

**PERSPECTIVES OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES ON
NATURE CONSERVATION IN TAMAN NEGARA
PAHANG, MALAYSIA AND KHAO YAI
NATIONAL PARK, THAILAND**

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**PERSPECTIVES OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES ON
NATURE CONSERVATION IN TAMAN NEGARA
PAHANG, MALAYSIA AND KHAO YAI
NATIONAL PARK, THAILAND**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEPA	Communication, Education and Public Awareness
DWNP	Department of Wildlife and National Parks
FELCRA	Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IUCN	World Conservation Union
JAKOA	Department of <i>Orang Asli</i> Development
JKKK	Village Development and Security Committee
JNPC	Johor National Park Corporation
MIDAS	Mekhong International Development Associations
MOAC	Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPD	National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department
NRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
RFD	Royal Forest Department
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WCMC	World Conservation Monitoring Centre
WCPA	World Commission on Protected Area

WTO World Tourism Organisation

WWF Worldwide Fun for Nature

**PERSPEKTIF KOMUNITI TEMPATAN TERHADAP PEMULIHARAAN
ALAM SELITAR DI TAMAN NEGARA PAHANG, MALAYSIA DAN
TAMAN NEGARA KHAO YAI, THAILAND**

ABSTRAK

Kajian perbandingan ini dijalankan untuk menyelidik perspektif komuniti tempatan terhadap pemuliharaan alam sekitar di Taman Negara Pahang, Malaysia dan Taman Negara Khao Yai, Thailand. Melalui perbandingan antara dua negara yang berbeza dari segi agama, kebudayaan dan tradisi, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka faktor yang mempengaruhi perspektif masyarakat tempatan terhadap aktiviti pemuliharaan di sekeliling Kuala Tahan dan Khao Yai. Permasalahan kajian ini telah mengenalpasti konflik antara taman negara dengan orang tempatan dalam pengurusan taman negara adalah satu cabaran utama dalam usaha pemuliharaan. Namun kajian mengenai pemuliharaan alam sekitar, orang tempatan dan komunikasi strategi di Malaysia and Thailand masih terlalu kecil. Justeru, sumbangan tesis ini adalah untuk merapatkan jurang kajian melalui penerokaan pendekatan strategi interaksi dan komunikasi antara pengurusan taman negara dengan komuniti tempatan seterusnya mencadangkan satu rangka kerja komunikasi strategi bagi kedua-dua taman negara dalam mencapai matlamat pemuliharaan dan menyelesaikan konflik. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif iaitu perbincangan kumpulan fokus, temu-bual secara mendalam dan pemerhatian bagi mencapai objektif. Secara umum, majoriti responden di Malaysia dan Thailand mempunyai perspektif positif dan menyokong penubuhan taman negara. Penemuan dari kedua-dua taman negara menunjukkan persamaan dari segi keputusan faktor positif dalam mempengaruhi perspektif iaitu: pendapatan dan peluang pekerjaan, penghargaan terhadap alam

semula jadi, peningkatan pengangkutan dan infrastruktur tempatan, galakan pertukaran kebudayaan, manfaat sosio-budaya, pengetahuan dan kesedaran tempatan, kelangsungan hidup komuniti, kebudayaan dan tradisi komuniti, dan hubungan baik antara kakitangan taman negara dengan penduduk tempatan. Walaubagaimanapun, hasil kajian juga menunjukkan beberapa perbezaan antara Thailand dengan Malaysia. Antaranya faktor yang mempengaruhi perspektif negatif dalam kalangan responden Thai adalah berdasarkan konflik sumber alam, konflik antara binatang liar dengan orang tempatan, hubungan antara komuniti tempatan dengan kakitangan taman negara terjejas akibat kegagalan usaha mendapatkan ganti rugi, dan kehilangan tanah nenek moyang kepada orang luar. Di Malaysia, konflik yang wujud antara pengurusan taman negara dengan orang asli, *Batek Negrito*, adalah disebabkan oleh komuniti penduduk asal ini dilarang daripada memburu secara komersial dan juga penjualan sumber taman negara. Hasil analisis kajian menunjukkan bahawa pendekatan pengurusan dan komunikasi Taman Negara Khao Yai adalah berdasarkan sistem atas-bawah dengan penyertaan terhad daripada orang tempatan. Berbeza dengan Malaysia, tradisi dan kebudayaan di Thailand mengutamakan ketua kampung yang berkhidmat sebagai orang tengah dalam proses komunikasi antara taman negara dengan komuniti tempatan. Kajian ini mencadangkan penyertaan komuniti tempatan secara meluas dalam pengurusan taman negara sebagai strategi untuk komunikasi efektif bagi mendapat sokongan mereka dalam mencapai matlamat pemuliharaan serta dalam usaha menguruskan pelbagai jenis konflik.

