

## Use and Trade of Rattan by the Jahai in Hulu Perak, Malaysia

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### ABSTRAK

*Atrikel ini cuba membicarakan kegiatan mengeluarkan rotan yang dilakukan oleh Orang Jahai yang tinggal di Hulu Perak. Orang Jahai merupakan kumpulan Orang Asli yang masih hidup berpindah randah memburu dan mengumpul hasil hutan untuk menyara kehidupan mereka. Kegiatan mengeluarkan hasil hutan seperti rotan ini telah membolehkan masyarakat ini mendapat wang untuk membeli barang-barang yang mereka perlukan. Bahkan bagi masyarakat ini rotan merupakan sumber kewangan yang utama. Rotan yang dipasarkan secara komersil dikeluarkan oleh Orang Jahai melalui pembiayaan taukeh yang menyediakan kemudahan pengangkutan seperti motorbot dan alat-alat lain serta bekalan makanan untuk membolehkan mereka pergi ke kawasan pendalaman hutan mencari bahan tersebut. Rotan yang telah dipotong ini kemudiannya dibawa ke pusat pengumpulan dan taukeh yang membiayai kegiatan ini akan datang mengambilnya. Mereka akan hanya dibayar setelah semua kos perbelanjaan ditolak daripada hasil jualan rotan tersebut. Walaupun sistem bertaukeh ini mendedahkan Orang Jahai kepada penindasan tetapi sistem ini telah membolehkan masyarakat ini mendapat wang untuk membeli makanan dan keperluan-keperluan lain.*

### ABSTRACT

*This article is about rattan collecting activities as practised by the Orang Jahai of Hulu Perak. Orang Jahai are still hunters and gatherers. Rattan collecting has provided them with a main source of income which they use to purchase mainly essential goods. Rattan collected for commercial purposes are done by Orang Jahai with the help of the towkay, who provided them with the transportation such as motorboats and food supplies to enable them to go deep into the jungle for the rattan product. The rattan are then brought to the collecting centre where they are collected by the same towkay, who will pay them after all expenditures have been deducted. Although this towkay system expose the Orang Jahai to exploitation, nevertheless the system has enable them to obtain money for buying food and other necessities.*

## INTRODUCTION

My research is mainly focused on the worldview and the social organization of the Jahai. I am not an expert on rattan, nevertheless by collecting data I gained a much deeper understanding of the interconnections of the economic and social aspects of life of Jahai in my research group. So far, the rattan that the Jahai use, could not be botanically determined. My guesses are made through comparing my data with Wanda Ave's description of the use of rattan by the Semai (Ave 1985).

*The Jahai – Semang* Semang is the common name, often used in the literature for the hunter-gatherers of the Northern Malaysia and Southern Thailand. The Semang can be distinguished from the other Orang Asli (meaning original people) groups in Malaysia, by their physical features. Because they resemble negro-pygmyes from Africa in a certain way, with their frizzly hair, dark skin and broad flat noses, they came to be known as 'negritos'. The Portugese used this term for similar groups in the Philippines, and this term was adapted by anthropologists for the Malay groups. Groups of 'negritos' are also found on the Andaman Islands and possibly in the mountains of central Irian Jaya.

There has been some speculation about common origins of these groups, but no decisive proof of this has been found so far. The 'negritos' were probably the first people to inhabit Malaysia. They may have entered here before 20,000 B.C., while the Austronesians like the Senoi, may have arrived much later, perhaps a few thousand years B.C (see also Bellwood 1986). It is possible that 'negrito' groups were once more widely dispersed over Southeast Asia and that inhabitants of the ancient kingdom of Funan (in what is now Vietnam) were 'negritos'. Hall (1968) for example, mentioned that: "A Chinese historical source dated 200 A.D. said that the inhabitants of the Funan Kingdom of Southern Indonesia were black skinned and wooly haired."

The Semang speak languages that are related to the Mon-Khmer language family (Austro-Asiatic), which is different from the Austronesian Malay related language groups. About the question how and when the Orang Asli came to adopt these languages, research is going on mainly by Geoffrey Benjamin of the University of Singapore. Substantial research has also been done by C.F. Diffloth.

