

Title	Man, Forest and Spirits: Images and Survival among Forest-Dwellers of Malaysia(<Special Issue>Forests and the Sea in the Southeast Asian Maritime World)
Author(s)	Hood M. S.
Citation	東南アジア研究 (1993), 30(4): 444-456
Issue Date	1993-03
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2433/56480
Right	
Type	Journal Article
Textversion	publisher

Man, Forest and Spirits: Images and Survival among Forest-Dwellers of Malaysia

HOOB M. S.*

Introduction

Whenever we lose our way in the forest we are always faced with two paths to choose from—the right path and the path of spirits.

A Jah Het Orang Asli saying.

By the very tales we tell we doom the natural tropical world we love and its inhabitants.

[Hecht and Cockburn 1990: 13]

This paper deals with two themes which appear to be interconnected in the present-day controversy about forests. The first is concerned with general relationships between man and the forest and is examined with reference to case studies of communities in Malaysia. The second is the relationship between forest-dwellers and spirits, which is examined by studying beliefs about spirits of the forest and how such beliefs are meaningfully related to each other in the conceptual world of some selected groups of people. Although the main focus is on Malaysia, it is hoped that the study has some relevance to communities in other parts of the world as well.

Forest-Man Interactions

Man's interaction with the forest has a very long history. Although this is generally true for most communities all over the world, scholars are not in agreement as to exactly how long this has been [Denslow and Padoch 1988]. In any case, it might be more logical to imagine that such interaction was, and still is, more with forests of the tropical rather than temperate or colder climates. Thus it appears that the combination of a suitable climate, plant diversity and man's great need and ingenuity on putting the environment to good use has a great deal to do with his sustained interaction with it.

The culture of forest-living has its own unique dynamics. Whether interaction

* Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia (Visiting Research Scholar, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, from April 1992 to February 1993)

between man and forest is intensive or extensive in nature depends a great deal upon the given natural and local conditions. These usually determine whether one way of life is more viable than others. Civilizations in the shape of small communities still exist in some numbers today in the rainforest tropics and they have existed in almost the same manner for several centuries. Although they may not have increased in size to any appreciable extent, and indeed some have actually decreased in size in the last few decades, they have persisted nonetheless, in spite of the threat of urbanisation and the encroachment of large-scale development projects into their midst. Today, it is believed that the persistence—indeed the survival—of such communities will be possible only through optimally intensive interaction with the resources still available in the forest. In some cases this is not even possible anymore. This is largely explained by the very great dependence of the communities on the products of the forest as sources of food and supplementary income through petty trading with outsiders. In the past, forests were 'friendly' to the inhabitants using them and the situation changed dramatically only when non-habitants ("outsiders") began to claim an avid and systematic interest in any kind of forest as a source for items of profits in local and international trade on a very large scale.

But the persisting interaction of human communities with forests is not just due to the fact that there are products to be derived from for either subsistence or supplementary trade. More importantly, the forest has come to be identified with distinct modes of human survival, indeed, ways of life that have developed and evolved over a considerable period of time. These ways of life have evolved into distinct cultural systems, mostly based on great dependence on the resources available over and around preferred areas of settlement. Any radical change upsetting the stability of such communities has usually come from external factors. Often these are changes which the small forest communities, as socio-political entities, find hard to contain, let alone control. It seems to be a truism that in such a situation, the little communities usually cannot cope with the demands of the changes. In such cases, it is hardly surprising that, very frequently, the question which arises is that of the survival of the forest communities themselves. And the issues involved here bring into sharper focus problems that relate also to the social and political dilemmas of our time.

Some Case Studies

(A) *The Temuan*

Some of the best studies on human interactions with the forest in Malaysia have been written by scholars who had diverse interests and approached the subject from a variety of disciplines, but who in the end contributed a great deal to the collective literature on the cultural meaning of the forest in the historical experience of the most involved with it. One of the earliest and perhaps more comprehensive Malaysian studies is F. L. Dunn's *Rain-Forest Collectors and Traders: A Study of Resource Utilization in Modern and Ancient Malaya*



Map 1 Peninsular Malaysia: Orang Asli Areas
Source: Benjamin [1983]

[1975]. The study provides significant details which adds to Burkill's earlier, monumental studies on forest products [1935].