**PERSPECTIVES OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES ON NATURE
CONSERVATION IN TAMAN NEGARA PAHANG, MALAYSIA AND
KHAO YAI NATIONAL PARK, THAILAND**

ABSTRACT

This comparative study examines local communities' perspectives on nature conservation in Taman Negara Pahang, Malaysia and Khao Yai National Park, Thailand. By comparing two different countries with the differences in religions, cultures and traditions, this study also seeks to discover the contributing factors that shape the local people's views on conservation activities surrounding Kuala Tahan and Khao Yai. The problem statements of this research have acknowledged the park-people conflicts as the key challenges to effective park management. Moreover, very little work has been documented by the past researchers about the nature conservation, local people and communication strategies in Malaysia and Thailand. Therefore, this thesis contributes to fill in the gap by exploring the park-people interaction and communication approaches in order to propose a strategic communication framework for both national parks to achieve conservation goals and to solve the conflicts. The study employed qualitative research methods through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and observations. Overall, majority of the respondents in Malaysia and Thailand expressed positive perspectives and supportive attitudes towards the park establishment. Findings in both national parks showed similar results for factors that contribute to positive perspectives included: income and employment opportunities, appreciation of nature, improves of local transportation and infrastructure, promotes of cultural exchange, socio-cultural benefits, local knowledge and awareness of park, community survival, community

cultures and traditions, and good park-people relationship. However, the outcomes also revealed some differences between Thailand and Malaysia. Factors that contribute to negative perspectives among the Thai respondents were mainly due to resource conflict, human-wildlife conflict, challenges in getting the compensation have resulted in poor park-people relationship, and loss of ancestral lands to outsiders. In Malaysia, a conflict was discovered between the park management and the indigenous people, *Batek Negrito*, because the aboriginal community were prohibited from commercial hunting and selling the park resources. The study analysis discovered the management and communication approach of the Khao Yai National Park is practicing a top-down system with limited participation of local people. Unlike Malaysia, the traditions and cultures in Thailand highlight the importance of their village headmen to serve as mediators in communication process between the park management and local communities. Hence, the study suggests greater inclusion of local communities in management should be a key strategy of effective communication in order to win the local support for achieving conservation effectiveness and managing different kinds of park-people conflicts.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute towards a profound understanding of local communities' perspectives on nature conservation in the oldest national parks of two countries, Malaysia and Thailand. A perspective study is very important in any nature conservation activities because it shows the kind of interaction and communication that people have to experience within the national park which subsequently determines their support for conservation efforts (Ormsby & Kaplin, 2005; Muhumuza & Balkwill, 2013). Hence, assessing local residents' perspectives by taking into account their needs and opinions should become a management priority of the national parks to identify the accurate conservation strategies (Allendorf, Smith & Anderson, 2007) while ironically becomes the main objective of this study.

This research takes a comparative view, and focuses on exploring both similarities and differences in local people' support for the national park establishment between Malaysia and Thailand. I also aim to discover the underlying factors that shape their perspectives of nature conservation attempts. Drawing on a debate in comparative basis, this study argues on how communities' perceptions are influenced by different factors due to different backgrounds of the countries, for example the differences in religions, cultures and traditions. Therefore, this section provides a brief overview of

the similar and dissimilar attributes of two countries that make them unique for this research.