The Semang can be subdivided into seven subgroups, namely, the Kensiu, the Kintaq, the Lanoh, the Jahai, the Menriq, the Batek and the Tonga Mos. The last group lives quite isolated, about 100 km up from the Thai-Malay border. It is possible that the so-called Semenam of Kampung Hulu Grik form the eight group, although they speak a seperate dialect.

South of the Semang live the Senoi groups. They are mainly swidden-cultivators, although they also practise some hunting and gathering. The Senoi, who mainly belong to the Austronesian race, can be divided into at least four subgroups: the Temiar, the Semai, the Semoq Beri and the Chewong. Of these, the Semoq Beri and the Chewong are mainly hunters-gatherers.

This research focuses on the Jahai, a group of about 870 people of which about 150 live in Kelantan near Keli and the others in Northern Perak. Jahai society, like other hunter-gatherer societies in the tropics, is characterized by mobility of residence, frequent processes of fission and fusion, thus little group stability; leadership that seems to be based on the ability to convince and not on coercive power; strong individual autonomy; no established land-ownership; negligible accumulation of property; frequent sharing out of surpluses which leads to a more or less equal distribution of food and other goods. Aggression and violence are virtually absent in Jahai society, like in other Orang Asli societies, and this has puzzled many social scientists, as after Freud, especially Western social scientists tend to think that aggression is innate in humans.

The Jahai know a division of tasks according to gender, but it is not strictly adhered to, except in connection with hunting. Only men are allowed to hunt with the blowpipe, to make it and to ornament it. Other activities like cooking, can be done by both men and women, although mostly women do the household chores.

### THE AREA OF PRESENT STUDY

The present research is undertaken in the area around Pos Banun, situated on the main road which connects the west to the east coast in the north, about 60 kilometers from Gerik in the direction of Jeli. Pos Banun is a center of the JHEOA (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli), which was founded eleven years ago, to provide facilities for the Jahai when the Temenggor Dam in the Perak river was built. Through the building of this dam, a large area of previous Jahai and Temiar land was flooded. The area of the JHEOA was to resettle the about 700 Jahai in the area around Pos Banun and the about 1,700 Temiar at Fort Kemar, at the southern point of the newly formed lake. At the moment 15 Temiar villages are situated around Fort Kemar, while there are 3 Jahai villages around Pos Banun. Other Jahai live at various streams, dispersed over the area around the lake, accessible by boat from Banun, all but one within one hour. The lake area is a so called restricted area, where one cannot enter without a special police pass. During the Emergency (1948-1960) communists invaded the area and forced the aborigines to

cooperate. Since that time the government has been keeping a watchful eye on the area. As a consequence of the special status of the area, it is only inhabited by the Orang Asli, except for a few jungle police camps and Special Branch of Police camps, while the army has camps at Banding near the bridges on the East West Highway that was built 10 years ago. There is also a logging camp with Chinese labourers near Banun. Banun itself has offices for the JHEOA staff, a school, a health care office, a small mosque and several houses for the partly Orang Asli staff.

The Jahai, being essentially nomadic, find it difficult to settle permanently. Their economy, which is mainly based on gathering and hunting and the trade of rattan, enhances mobility. When one area is depleted, they will shift their camps to another area where there is more game and/or rattan. At the moment the decision to make a camp somewhere, is mainly guided by the possibility to collect rattan. In the area of my research, river Bukek, the game was almost depleted. But the people stayed there, because they could still collect rattan, while they go to other areas for hunting, mainly by motorboat. It is not only their economic activities that promotes mobile lifestyle, their tendency to evade open conflicts by moving away one of the conflicting parties; and other customs like burning the house after a case of death or severe illness and leaving the place, promotes mobility as well.

The Jahai I encountered, told me that they prefer a mobile lifestyle, although they have become less mobile than they used to be, due to the lake that had flooded large areas of possible campsites near the streams. They now prefer to live upstream along the tributaries of the former Perak river.

According to the Jahai, game like monkeys (leaf-eating monkeys, gibbons and macaques), mousedeer and several kinds of squirrels have diminished in the area, due to logging and the flooding of large areas of their fruit and leave-trees. This makes Jahai more dependent on boating on the lake to exploit larger hunting territories. These boats use a lot of petrol which has to be earned through rattan trade. The boats are provided by the Chinese rattan trader – the towkay.