Dunn interprets through archeological and anthropological materials the immense importance of the resources of the rainforest over several centuries (5th–19th) not merely to the inhabitants of the forest but also in supporting the demand for forest product originating in distant parts of the world. The most important contribution of his study was to indicate, among other things, the richness of the species of trees, flowers and the general plant diversity in the forests of Malaya [Dunn 1975: 38], and additionally how they were used, recognised and planted by the people he lived with and gained firsthand information from. Dunn elaborates on the knowledge that forest-dwellers have concerning the living plant environment and the animals and birds which made the forest their home and environment for subsistence [*ibid.*: 55–56]. The best reference he presents for

us lies in the description of the nature of human adaptation to the larger universe of the forest as a space for social life. In this connection, Dunn points out how the ecological knowledge of the people is not entirely based on the criterion of utility of the forest products but also on the “cognitive value” of it as an item of intellectual interest. In other words, the forest is not perceived just as a facility to be exploited but also as a source of intellectual nourishment. For the people living in it, it had much social and “cognitive value.”

Dunn traces the events in the life-cycle of the ordinary Temuan Orang Asli as the latter begins to develop sound ecological knowledge of his environment. The Temuan child, he says, must become a good naturalist if he is to live successfully within the subsistence zone in which—at least traditionally—he is expected to spend his life. It is stressed that the combination of practical, utilitarian knowledge and the development of intellectual curiosity in regard to the forest begin at a very early stage of life for the Temuan. Dunn says:

The child begins to acquire this knowledge even as he starts to speak, to understand and to explore the immediate surroundings of his mother's house. Among his early words are terms for parts of the house and household objects; these, with few exceptions in the traditional Temuan home, are derived from forest materials. The house itself is framed with forest timbers and poles selected for qualities that include. . . strength, termite resistance, hardness to prevent rotting; in the wall poles—strength, rigidity, lightness; in the roofing beams and poles—flexibility, lightness, moisture resistance. All these parts are named and the forest trees that provide the best materials are wellknown. Flooring, too, is a complex subject. In the family living areas the best floors are two-layered, of split bamboo (especially *buloh akar* and *buloh kasap*, two of the 13 “Temuan species” of bamboo recognised in the community). . . [*ibid.*: 61–62]

The Temuan child continues the life-long process of educating himself by progressively being involved in all other spheres of life in the village as well as in the forest, with members of the older generation as well as with others who may play with him and who take the products of the forest as the “natural” items to use in daily life [*loc. cit.*].

As they grow older, Dunn says, Temuan youth begin to have wider and much wider specific knowledge about the forest. This consists, among other things, in knowing what he terms “the landforms and the landmarks of a subsistence zone.” According to him:

This is an important dimension of forest knowledge, indeed a critical dimension for the male Temuan who must learn to find his way around forested terrain without error. The collector or hunter cannot afford to lose his way around and waste hours in returning to the village with perishable produce or prey. Being

benighted in the forest is especially to be avoided. Thus, from the beginning of his experience in the forest, the Temuan youth must develop a mental map of the forest, a map in which he plots trails, stream courses, topographic features such as ridges, rocky outcrops, and valleys and hundreds of landmarks—great trees, distinctive vines, swampy spots, waterfalls, pools and so forth. [*ibid.*: 63]

What Dunn says about knowing the forest and the way of life associated with it has implications that are far-reaching and relevant to the present discussion. More examples are presented below to provide substantive elaboration on important dimensions related to the kind of close interaction between man and forest as described by Dunn.

(B) *The Penan*

The Penan case is interesting in many respects: first, in their relationship with the forest as a source of sustenance; and second, in the special way in which they have been able to preserve the forest even as they depend on it for their staple diet. Two studies of the Penan mention the importance of these two aspects of resource use [Brosius 1992; Langub 1989]. Langub says the Penan have “a profound sense of affinity with the forest, for it plays a central role in their lives. It is the forest that provides their staple foods: the starchy pith of a type of sago palm (*Eugeissona utilis*), *uvud* (young sago plants), *lekak* (an edible palm leaf-bud), the meat of the beaded pig (*Sus barbatus*), a variety of fruits and many other food plants.” Over the centuries, the forest has been the main source of trade items such as camphor, *jelutong* (a wild rubber), *damar* (a resin), *gaharu* (incense wood), bezoar stones (gallstones to which the Chinese attribute medicinal properties), and rattan (for making mats and baskets that are in demand in the coastal towns). The Penan have long depended on the forest for these products and they are now becoming acutely aware that such resources are getting scarce.