Both Malaysia and Thailand are located in the equatorial region which falls in the tropical wet and climate zone with abundant rainfall (Association of Southeast Asian Nations Information Centre, 2015). Thus, they undergo quite a similar climate, geographical and ecological characteristics, vegetation and wildlife species. Malaysia has a hot and humid tropical climate whereby the rich and diverse tropical rainforests have been recognised internationally as a depository of mega-diversity of both flora and fauna (Lee & Krishnapillay, 2004). On the other hand, Thailand's climate is tropical and largely determined by the monsoons, where the temperature is high and relatively uniform throughout the year in all regions (Ridd et al., 2011).

Meanwhile, both countries also have some differences that make them worthy for thoughtful attention, such as through religion and culture. Previous studies have examined the impact of religious faith on public's views and attitudes to environmental issues whereby many researchers are increasingly realised on the important role of the religion and culture (Hunter & Toney, 2005; Horenstein, 2012; Hope & Jones, 2014). The finding is somewhat germane because religion acts as an important source of morals and values for many people that influence their environmental attitudes and behaviours (Horenstein, 2012).

As an overview, Thai culture is deeply influenced by religion with nearly 94 per cent of the country populations are practicing Buddhism. Islam accounts of approximately five per cent while Christianity records less than one per cent (Hays, 2008). Often

referred to as “The Land of Buddhism”, Thailand’s constitution specifies that their King must be a Buddhist and the Guardian of Buddhism. Hence, to the Thai people as a whole, Buddhism strengthens their culture and philosophy with specific control on the art and literature, ethics and morality where significance might be seen from the majority of their folkways and festivals (Kusalasaya, 2005).

In Malaysia, on the other hand, the country’s religious diversity presents a basic cultural characteristic of the local society. Being a multi-religious nation, the devotees of each religion in the country heavily reflect the multi-cultural characters of the population (Mokhlis, 2006). Islam is the most widely professed religion in Malaysia with the proportion of 61.3 per cent. The followers of other religions are Buddhism at 19.8 per cent, Christianity at 9.2 per cent, Hinduism at 6.3 per cent, and Confucianism, Taoism, tribal, folk or other traditional Chinese religion stand at 1.3 per cent (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015). It has also been reported in the statistics that 100 per cent of Malays in Malaysia are Muslims. Islam has played a major role in the lives of Malays, shaping various aspects of Malay ethnic identity and their culture as well.

Even though Malaysia is a multiracial country with more than half of its people are Muslims, while Buddhists are the largest religious group in Thailand, it could also be contended that both residents of Malaysia and Thailand are familiar with these two world’s major religions. The reason is that there are significant numbers of adherents of each religion in both countries. In Malaysia, for example, Buddhism is the second largest religion professed after Islam, widely practised by the Malaysian Chinese community (Mokhlis, 2006). This is also the religion of Thais who are the

practitioners of Theravada Buddhism. Conversely, Islam is also the Thailand's second largest religion and strongly represented in the southern provinces of Satun, Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat. Thus, this has reflected the sharing cultural heritage between Malaysia and the Thailand's southernmost provinces.

The Muslim community in Thailand is divided into two categories, the Malays and non-Malays. The ethnic Malays form the majority group, at nearly 80 per cent. In this case, Aphornsuvan (2003) states that the Thai-Muslims of Southern Thailand belong to the Malay world. Meanwhile, the other 20 per cent of the Muslim populations are scattered around especially in the central region. The central Muslims are different from those of the South, as they tend to portray themselves as Thai citizens. In relation, the southern Muslims prefer to be called with the term "Malay-Muslims", instead of Thai-Muslims because the word "Thai" is meant by "Buddhism" (Aphornsuvan, 2003). Politically, therefore, the efforts to draw southern Malay-Muslims into the nations' mainly Thai-Buddhist culture and politics have been reportedly unsuccessful (Aphornsuvan, 2003; Chalk, 2008). As argued earlier by Hope and Jones (2014), religious beliefs have moulded the concepts of relationship between humans and environment, whereby the scholars claim that religion has been proven to influence views and attitudes towards environmental and conservation issues among the general public. In order to provide deeper insight into the debate, this study helps to explore how religious beliefs in Malaysia and Thailand might contribute to form locals' perspectives on nature conservation activities.