Bigger animals like deer and wild pigs are only hunted by those men who have guns. There are only about eight of these men in the whole area. The guns have been provided by the Special Branch Police or by the Senoi Praq (Orang Asli army division). In the camps at river Bukek where I did my research, there was no gun. When a man from another river and who owned a gun came to stay with us for some time, this was highly appreciated.

At the moment Jahai camps are situated on 6 former tributaries of the Perak river. On one of these is Sungai Bukek, where about 145 people

live. Most Jahai camps make *ladangs* (Jahai: *selai*), by cutting down a part of the primary forest. Then after drying, burning the leaves and branches, they plant mainly tapioca (Malay/Jahai: *ubi kayu*) with the help of dibble sticks. Tapioca, which originates from South America has probably been cultivated here for a few hundred years. According to the Jahai they learn to make *ladangs* from the Temiar.

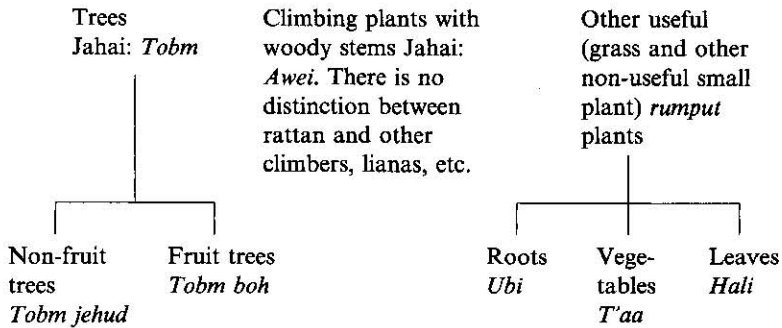
## THE CLASSIFICATION OF RATTAN

The Jahai distinguish between trees and other plant life. The general name for trees is *tobm*. The trees are divided into trees that are just wood; (*tobm jehud*) and trees that bear fruit or have other use for the Jahai such as giving poison. Those trees they call *tobm boh* (*boh* in Jahai means fruit). A fruit tree as the rambutan tree for example is called *tobm boh tangoi*. The ipoh tree is called *boh dok* (*dok* is the word for ipoh poison in Jahai).

Dead wood that is used as firewood is called *os*. Thus, *chom os*, means to cut firewood. It has the same name as the fire itself, which is also called *os* by the Jahai. All climbing plants with woody stems are called *awei*. Thus the rattan species are called *awei*, but the related non climbing palms who have similar leaves, are not. The feature of limbing determines whether the terma *awei* is applied. Other palms are called *hapoi* in general, when they are used for thatching and/or *t'aa* (the Jahai word for vegetable) when they can be eaten. Smaller plants are called *rumput* in general (similar to a Malay word for grass), except when they have some use for the Jahai.

Creepers with edible roots have the name *ubi*. There are many kinds of wild *ubi* (mainly form *Dioscorea* species). The main *ubi* are *ubi hau* and *ubi lang*. The Jahai know very well where to get them and observe the thickness of the thread first, before deciding to dig them. According to the Jahai the *ubi hau* take about 3 years to regrow from parts of the root that were left behind. *Ubi* form the main staple food of the Jahai when they move to temporary camps for rattan or honey collection. In the swidden they will plant the *ubi kayu* (tapioca) but their preference is for the tastier wild *ubi*. I was surprised to note that at Sungai Bukek the people still eat a bit of wild *ubi* almost everyday, while they have lived in that area for almost three and a half years. Now with the three camps together counting about 130 people, they still dig up wild *ubi* almost everyday near the campsites. *T'aa* (vegetable) are taken in the form of palm kernels, as sprouts of several plants, especially ferns and as leaves of certain plants. Leaves that are used to roll around tobacco to form cigarettes and leaves that have a medicinal use are classified as *hali* (the Jahai word for leaf).

Thus we find the following (preliminary) classification scheme:



I could not find a general name for plants to encompass both trees and other plants. The Jahai do not seem to have such a general classifier. Similarly there seems to be no name for animals. The same was found by Signe Howell for the Chewong (Howell S, 1984).

## RATTAN IN THE LIFE OF THE JAHAI

The Jahai collect rattan for their own use as well as for commercial trading. To account for this first I will give some idea of non commercial uses of rattan in Jahai daily life and subsequently I will give some attention to the role of rattan trade in the economy of the Jahai and how the rattan trade determines (at least in part) their other activities.