Both Langub and Brosius dwell on the importance of the concept of *molong* as a factor of supreme importance in the question of conservation. The belief in the idea of *molong* is the method by which the Penan lay claim to the trees and sago palm in order to save them for the future. Langub says they mark a rattan stand as theirs, for instance, and use it later, often much later, to make mats and baskets. Such “ownership” of forest products is acquired by other individuals in the group as well as other Penan in the neighbouring areas. In this way the Penan establish and maintain rights over the area in which they live [Langub 1989: 174].

The Penan are well known for their moderate treatment of the forest, for example in the treatment of sago palms, an important source of their staple food. Langub says the Penan never waste or mistreat sago palms. Though there is an abundance of palms, Penan “always harvest sago by cutting only one or two of the trunks, leaving the palm to resprout; they will never cut down the entire plant at the root clump as this will kill it [*ibid.*: 175]. Apart from this they rotate the extraction of clumps systematically from the one

sago grove to the other, marking the young sago for future use. In this way, the supply of sago is never easily depleted. Other studies [e.g., Lian 1991] indicate that though a large part of the forests where the Penan collect and hunt other items of need may be logged, sago clumps are situated away from such forests and thus continue to provide a ready source of food.

(C) *The Semelai*

The case of the Semelai Orang Asli of southwest Pahang provides us with an instance where both water and forest, once prevalent in great abundance, gradually became depleted until they became no more dependable as adequate sources for continued survival. Prior to the 1950s, Collings [1949] wrote of the flourishing community of Semelai who lived in scattered village clusters around the Tasek Bera watershed, an inland lake some 17 miles long and 3 miles wide [Merton 1962], subsisting on hill rice, fish, vegetables and meat in the forest. Trade in the sale of the *keruing* sap and rattan to outsiders provided cash to enable villagers to lead a comfortable life without depending on seasonal jobs with outsiders. Around the early 1980s, with capital-intensive projects of land reform which were principally meant for the benefit of outsiders, several thousand hectares of forest around the lake were cleared to make way for oil palm and rubber plantations. Undoubtedly this had a severe impact on the Semelai economy and wildlife in the area, apart from dramatically reducing the water-level of the Tasek Bera.

Thus the displacement and dislocation of the village economy and the instability brought about by this change in the ecosystem resulted not only in economic distress to local inhabitants but in the steady depletion of flora and fauna as well (see, for example, studies carried out by the University of Malaya, the IPB research teams and, latterly, the survey on wetlands of the Malay peninsula from the 1970s to 1991). There is today among the Semelai an acute sense of the loss of the forest and the lake as sources of subsistence. Some areas in the vicinity of Tasek Bera have been converted into plots for cultivation of cash crops for villagers, and the process, begun in the 1970s, is still going on. In the last 18 months, RISDA has initiated planned change by replanting of rubber trees in the area, but this does not offset the current problems of a wider nature affecting the villagers as a whole.

As with other rural forest-dwelling communities, the problems faced by people like the Semelai are compounded by the fact that the transition to a peasant-type subsistence way of life would take many years, assuming that the way is clear for them to make such a transition through subsidies and similar facilities. But as the situation stands, loss of the forest and the lake as a socially and economically dependable environment for subsisting is not compensated but instead compounded by other complications, such as the reluctance to see Orang Asli attachment to the forest as an important point for consideration.

(D) *Batek negrito nomads*

In an excellent monograph on the Batek negrito on the Aring and Lebir rivers in Hulu Kelantan, Endicott described in meticulous detail how the forest and the environment in general defined the cosmological and social principles of Batek existence. The Batek mostly live off tubers, cassava, vegetables, fruits, palm cabbage, mushrooms, fern shoots, monkeys, civets, squirrels, birds and fish which are plentiful in the undisturbed parts of the tropical forest. To obtain some cash for their other needs, they collect rattan and other jungle products which they sell to traders outside the forest. Today, Batek people need more cash in order to buy things that can no longer be obtained from the forest and to cope with changes brought about by the shrinking of the forest. Children have been encouraged to go to school and the pressure on parents is to leave the forest and adapt to new environments as soon as possible.