As the largest economic powerhouses in the Southeast Asia region, Malaysia and Thailand feel the pinch of the tensions of balance between the socio-economic

developments for the betterment of society in order to overcome the collapse of diverse biodiversity. Thailand has been transforming from a traditional agricultural country to an industrial development country, but at the same time it has also led to serious environmental problems that threaten the survival of Thai people (Pongloe, Wijaya & Mindarti, 2015). On the other hand, human activity of deforestation which is driven primarily by agricultural expansion, population growth and illegal logging has manifested various problems of pollutions and ecological degradation in Malaysia. These catastrophes include cases like landslides at Gua Tempurung and North-South Highway (2004), flood in Segamat (2007), and recently flash floods and landslides at Cameron Highlands (2014) and Pantai Remis (2015), while the haze that spread to Malaysia, Singapore, south of Thailand and Philippines (2015) have caused a significant deterioration in air quality.

The shared environmental degradation problems have been an enormous challenge for Malaysia and Thai government every year as the mishaps have endangered the people's quality of life (Hadi, 2009; Xu, 2012). In the context of addressing the environmental issues and concerns, national concerted initiatives on nature conservation have been taken by the governments of both countries to protect natural resources, as well as their living habitats. As a result, many tropical forests in Malaysia and Thailand have been nominated to become the national parks in the beginning of 20th century.

According to the protected areas management categories proposed by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the national parks which is listed under Category II are the most extensive and most restrictive type of protected areas (West & Brechin,

1991; Muhumuza & Balkwill, 2013) to maintain the most valuable, delicate and threatened habitats, species and landscapes (Hamin, 2002). In most developing countries, national park acts as a cornerstone for nature conservation. More precisely, a national park is a nature park, operated for conservation purposes as perceived by surrounding communities. Hence, in this study of locals' perspectives, the term "national park" largely refers to "nature conservation".

In addition to its important role in nature conservation, the other reason of national park establishment is also aimed to document the nation's natural history. It has been highlighted by Nynas (2004) that the concept of the earliest national parks is based on an idea of a national heritage with the key objective of documenting the nation's natural history. It represents a strong symbol of a nation's understanding of the actual root, by symbolising the own characteristics and authenticity. Therefore, establishing a national park can also be interpreted as a nation's maintenance of an image that emphasise pure nature, as well as their culture. For example, with an area of 4343 square kilometres, Taman Negara National Park in Peninsular Malaysia conserves more than 3000 species of flowering plants, 200 species of *pteridophytes* and a host of wildlife species (Latiff, 1996). Additionally, the park also serves as a symbol of national identity, as it was estimated to be 130 million years old and considered to be one of the oldest tropical rainforests in the world.

Besides, the rationale of choosing the national parks as the focus of this study is because they represent an entirely close, specific and complex relationship between human and natural environment. In general, Macleod (2001) views national parks as protective controllers or defenders of resources. They manifest a natural context of

human desire under a culturally-determined sentiment whereas they illustrate a relationship of power between human and nature, as well as between differing social groups. Therefore, the study of national parks in uncertain and various situations helps us to gain better understanding on the fundamental issues in environmental conservation, social development, human behaviour and cultural interpretation of nature.

Goh's research (2007) in Kinabalu Park, Malaysia, finds that there was not only a growth in the number of protected areas, being witnessed over the past few decades since 1960s, but also the evolution and diversification of the role played by them. There are two main conservation concepts that have influenced the management policy of the national parks: traditional and contemporary conservation. The traditional conservation movement was first initiated through the setting of human as a threat to nature in order to preserve natural resources which are pure, pristine, untouched and desirable (Castree, 2001; Adams & Hutton, 2007). This idea of separating human activities from nature was proliferated from nineteenth to twentieth century and has instigated a clear conceptual division between natural environment and human.

Unfortunately, it has resulted to a variety of negative consequences and park-people conflicts because the rights of local people who are traditionally depending on the forest resources to sustain their living, have been either denied or restricted (Wells, 1992; Robert & Martin, 2003; Crawford, 2012; Mamo, 2015). Concerning the dilemma between the protection of natural resources and human rights, there are different points of view among the ecological conservation advocates and social

scientists. On one hand, the ecological conservationists consider the local people's activities as the causes of biodiversity degradation and support the need for strict park management. On the other hand, many social scientists particularly in the discipline of sustainable development criticise the exclusion of human activities and promote social equity in conservation (Chambell, 2005; Adams & Hutton, 2007), since the local residents have been utilising forest resources in relation with their cultures and traditional ways of life.

