

Large-scale forest developments and landuse by the Iban around the Lambir Hills National Park

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In this presentation, landuse by native people is evaluated from viewpoint of biodiversity conservation, referring a case of the Iban landuse around the Lambir Hills National Park.

The present landuses observed around the national park are described as follows: converting to oil palm plantations after commercial logging in the northern part from the national park; oil palm plantations in the south western part from the national park boundary; and villages of the Iban distributed along the Bakong river in the south eastern part from the national park.

The Iban migrated into this area about 100 years ago. The present landuse in their territory is based on natural secondary forests in various secession stages. In those forests, swidden agriculture lands where hill and swamp paddy is produced, rubber groves, fruit trees groves, pepper gardens, and longhouses dot. However, the former landuse was different from the present one. A research result based on observation of aerial photographs in the past years, interview with the Iban villagers, and documents survey shows dynamic changes in their landuse. The changes are consequent due to their adaptation toward price changes of rubber, pepper and timber in the international market, and also demand changes of rice and forest products in the domestic market.

As a result the change, their landuse is characterized by: possessing similar structure (multiple layers and species) with natural forest, as observed by rubber groves and fruit tree groves; and always being returned to natural forest from certain types of the landuses, such as hill and swamp paddy fields and pepper gardens. A land plot is not used for long period by the same usage of land. The lands after recovering to natural forest become fertile, and allow to plant any kinds of products. Such forest-based landuse is the principal of the Iban livelihood which is made adaptively to changes of the social and economic environment outside their villages.

The commercial logging in the northern part from the national park started in the former part of the 1960s. After 1990s, the remained trees have been cleared and the conversion to oil palm plantations has been proceeding. The development of oil palm plantation in the south western part from the national park started after the middle of 1960s when the Miri-Bintulu road constructed, and the plantations are expanding toward Bintulu and the middle and upper reaches of the Baram river.

The change size and rate of the landuse by the Iban are much smaller and slower respectively than those of the large scale forest development, such as commercial logging and oil palm plantation. The Iban practice more preferable landuse in terms of biodiversity conservation.