For forest-dwellers such as the Batek the latter is not the easiest thing to do, for the forest has always been a vital part of their cultural ensemble. As nomads (depending on which small groups are referred to), the Batek have their own conception of the world around them. To quote Endicott:

The Batek identify closely with their rain-forest environment. They sometimes call themselves 'forest people' (*batek hep*). . . They regard the forest as their true home; whenever they camp in or near clearings, they say they are only 'lodging' (*tompang*) there. The Batek consider their living in the forest to be part of the natural order of things as established by the superhuman beings. [Endicott 1979:53]

Additionally the Batek prefer the coolness of the forest to the hot open spaces outside it, including the villages and the towns, and would therefore avoid such places if they could. Being unmaterialistic on account of their simple needs and their beliefs about the world, their relationship with the forest as a place to live becomes even more important. Although their attitude to the forest may be understood in a mundane manner as being an essential part of their social space, the forest is also intertwined with their religious notions of what constitutes good and bad. These notions are taught to them by the *hala'* or intermediary between themselves and the superhuman beings who set the rules governing proper behaviour in this world. As Endicott says:

. . . to the Batek the environment is not just a collection of material resources, devoid of any significance. They believe that their major foods were created expressly for them by the *hala'*. They assume that in harvesting and living off these foods they are living as they were meant to do. They acknowledge their debt to the *hala'* by observing a first fruits ceremony, and they take an active part in some of the processes of food production by singing for the fruit blossoms and the honey bees. [*ibid.*: 67]

(E) *The Chewong*

Another instance of the very close involvement of peoples and the forest is clearly demonstrated by Howell in her study of the Chewong of Pahang, a small group of Orang Asli living in the Krau Game Reserve. The Chewong attachment to the forest, indeed the meaning of the forest to them, is summarised succinctly in the following terms:

In their own parlance they are forest people (*bi brete*), and it is only once they have put a large expanse of primary forest between themselves and the rest of the world that they feel happy and secure. . . the forest and their own labour within it provides them with virtually all their necessities. [Howell 1984: 18-19]

The Chewong sources of food are various species of animals such as monkeys, squirrels, tortoises, porcupine, pigs, deer, fish and fruits. They forage numerous species of edible tubers, wild mushroom, vegetables and nuts. Chewong are today swidden cultivators and live off tapioca as their staple diet. During the fruit season they leave their settlement in order to move closer to a large durian or payong tree, the fruit of both becoming their staple (*ratn*).

As is the case with the Batek, the Chewong need the forest to survive well and live according to their own concept of things. They look at the forest in a very special way. The social universe of which the forest is an important part is looked upon as a place of exchange and "chains of exchange" [*ibid.*: 116] between humans and superhumans who regulate behaviour in this world. Superhumans to the Chewong are "the totality of beings with whom they maintain relations" [*loc. cit.*]. Superhumans are important in the creation of the moral universe and symbolised how society was created through "gifts from the culture heroes." The gifts gave knowledge and specific ideas on how to lead the good life. Transgressions and not observing the rules of superhumans, which includes maintaining the forests and animals, are punishable by disease and even death [*ibid.*: 118].

Howell adds that part of the creatures of the forest may be in the life substance of the Chewong, for it is believed that the forest "houses" those creatures or plants which are manifestations of their soul (*ruwai*). Thus when a person has met such a *ruwai* his attitude to that particular species as a whole alters. He will refuse to eat any member of it, knowing that they are people [*ibid.*: 139].