In response to these challenges, there has been a shift from traditional to a new conservation concept to underline the integration between the park management and participation of local communities towards nature conservation and decision-making activities (Poudel, 2002). Park-people conflicts resulted from the separation of natural resources and human influence have led to a growing attention from the stakeholders since the national parks should play a role in sustaining local communities.

Previous research works have argued the importance of examining the perspectives of local communities living in and around national parks to achieve the effectiveness of nature conservation programmes over the long-term, especially in developing countries (Allendorf, 2007; Triguero-Mas et al., 2010; Mamo, 2015). This is because understanding the local people's attitudes on nature conservation is vital in order to overcome the park-people conflicts (Webber et al., 2007). In Southeast Asian countries, park-people conflicts are often linked to crop damages by wild animals (Sifuna, 2010; Karanth & Nepal, 2012; Lamsal, 2012), restriction of access to traditionally used forest resources (Heinen & Shrivastava, 2009), unequal land

allocation (Panusittikorn & Prato, 2001), and lack of community involvement in the decision-making processes (Silori, 2007). All these problems may contribute to poor relationship between national park management and the surrounding communities as well as inflicting more negative attitudes towards nature conservation amongst the local people.

In order to solve the park-people conflicts and improve their mutual relationship, an effective communication between all the stakeholders within the community comprising the government organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local villagers is absolutely essential and momentous. The main reason lies on the fact that the information and effective communication may assist in the development of a good relationship between the regulatory network and its environment, and may also facilitate in influencing the wider environment by changing the attitudes in the various target groups. In short, communication strategy is important to educate the society to change their perspectives and attitudes for the sake of the environmental conservation (World Conservation Union, 2007; Jacobson, 2009).

I am interested in conducting a comparative study to examine if the different backgrounds of the countries could also lead to nature conservation as it is perceived in different ways by the local communities. This thesis also seeks to fill in the gaps of the existing literature by identifying park challenges, particularly in finding out the conflicts between the national park management and the local villagers. Furthermore, this research will look at the park-people relationship and the communication approach between the two parties in order to suggest effective communication

strategies specifically in nature conservation activities that include the ability to manage different kind of conflicts. It will serve as a useful tool in designing appropriate guidance and policy to address the needs and expectations of the local populations once the motivating factors that determine their perspectives on nature conservation have been successfully discovered.

1.2 Problem Statements

Despite the growing establishment of national parks has significantly reduced the rate of biodiversity loss, the park strategists have conspicuously failed in other realms. Many previous studies, conducted on threats of protected areas in Malaysia and Thailand, acknowledged that the key challenges for the implementation of the national parks in both countries entail few dimensions that consist of constraints on laws between the Federal and State governments (Mat Som, Mohamed & Yew, 2006; Pakhriazad, Hasmadi & Aida, 2009), Federal budget cuts, visitor management and environmental impacts of tourism (Phumsathan, 2010; Zaiton, Aziz & Mohd Rusli, 2013), illegal logging and wildlife poaching (Panusittikorn & Prato, 2001) as well as conflicts with neighbouring communities (Yamuachi, 2005; Nasuchon, 2009).

Among the aforementioned threats, conflicts with the local people living within the national parks are found to be the greatest and most significant pressure that has inflicted the park management particularly in developing countries (Thapa, 2014), and ironically it offers a lacuna to be further explored in this study. This is because the national park and its surrounding communities are highly dependent on each other: On the side of local people, the national park has become a part of their life

economically and socio-culturally as they are relying on the park resources to sustain their cultures and traditional way of life. For the park management, however, the authority has failed to adopt appropriate policy to protect the park against traditional exploitation of natural resources (Bhusal, 2012).

Also, as claimed by Thapa (2014), the protected areas are the breeding ground of conflicts in almost every place. The established national parks are not free from conflicts with local people who inhabit the area, either inside the parks or in the buffer zones. Initially, the national parks were established in following the American model of park management whereby the park resources and wildlife are protected from human exploitation. The concept of separation between humankind and its natural environment is embodied in the IUCN (1975) definition of a national park:

Where one or several ecosystems are not materially altered by human exploitation and occupation, whose plants and animal species, geomorphological sites and habitats, are of special scientific, educative and recreative interest, or which contains a natural landscape of great beauty (IUCN, 1975).

