily ways of living due to ecotourism development. The findings reveal that the *Orang Asli* who has strong economic, social, culture and traditions ties with the national park, respectively voiced out both positive and negative feedbacks to the park management and ecotourism industry.

To an old man who was previously a nature guide, the national park was regarded as ‘a residence since the grandparents’. He stressed that he was born in the park before the Japanese invasion of Malaya during the Second World War. The *Batek* are the original inhabitants of the park, he argued. Their complex and diverse cultures are remaining unchanged for over thousands years from one generation to another. A clear stand was made over the rights of indigenous people especially their rights to lands and the resources. He said:

*I think the national park is my residence since my grandfather and grandmother. They were also stayed in the park. Nobody can chase me out of my place, and stop me from searching food... I was born here before the Japanese invasion.*

Moreover, he added ‘*Perhilitan* wanted to make a roof in my place’ in his statement below. The respondent was unable to give good explanation in Malay language; however, the researchers could describe his meaning as since the national park has been gazetted, the *Orang Asli* has been expelled from the protected areas created in their homelands. Nevertheless, this old villager was very confident that nobody could force him to leave the forest, the place that he perceived as a place of soul or *tempat jiwa* in Malay. He continued:



*They [Perhilitan] wanted to make a roof in my place, you see, now where are they? The people who are staying here now are from Perhilitan. They want to force me to leave but they couldn't make it. Here is already my tempat jiwa.*

Talking about the ecotourism development in Kuala Tahan, the *Batek* were being uncomfortable with the changes of their lands and surroundings exposed to the tourists initially. With the existence of buildings, resorts and chalets, they just didn't feel good at all. As mentioned earlier, modernization, development of tourist infrastructure and amenities has put pressure on the natural living environment of aboriginal people.

Nevertheless, after the villagers experiencing better living standards from the benefits of tourism since it contributes revenue for them, they could slowly accept the tourists from around the world. Generally, Kampung Dedari, their village itself is one of the tourist attractions, where the visitors have to pay five ringgit per person for every visit. Few activities for the tourists will be conducted by the *Batek* villagers, such as how to use the blowpipe and traditional way of making a fire.

The respondents said that they live by a combination of hunting, gathering forest products, and involving in ecotourism industry. Many of the *Batek* men are working as the tour guides and boat drivers during the peak tourist season, which is from April to August. Meanwhile the women are also involving as producers of handicrafts to make some income from the tourists. However, during the low season of tourism by the end of the year, the forest is the main source of their daily livings. One of them cited:

*For example starts from January, there will be many tourists come to Taman Negara. However, by the end of the year like November, the number of tourists will be less. So we have to go to find the resources in the forest. When we go into forest, we will bring back some food or something for doing the hunting equipment.*

Another interviewee explained that his daily ways of living was moving from one place to another, mainly because of the tourism. The respondent repeated to say 'main source of income from the tourism' to explain the benefits from working as both boat driver and nature guide for the tourists to the national park and Gunung Tahan.

*Before the tourist come to Kampung Dedari, I was staying in Kuala Tahan. I stayed there for nearly five to six years. After that, I came to Kampung Pagi for almost three years' time there. Moving from Kampung Pagi, I went down to stay near to Kuala Tringan where the homestay project developed by the Ministry of Tourism... Yes, I have been moving from one place to another, it depends on the number of tourists. For example, during the peak season of tourist, sometimes it could reach 1000 to even 4000 people, so that time I will be back to Kampung Dedari.*

As mentioned by the respondents, many *Batek* people have moved to Kampung Dedari as this is the most visited *Orang Asli* settlement presently. It was about 40 minutes' boat ride and passed through few *Batek* villages on the way to Kampung Dedari. One of them is Kampung

Yong, where the researcher has stopped there for a while to observe the surrounding areas of this village which was formerly the most popular tourist region. Not even a tourist was there could be seen, the condition of the road was extremely poor. Moreover, the villagers were shy and they were not daring to come out from their houses during the visit. Therefore, it could be said that the *Batek* tribes in this village have been isolated from the outside world.