Forest-Dwellers and Self-image

One of the main sources of misunderstanding in most controversies about forests, which gives issues connected with them their present character is the lack of appreciation regarding the close and intimate relationships between forest-dwellers and the forests in which they live. For forest-dwellers, and also people closely acquainted with them, forests have always been a source of great knowledge and a symbol of power. The forest is also a means of knowing and realizing their selves and the culture which informs them of this. It

is a means of obtaining “self-knowledge.” To obtain this self-knowledge requires a great deal of effort and exposure to the forest itself, especially its many mysteries. But it is precisely the learning of these mysteries that trains the individual to cope with the stresses and demands of the special environment of the forest. If the environment changes, especially due to pressure from external sources, survival becomes difficult and very often the old “moral economy” of life in the forest changes completely. We have to understand the traditions of life in the forest first in order to know how intricate and sensitive the cultural constraints are on the forest-dwellers. For most forest-dwellers, the forest and its “spirit inhabitants” represent part of their world. Indeed they feature very importantly in their coslogical and practical day-to-day affairs. We shall examine briefly some ethnographic examples to illustrate this point.

For the Batek negritos, we saw how the forest was very important to their way of life and their sense of identity, indeed to their day-to-day survival. Although at a superficial level it appears that the forest does not feature directly as an element in the Batek cosmology, a deeper appreciation of the logic behind their ritual activities reveals otherwise, underlining a more complex situation than a casual observation might suggest. This is what Endicott means when he says that the forest plays a crucial part as a source of subsistence as well as a source of danger [Endicott 1979: 53]. This being so, we are told that Batek people have always tried to “regulate” their behaviour according to their conception of their relationship to the powers connected with their continued survival. The “powers” connected with their survival are those spirits which Endicott prefers to call “superhuman beings.”

Thus if the forest is taken to mean only the environment of the Batek in a literal or physical sense, then it fails to describe sufficiently the meaning of it to the lives of the Batek as a social community. But as Endicott explains [1979: 53], the true significance of the forest is to be seen against the background of Batek religion. The components of the forest always includes the superhuman beings-spirits who play a large part in the continuing struggle of the Batek to maintain their long-term identity alongside other societies on the Malay peninsula. In his explanation, Endicott makes the following formulation [*loc. cit.*]:

The Batek consider their living in the forest to be part of the natural order of things as established by the superhuman beings. Although individual Batek may leave the forest for varying lengths of time, it is generally believed that if all the Batek moved out of the forest, the superhuman beings would destroy the world. The Batek are not afraid of the forest and do not build symbolic defences against it. . . . No deliberate effort is made to remove the undergrowth from the space between the huts or to set off the area of the camp from surrounding forest. . . . a Batek camp blends into its surroundings so well that only the sound of voices and the smoke of fires betray its presence to an observer a few feet away. Thus, the Batek. . . do not attempt to carve out an island of culture in the sea of nature.

The Batek world and the forest are therefore one, a unity, because as human beings they are part and parcel of that natural world of the forest. To separate the forest would be to divide them unnaturally from the superhumans upon whom they have depended for subsistence and spiritual vitality since the days of their ancestors. The superhumans, in this sense, may be regarded as the "spirit-guides" of the community and the *hala'* or shaman is the symbol of that species of guidance.

The incorporation of the forest into their cosmological thought may be observed in the few ritual activities that characterize their social life. Most important are the singing sessions that adult members of a community participate in to ensure that they have a continuous and bountiful supply of food from the forest. The life of the forest, its vitality, and the survival of the Batek must be seen as elements of an interconnected process, which only the Batek can be held responsible for perpetuating. It is in this sense that we should understand why the forest is so important. For the Batek, what is needed to make sure that the forest remains a food-producing entity is effective rituals which help to mediate in the process of ensuring survival. The individual chosen to lead in this mediating process, i. e., the *hala'* who is seen as the most knowledgeable human being to communicate with the superhuman beings. He is the one who knows the forest and the ways of the forest best of all. Batek people believe that a "shadow soul" inheres in all things, including humans, animals and fruit trees and foods in the forest. The continued existence and the supply of all these natural commodities in the forest are considered to be in the hands of the superhuman beings whose rules have to be followed strictly. The time to do this is determined by the ancestors and the way to do it is through correct ritual methods. We can take as an example the singing sessions that Batek people engage to ensure the continued supply of wild tubers, fruits and wild honey bees.