There have been numerous cases which lead to arising conflicts between the park management and local people. Conflicts often occurred when interests and needs are incompatible due to restriction of access to cultural resources (Kathirithamby-Wells, 2005; Heinen & Shrivastava, 2009; Lamsal, 2012), displacement of people from their traditional lands without compensation, loss of crops and livestock due to wildlife damage that causes poverty and threats to human lives (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Sifuna, 2010; Karanth & Nepal, 2011), disruption of local culture and economies by tourists (Hough, 1988), lack of communication between the park employees and

local residents (Ormsby & Kaplin, 2005), and limited community participation in natural resource management and decision-making (Silori, 2007; Abdul Aziz, 2009). Therefore, this study will highlight the importance of understanding local communities' perspectives on nature conservation in solving the park-people conflicts particularly in developing countries such as Malaysia and Thailand.

In Thailand, for example, there are diverse forest-related conflicts have been reported. One example of conflicts deals with land rights issue which was happened in a national forest reserve in Buriram province of Thailand, namely Dong Yai, where the government had decided to allocate land and release the deteriorating forest to private sector for forest tree planting. About 300 out of 1297 families had to move out of the forest area without any compensation. 2000 villagers were against the authority and burnt down 20 rai of the forest and one nursery. Finally, on the charge of encroaching and destroying the forest reserve, a Buddhist monk and three village leaders were arrested and imprisoned under the National Forest Reserve Act 1964 (Yamauchi, 2005). Besides, unclear rights to forest resources and lands have also been reported in Kanchanaburi province, the west of Thailand. Interviews have been conducted with 50 participants regarding the conflicts between national park authorities and local communities. The results show that the underlying cause of the conflict is unclear and contested tenure (Phromlah, 2014).

All the conflicts mentioned above may contribute to poor relationship between park managers and the surrounding residents that will subsequently affect the effectiveness of park management. In other words, conservation success is often predicted on local support for nature conservation which is strongly influenced by

such perspectives of the impacts as experienced by the local communities (Bennett & Dearden, 2014). Therefore, the greatest challenge of park establishment is to consider the perspectives and attitudes of the local people (Macleod, 2001; Walpole & Goodwin, 2001), which is also the aim of this research. Moreover, examining local perspectives will also help to identify and resolve the park-people conflicts concurrently.

According to Ap (1992), perception implies a people's knowledge or beliefs. Meanwhile, Pickens (2005) sees attitude as a mind-set or a tendency to act in a particular way due to an individual's personality and experience. In different words, perception is closely related and strongly influences the attitude (Pickens, 2005), beliefs and evaluation of outcomes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Wang et al. (2006), however, conclude that attitudes are not only built upon the perceptions and beliefs of reality, but they are closely related to other values and personal characteristics. Based on this definition, researchers have recognised local people's attitudes as not as simple as the reflections of their perceptions, but rather the results of the interaction between people's perceptions and the factors that affect their attitudes (Wang et al., 2006). Therefore, apart from evaluating the locals' perspectives on nature conservation, this study is designed to explore what factors have influenced them, in order to present a tool for better understanding of why and how their attitudes are formed, whether they are willing to support or not the park conservation activities.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the problem statements, the research questions can be formulated as follows:

RQ 1: What are the local communities' perspectives on nature conservation in Taman Negara Pahang, Malaysia and Khao Yai National Park, Thailand?

RQ 2: What factors determine the local communities' perspectives on nature conservation?

RQ 3: What are the interaction and communication approaches between the national park management and local communities?

RQ 4: How can the local communities' perspectives on nature conservation be integrated into effective communication strategies for conservation activities?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims to examine how the local communities, who are living within Taman Negara Pahang in Malaysia and Khao Yai National Park in Thailand, would perceive nature conservation. In particular, the objectives of this study are as below:

1. To explore the local communities' perspectives on nature conservation in Taman Negara Pahang, Malaysia and Khao Yai National Park, Thailand.