It was a big different from Kampung Yong, the surroundings of Kampung Dedari tend to be more equipped with facilities, such as a better road leading to their settlement. Besides, the food and small gifts given to the villagers made them happy, and especially the kids were no longer shy to welcome the visitors. All the *Batek* spoke their native tongues, *Batek* language. Even so, from what it could be observed, this aboriginal group was brave to talk to the visitors and they were able to communicate well in other languages. When chatting with two men who are the nature guides, the researcher was impressed with their proficiency in English. In addition, one of them named “John”, putting this English name was purposely for the tourists to remember him. This observation provides empirical evidence of tourism is likely to generate socio-cultural benefits to *Batek* community.

Being a popular tourist destination is an advantage, but a problem is that the negative tourism impacts on the cultures and traditions of *Orang Asli*. The interview results recorded a bad behaviour of the international tourists which was deliberately insulting to the *Orang Asli*, and also affected the national image of Malaysia. JAKOA has found out it was true that the *Batek* villagers were asked for taking pictures without their clothes and the tourists were willing to pay for this.

According to the rules and regulations, the *Batek* men are allowed to work as tourist guides in the national park, as well as the Gunung Tahan. This is because they are very familiar with the forest geography, and thus they are suitable to provide nature guides services to the tourists. In order to improve the skills and knowledge in various areas, all the nature guides including the *Batek* are required to sit for certain courses held by the Nature Guides Association of the national park, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism. From the perspectives of the aborigines, they were being challenged by the license renewal with the compulsory courses. When asked if he feel that to complete the courses is a tough job, one answered:

*I think is very hard for us. Since we are the Orang Asli, we could not understand the course. So what can we do? To get the license, we have nothing to choose... We are not good in writing at all, we are afraid to go there...*

The above phrase ‘we have nothing to choose’ illustrates the disappointment among the aboriginal group. In the eyes of them, they have no other choices except for attending the courses which have totally made them uncomfortable. In addition, the expenses such as medical check-up have made it even more difficult for the *Batek* to obtain a nature guide license, where the other respondent said “When the license is expired, I have to find the money to do the renewal. It is absolutely hard for me”.

## CONCLUSION

The study confirms the most significant finding where the *Batek* community and the rainforest are indeed inseparable. They are depending largely on natural resources in the

forest for their food supply such as fruits, sweet potatoes, woods and plants for traditional medicines and other purposes. The forest produces are also important as materials for building their houses, lighting purposes and making traditional handicrafts. They sustain themselves by hunting and gathering forest products, hence the respondents named the forest as their 'supermarket'.

Besides, aboriginal culture is one of the oldest living cultures in the world. Throughout the ancient and long history, the *Batek* have retained their rich cultures and traditions of giving up a life in the rainforest. They consider the natural environment as their true home where they prefer to live in simplified surroundings within the forest, as the observational data has recorded. Due to its importance in providing food and shelter, in other words, the forest is the place of survival for the *Batek* people which have sustained and engaged them over centuries.

Evidence from in-depth interviews suggests the reasons of why the aborigines are having unique relationship and positive attitudes towards the forest are including: (1) a source of economy from hunting and gathering produces in the jungle, (2) moving from place to place in the jungle for searching food, (3) the beautiful natural setting of the forest, (4) no living expenses of staying in the forest, and (5) maintain their identity and follow the traditional steps of their ancestors. As the result, the *Batek* argued that the national park and its surroundings are essentially their traditional homelands. However, the foundation of Taman Negara Pahang in 1938/1939 has limited their indigenous rights over the use of the forest resources.