For the Semelai of Pahang, the forest has multiple images. Each image of the forest may be linked to the variety of spirits or superhuman beings which are said to play their part in various aspects of the forest-dwellers' lives. Some of the spirits and superhuman beings are commonly known by village folk while others remain the province only of specialists, especially those concerned with healing the sick (*bomo* and *puyang*), sorcerers, and elders known to have some interest and talent in regard to such matters. Thus for the common villager the forest is mainly seen as a source of food but also, in many other ways, as a place of danger from attack by spirits of all sorts, usually vaguely defined according to hearsay. Unlike the Batek, the Semelai regard the forest as eminently a place where malevolent spirits reside.

It is perhaps easier to understand Semelai attitudes to the forest by their identification with it through their sense of themselves as a 'people of the forest' (*sema' beri'*), in contradistinction to the Malays, whom they regard as not belonging. The forest represents for them the ancient world from which it is believed the bulk of the repository of ritual and traditional knowledge of the present day is derived. Apart from forests, the mountains (*benem*) represent the other place from which specialised knowledge of the ancestors and

the meaning of things can be obtained. Knowledge about forests and mountains implies knowledge about spirits and legendary figures (superhumans). This knowledge teaches people at once about how to understand their characteristics and how best to deal with them and put such knowledge to good use.

Thus the relationship between the Semelai and the forest is a very complex one. Underlying the dynamics of this relationship is the central concept of a "soul" which is believed to exist in all things. This soul-substance variously called *semengot*, *bayang* and *riwai* (the latter is used only to refer to it in the ritual context), will explain about life and death and the dangers by which the living are always threatened, whether in the spatial context of the forest or in the village outside of the forest proper. Human beings are believed to have seven souls, of which six are said to be attached to the body and one ("the youngest", *Bayang Bongsu*) to be "free" and live on after a person dies. The dangers lurking in the forest constantly remind humans about the perilous threats from which the human soul would suffer; great care must be observed at all times in order to survive adequately and be relatively free of harassment from one category of spirits or another.

The perils of the human soul are no doubt a consequence of "forest-living," which, as mentioned earlier, the Semelai believe to be part of the natural order of things inherited from their ancestors (*nine' muyang*). As an environment, the forest imbues Semelai life with a great variety of alternatives and "social rules" which define their cultural and symbolic adaptation to it. The latter is worth mentioning, as this would show the forest as a cognitive and cosmological category in their collective experience. In this connection, some propositions are examined in order to understand more deeply the involvement of the Semelai with the forest. For instance, like human beings, trees of the forest have souls and different trees have been created for different use. This is generally understood by everyone in a practical as well as a symbolic sense. Semelai say that there are two named spirits which guard the two main natural entities, the forest and the earth. The category of spirit is called *seko'*, best described as "guardian spirit." The guardian spirit of the trees is called *seko' delong* and the guardian spirit of the earth is called *seko' ateh*. Both guardian spirits, like others in the same category, must be respected by acknowledging their existence through a show of observing silence, i.e., it is forbidden to mention (*pecere*) the name of the *seko'*. Nonobservance of this prohibition would make one prone to fall into a state of inattentiveness resulting in soul-loss (*tenon*).

If a tree falls without there being a storm, one must therefore keep quiet, or else one becomes vulnerable to *tenon*. Or if one hears a tree being cut in the dead of night in the middle of the forest, one is supposed to pretend to have heard nothing, for again this is believed to be the *seko' delong* doing something. As a category, *seko'* have several images or manifestations. One *puyang* says that as a spirit it manifests itself as a small, black-skinned three-year-old boy. Other instances are also cited by villagers who say they saw three dark-skinned boys walking between two hills in the forest some distance from the village at midday. It is said that they look like Indians, and so this is supposed to mean that they are

seko' delong, not children. The *seko' delong* is also said to be fond of stealing young children (*kenkon*). The *seko' delong* is said to take the children away and lure them into staying in their world, which is said to be a beautiful and enjoyable place.

The forest is also the place of such ancient spirits as the Spectre Huntsman, a spirit-guardian who decided to withdraw into the forest due to an unsatisfactory domestic situation in his own family in the village. It is also the dwelling for the Tall-Spirit or *Pakre'* (which uses the tiger as its main agent in its attacks on humans) and countless other spirits which are either enemies of humans or friends in their spirit forms. The large variety of such spirits will be easily understood from the complex rituals associated with curing the sick (*belian*). It is the persistence of these *belian* rituals which underlines the close relationship of the Semelai to the forest. It may be regarded as the main cultural institution which outlines in substantive form the ideological structure of the society and hence its belief in spirits.