2. To discover the factors determine the local communities' perspectives on nature conservation.
3. To explore the interaction and communication approaches between the national park management and local communities.
4. To develop a sustainability communication framework for conservation activities based on local communities' perspectives on nature conservation.

1.5 Conceptualisations

Several terms and concepts have been defined and described for the profound understanding of this study.

Local communities:

A group of people with diverse characteristics, religion and race, but they are living in a same territory with shared interest and linked by social ties, involving in different occupations but related aspect of livelihoods (Borrini-Feyerabend, 1992; MacQueen et al., 2001). In this sense, the local communities of two study areas in Malaysia and Thailand include local Malays, *Batek Negrito*, and local Thais.

Indigenous people:

The native people especially protected in international or national legislation as having a set of specific rights based on their historical ties to a particular territory, and their cultural or historical distinctiveness from other populations (Coates, 2004). For this research, the *Orang Asli* group who primarily inhabits the rainforest within Taman Negara Pahang, Kuala Tahan is *Batek Negrito*.

Perspectives vs. Perceptions:

According to Niederhoff (2011) who is an expert in narratology field, a perspective is a point of view. He argues perspective in narrative may be defined as the way the representation of the story is influenced by the position, personality and values of the narrator, the characters and possibly, other more hypothetical entities in the story world. A professor of Geography, Tuan (2001) asserts that the study of perspective deals with the research on a person's spatial feelings and ideas in the stream of experience. In this study, perspectives could be referred to local communities' points of views, ideas, opinions, and feelings based on own past experience. On

the other hand, perception is the process by which individuals interpret and organise sensation to produce a meaningful experience of the world (Lindsay & Norman, 1977). Similarly, Pickens (2005) describes perception as a process when individuals receive, organise, and interpret information from their environment in order to make effective decisions. They interpret the situation into something meaningful to them based on prior experience. Schacter (2011), a psychology scholar, also defines perception as “our organisation, identification and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the environment”. Therefore, in this study, perception is the way we interpret our perspectives or points of view, or how we respond to the information. It implies people’s knowledge and beliefs, constructed from their perspectives that could influence their attitudes either supporting or not the nature conservation activities.

Factors:

A circumstance, fact, or situation that contributes to influence a result (Oxford

University Press, 2016; Cambridge University Press, 2016). For example, Lim and Mohamed (1999) define success factors as any circumstances, facts or influences that contribute to the success or failure of a project. Besides, according to a study done by World Health Organization (2004), adolescent behaviours are influenced by a variety of factors which are dependent on differences in relationships, settings, cultures, and economic conditions. These factors are called “determinants” as they determine and influence people’s behaviours. Thus, in this study, factors refer to determinants, causes or characteristics that contribute to influencing local communities’ perspectives and attitudes either to support or not the nature conservation activities.

Nature conservation:

Efforts made towards wise, careful, controlled and sustainable use of natural resources including plants, wild animals and their habitats for the purpose of retaining biodiversity and ecosystems (Maczulak, 2009) may be the accurate explanation of nature conservation. In

a more reflective manner, according to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992), *ex-situ* conservation means the conservation of components of biodiversity outside their natural habitats (Article 9). On the contrary, *in-situ* conservation refers to the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings (Article 8).

National park:

It is listed under Category II of the IUCN protected area management categories (World Conservation Union, 1994), which provides a foundation mainly for ecosystem protection, education and recreation. National parks are created to: a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for future generations, b) exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area, and c) provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational, and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible (Dudley & Stolton, 2008). The national park concept was originated in the United States

with the establishment of the Yellowstone National Park in 1982 (Philips & Harrison, 1997).

Conflicts:

This term can be alluded to perceived incompatibilities or discrepant views among the parties involved (Jehn and Bendersky, 2003). Bartos and Wehr (2002) define conflict as “a situation in which actors use conflict behaviour against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility”. In this study, it mainly refers to the conflicts between the national park authorities and local communities, caused by improper planning and management, which sometimes disregard the participation of local people.