The protection of the native lands also means the protection of the culture and identity amongst the aboriginal people (Lo, 2012). The results of study have reflected the community cultures and traditions are correspondingly related to participants' concern about the values of the national park and the importance of environmental protection. The respondents have shown their awareness and prime concern that the forest should be well-preserved from elders to descendants for their daily survival. They called themselves as the 'wildlife in the forest' to indicate the forest and *Batek* people are inseparably linked and they need each other. Until recently, the *Batek* maintain much of their identity and they are still traditionally following the steps of their ancestors including the beliefs about the forest and the ways of resources use in a sustainable manner.

Finally, the whole socio-economic and living standards of the *Orang Asli* who are generally regarded as forest-dependent community has been improved, and it can be attributed to opportunities afforded by ecotourism development. As Taman Negara Pahang represents one of the main tourists attractions in Malaysia and tourism creates the largest source of revenues for those living nearby the park includes the *Batek* people. The findings discover their behaviour of moving from one place to another was not only for sourcing the food, but also the possibility to move elsewhere followed the number of tourists for additional income. Undeniable, the modernization and rapid development of ecotourism industry has brought both positive and negative changes to the socio-cultural customs of the aborigines.

## REFERENCES

Abidin, Z. Z. (1999). *The identification of criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of ecotourism in Taman Negara National Park, Malaysia: A Delphi consensus* (PhD's thesis, West Virginia University, Morgantown). Retrieved from

[http://www.wvuscholar.wvu.edu:8881/exlibris/dtl/d3\\_1/apache\\_media/L2V4bGlicmlzL2R0bC9kM18xL2FwYWN0ZV9tZW50YS8xMDEyNw==.pdf](http://www.wvuscholar.wvu.edu:8881/exlibris/dtl/d3_1/apache_media/L2V4bGlicmlzL2R0bC9kM18xL2FwYWN0ZV9tZW50YS8xMDEyNw==.pdf)

- Adams, J. S., & McShane, T. O. (1992). *The myth of wild Africa*. New York: Norton.
- Borrini-Feyerabend, G., Kothari, A., & Oviedo, G. (2004). *Indigenous and local communities and protected areas: Towards equity and enhanced conservation*. Best practice protected area guidelines series no. 11. Gland and Cambridge: IUCN.
- Bursztyn, A. (2006). *Qualitative methods: Encyclopedia of multicultural psychology*. SAGE Publications. Retrieved from <http://www.sage-reference.com/view/multiculturalpsychology/n171.xml>
- Hasan, M. N. (1992). Environmental management as a strategy for sustainable development. In H. Y. Teh & K. L. Goh (Eds.), *Malaysia's economic vision: Issues and challenges* (pp. 421-437). Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Publications.
- Hezri, A. A., & Hasan, M. N. (2006). Towards sustainable development? The evolution of environmental policy in Malaysia. *Natural Resources Forum*, 30, 37-50.
- Hinchman, L. P., & Hinchman, S. K. (1997). *Memory, identity, community: The idea of narrative in the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of NY Press.
- Labov, W. (1982). Speech actions and reactions in personal narrative. In D. Tannen (eds.), *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Scherr, S. J., & Yadav, S. (1996). *Land degradation in the developing world: Implications for food, agriculture, and the environment to 2020*. Food, Agriculture, and the Environment Discussion Paper 14. Washington, USA: International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Seidman, I. E. (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York: Teachers College.
- Subramanian, Yogeswaran. (2012). Orang Asli land rights by UNDRIP Standards in Peninsular Malaysia: An evaluation and possible reform. PhD thesis. University of New South Wales.
- The Star Online. (2015). Retrieved April 28, 2015, from <http://www.thestar.com.my/Metro/Views/2015/04/28/A-morass-of-a-problem-The-Government-must-take-proactive-steps-to-protect-the-countrys-mangroves/>
- Teh, K.Y., & Nik Norma, N.H. (2015). Local communities' perspectives towards nature conservation: A study of Taman Negara Pahang, Kuala Tahan Malaysia. *Health and the Environment Journal*, 6(1), 1-10.
- WWF Malaysia. (1986). *Environmental impact assessment of the proposed tourism project in Taman Negara*. Report no. 26. Malaysia: WWF.