Comparison with the Malays

There is some connection between the Orang Asli conception of the forest and that of the Malays. Even though he wrote nearly 100 years ago, Maxwell, the well-known scholar of the colonial period of Malayan history, noted the following:

To the Malays the great enveloping forest is full of supernatural powers. There are the wonderful *Jin Tanah*, the Earth Spirits; *Gergasi*, the great tusked giants; *Orang Bunyi*, the invisible Voice Folk. There are individual creatures—such as *Hantu Pemburu*, the Spectral Hunter; mountain-top and Pemburu river pool have their local spirits; and there are classes innumerable of ghosts, goblins, and demons.

In the same section, Maxwell extended his observation not just to forests but to the contemporary study of Malay folk beliefs in general, and this still has a measure of relevance:

It is worthy of notice that, though the Malays have been staunch Muhamamadans for centuries, their aboriginal fear of the forest is so deeply rooted that it is to the spirits and not to Allah that they apply for protection. Similarly, when a party of Malays sets out to drive deer, the commonest of all game, they may go no more than a few hundred yards away from the village; but none the less the leader of the party will utter this preface to his prayer to the spirits:

Hail! All hail!

We crave permission to enter on this domain and to tie our nooses to these trees.

[Maxwell 1982: 8–9]

References

- Benjamin, G. 1967. Temiar Religion. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Cambridge.
- . 1983. Peninsular Malaysia. In *Language Atlas of the Pacific Area*, edited by Stephen A. Wurm and Shiro Hattori, Vol. 2, map 37. Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities and Pacific Linguistics.
- Brosius, P. 1992. Perspectives on Penan Development in Sarawak. Paper presented at Workshop on Penan Development, Marudi, Sarawak, January.
- Burkill, I. H. 1935. *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of the Malay Peninsula*. 2nd Edition. Kuala Lumpur: Dept. of Agriculture.
- Chin, S. C. 1985. Agriculture and Resource Utilisation in a Lowland Rainforest Kenyah Community. *Sarawak Museum Journal* 35 (56) (New Series), Special Monograph No. 4.
- Collings, H. D. 1949. Aboriginal Notes II. *Bulletin of the Raffles Museum*, Series B, No. 4: 86-93.
- Denslow, J. L.; and Padoch, C. 1988. *People of the Tropical Rainforest*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dransfield, J. 1979. *A Manual of the Rattans of the Malay Peninsula*. Forestry Dept. Malaysia.
- Dunn, F. L. 1975. *Rain-Forest Collectors and Traders: A Study of Resource Utilization in Modern and Ancient Malaya*. Monographs of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, No. 5.
- Endicott, K. M. 1979. *Batek Negrito Religion*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Hecht, S.; and Cockburn, A. 1990. *The Fate of the Forest*. London: Penguin.
- Hood, M. s. 1978. Semelai Rituals of Curing. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Oxford.
- Howell, S. L. 1984. *Society and Cosmos: Chewong of Malaysia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kiew, R. 1989. Conservation and Utilisation of Malaysian Palms. *Malayan Naturalist* 43 (1 & 2). Kuala Lumpur.
- Langub, J. 1989. Some Aspects of the Life of the Penan. *Sarawak Museum Journal* 40 (61) (New Series), December, Special Issue No. 4, Part III.
- Lian, F. J. 1991. Towards a Sustainable Environmental Future for the Southeast Asian Region: On Threatened Peoples. United Nations University Workshop, Jogjakarta, May.
- Malayan Naturalist* 43 (1 & 2). 1989. Kuala Lumpur.
- Maxwell, G. 1982. *In Malay Forests*. Eastern Universities Press. First published in 1907.
- Merton, F. 1962. A Visit to the Tasek Bera. *Malayan Nature Journal* 16 (September): 103-110.
- Morris, S. 1953. *Report on a Melanau Sago Producing Community in Sarawak*. Published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office for the Colonial Office.
- Roseman, M. 1991. *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest: Temiar Music and Medicine*. Berkeley: University of California Press.