### NON COMMERCIAL USE OF RATTAN

Rattan is quite important for the Jahai in their daily life. It is used as their binding material, to make a stiff and strong connection between pieces of wood or bamboo, but is also woven into various shapes, used for containers, as decorations and used for toys and traps. The fruits of various species of rattan are eaten as well.

The use of rattan cannot be seen as separate from the use of other forest products. Bamboo play a large role, but the use of other palms and woods cannot be neglected in the study of the cultural use of rattan. Now I will mention some of these various uses of rattan by the Jahai.

### House Building

For house building, various materials are needed, like young trees, bamboos, palm leaves and rattan. The rattan is used to tie the frame of the house together and to fasten the roof.

The traditional Jahai house is the windscreen house or lean to (Jahai; *hanyek*). The *hanyek* consists of a frame of young trees, some already in situ, some stuck into the ground, about 60 cm from each other. They are about 4 meters long for a family house. These sticks are then connected by one or two horizontal poles by means of rattan bindings (Jahai; *Awei lebih*, most probably *calamus deipenhorstii*). The binding is made from freshly cut rattan, from which the skin is removed and by splitting it two times. This rattan can be up to 5 meters long and is cut into smaller pieces that are convenient for the binding. It is growing abundantly near the camps and if needed can be procured within five minutes. The collection is mainly done by the men, but can be done by women also.

For the windscreen itself (Jahai; *hapoi*), palm leaves of different kinds are used (Jahai; *hapoi*, *chachu*, *hapoi tadoeh*). The first one is most commonly used. I could not yet determine it. Most probably it is *Daemonorops grandis*. The kernels of these palms are cut out and gathered to be eaten. On many occasions I have seen the women and children going to the forest to gather *hapoi* for the roofs. On the way back they will be dragging their bundles behind them while chattering merrily and munching raw pieces of 'chachu' kernels. These kernels are called 't'aa *chachu*. On most of their gathering rounds, such groups bring extra kernels to the settlement to be shared among those who stayed behind. At the site of the new camps, the leaves of the palm branches are folded to one side. The folded big leaves are taken by two and tied to the standing poles every 15 centimeters. For a roof of 3 meters high and about 3 meters wide, about 60 such palm leaves are needed. They grow in abundance in the forest. Under the windscreen, a simple sleeping place is constructed by means of a frame of wood, that is tied together with the same type of rattan (*awei lebih*), and covered with split bamboo (*karob*) or bamboo halves. This makes a rather comfortable, flexible mattress. Next to the *karob* bed, a woodfire is built on the ground. At night, the overcasting roof keeps the heat in a bit, while the glow of the fire also spread under the bed. All people of one house sleep close to each other (except the elder boys who sleep on a separate *karob*). This way not much heat is lost and not much bedding is needed. Moreover mosquitos and other insects are kept out by the fire.

The windscreen type house is preferred by those groups who live under the trees of the rainforest, where it is relatively cool during the day (an average of 25°C during day, and 18°C – 20°C at night). However, they

are not suitable for living in a swidden (Malay; *ladang*, Jahai; *selai*), when the temperature during the day can rise to 38°C and fall lower than 18°C at night.

When the Jahai feel themselves forced to live in the *selai*, mainly to protect their crops from animals like pigs, and elephants, they live in more elaborate airy houses built on stilts, with higher roofs. These houses catch more wind than the windcreens but due to that are colder at night too. Those houses have fire places, built on earthen base. According to Jahai, this type of house building was imitated from the Temiar people. This type of house is also called *hanyek*.

The materials for constructing the bigger house are essentially the same as for the lean to's. The more elaborate typing of the poles is also done by *awei lebin* (probably *calamus deipenhorstii*). The building of this type of house is mainly men's work, while the women take care of the material for the roof (*hapoi*).

#### *Connection with Hunting and Fishing*

In Jahai culture, the blowpipe (Jahai: *belau*) and dart quiver (Jahai: *banuh*) plays a predominant role. Hunting with the blowpipe is only done by the men. It is not allowed for women to hunt.