1.6 Significance of the Study

It is increasingly conceded by many scholars that failure in considering the local communities' perspectives that include their opinions, perceptions, attitudes and community participation in conservation activities will lead to limited success of the national park management (Western & Wright, 1994; Macleod, 2001; Walpole & Goodwin, 2001; Bennett & Dearden, 2014). Such argument is based on the reality that the local voice is often excluded from park planning processes (Honey, 2008) as

it had triggered adverse social-economic impacts, and caused conflicts between park managers and local residents (Andrade & Rhodes, 2012). With criticisms on every angle of the conservation debates, therefore, it is critical to have a better understanding that associates the perspectives of local people with environmental conservation.

Research on conservation, people, and communication strategies are still new in Malaysia and Thailand. Therefore, the findings of this study are important to build strategic communication framework for both countries. In addressing negative human impacts and park-people conflicts, Bogart et al. (2009) believe that strategic communication and education must be integrated into conservation delivery. It is, hence, a useful guidance in employing sustainability communication strategies for future conservation activities, particularly for approaches that contribute towards effective park management by working together with local people through communication and education programmes.

This research also provides a significant contribution for the governmental and non-governmental conservation agencies by generating useful information and understanding not only to the extent of the community involvement in management of national parks, but also towards tourism programmes. Malaysia and Thailand are nations that are well-endowed with a variety of rich biodiversity resources, whereas tourism is highly promoted to make use of natural landscape for the dominant and important growth of the country's economy. On a related note, findings of this study will also provide a reference for students, scholars and researchers with interests in similar or related fields.

Lastly, a comparative study of two different countries will offer a tool to illustrate why and how members of local communities with different backgrounds perceive natural resource conservation initiatives. It will present findings of the strengths and weaknesses of different park management styles under two different governmental policies. This is because every side is unique and the challenges involved in management differ from country to country, and even region to region or site to site (Shioya, 2011). In other words, this study helps to highlight on what each party can learn from the other and finally generates useful information in designing effective conservation policies for both countries.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The main limitation in conducting this research lies on the problems of language barriers that had created communication difficulties with the target respondents. First, the *Batek* people do not speak Malay as their first language. Only some of them who often interact with the outsiders could speak a combination of Malay and English languages. Similarly, all of the respondents in Thailand speak Thai as their native language. In order to conduct interviews in a foreign language, this study employed an interpreter who is a native and well-versed with Thai culture that can converse easily with the respondents.

The reluctance of the respondents to be interviewed was another challenge in this research. Most of the *Batek* women were shy and unwilling to speak with the researcher as they refused to be interviewed alone. However, the researcher managed

to persuade one of them who eventually agreed to participate in focus group discussion.

Other limitations of this research are related to insufficient financial resources and time constraint. This is because of the poor accessibility of *Batek* villages due to the distance and remoteness. Their settlements are only accessible by boat and the fare is expensive. My schedule of visiting these villages was thus has to be adapted to these conditions.

1.8 Thesis Outline

This study is composed and structured into seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview and background of this research. The nature of the research problem, research objectives and research questions are clearly stated. Next, the definitions of conceptualisation terms were developed accordingly to the scope and objectives of the study. It also contains important contributions to the fields of conservation, people and communication.

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 consists of the theoretical framework. It describes the social exchange theory, conflict theory and perspective-taking paradigm in communication, as well as the arguments of the intentions in using them. Finally, a framework was proposed with regard to the application of this study.

In Chapter 3, the literature review begins with the arguments of previous research by describing the meaning of nature conservation which is relevant to this study. Then,

it moves to the history of conservation approach in global protected areas from conventional to contemporary conservation concepts, and the conflicts happened between the national parks and local communities. The literature also considers the past research related to various topics including local people's perspectives on nature conservation, and the roles of communication strategies in conservation activities.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and methodology that were used for this study in detail, including the qualitative methods which are used to collect data from focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and observations, data collection and data analysis procedures. The interview questions were designed to explore the perspectives of local communities and possible factors that determining their perspectives.

Both Chapters 5 and 6 respectively presents the detailed findings in Malaysia and Thailand. Next, Chapter 7 provides the discussion of both similarities and differences in local people' support for nature conservation activities between two different countries in the lens of different backgrounds. Finally, this last chapter concludes the study with a summary of the major findings, conclusions and recommendations.