The Jahai men spend quite some time to decorate their blowpipes with incised figures and with their woven rattan bands made of rattan that the Jahai call *awei kenbuh* (probably *calamus javonensis*). These ornaments seem to have a special role in connection with the power of the blowpipe. The blowpipe is considered to have a personality of its own. It can be offended if certain taboos are broken and consequently can become lifeless in which case no game is caught. Thus it is considered important to keep the blowpipe satisfied. This is done by tending it and giving it the proper decoration.

The *belau* is made of special kinds of bamboo that has long internodes (Jahai: *bulu suworr*). This is obtained by making long trips to certain hills, where this is known to grow (for the Jahai at Sungai Bukek, this is Bukit Noring, near Sungai Mangge, which is about a week's walking from their present camp). When they go on a bamboo fetching expedition they will camp out together with some other families and live on wild tubers, fruits and hunted animals. These expedition groups always take back more bamboo than they need for their own use. When they come back to their base camp they hand out the surplus bamboo to those that were left behind and who had expressed their need.

Some groups around Gerik are selling blowpipe bamboo for a fixed price of RM10 in a certain restaurant. These are mainly Lanoh. Some



Jahai have bought their blowpipe material from here, which saves them a gathering trip. In the village where I stayed, about half of the men who owned blowpipes had obtained the material in this way.

The blowpipe consists of several parts, of which the biggest are the inner and outer tubes, both of the same kind of bamboo. The inner tube has a diameter of about one and a half centimeters. It is made of two pieces, that are connected in the middle by a bamboo connection. The outer tube fits tightly around the inner tube. Furthermore, the blowpipe has a head made of bamboo and a mouthpiece made of wood or sometimes of the casque of hornbill.

It may take several days or, up to two weeks to make the blowpipe. The tubes have to fit perfectly and the pieces have to be straightened and then hardened by endlessly rubbing it with a bark cloth or order cloth after pulling it over the glow of the fire (*pu-o belau*). The inner pieces of the *belau* are sand papered to remove all obstacles for the swift and straight movements of the darts. By the time it is finished, the *belau* has acquired a kind of personality, that is the character of a friend and companion and has to be carefully tended and daily polished, not to lose its hunting ability. The Jahai informants made it clear that it is the hunter together with his friend, the *belau*, that do the hunting.

The trespassing of certain taboos, like the throwing of bones of game in the water instead of on the ground (which I did once) can cause the *belau* to lose its power, to become *putcha*, that is to leak or crack. In the case of an offense, the offender has to appease the *belau* by offering scratches of fingernails and locks of hair, packed in bee wax, to the *belau*, while asking the *belau* to look for game again. Such a precious *belau* is ornamented and strengthened with bands of woven rattan (*chenos*, made of *awie kenbuh*, most probably *calamus javanensis*). These bands are said to prevent the *belau* from becoming cracked (*putcha*).

The darts are kept in a bamboo container (*banuh*). This ornamented container has a most beautifully woven top, made of finely split rattan. The diameter of which can be less than 2mm. This cover is called *cheng kub* in Jahai. It is woven only by men, in a few days. Mostly some men feel the urge to make new covers at about the same time, go out to collect the rattan and enjoy the sitting together while weaving their new covers. This cover is also made of *awei kenbuh* (probably *calamus javonensis*). The rattan for it can be obtained quite near the camps. The quiver itself is ornamented with abstract figures, like triangles, diabolos and wavy lines, representing the torns of the rattan (*gelee awei*), flowers (*bakau*) and the giant hornbill (*hangang*) according to the informants.

The darts (*senlodz*), 20-25 centimeters long, are made of the skin of the *rachis* (leafstem) of a certain palm (probably *Eugeissonia tristis*, Jahai : *layos*). Small strips are split off with a small knife, after which the maker

turns the strip in his hand while scraping it off with the knife till it is a thin round stick. After that he makes the point by scraping carefully. The buttcones of the darts (*brul*) are made from the core of a rattan (*taloed*, probably *Plectocomiopsis geminiflora* Griff, Becc). The core of the stem is light and corky. A stick of cone is first made by peeling off the outer skin. One of the best made arrow is tuck in the middle of the core, after which a piece of about 2 centimeters is cut off and shaped conically. The points of these darts are later rolled in heated sticky Ipoh poison (tapped from the tree *Antiaris tixicaria*) and let to dry near the fire. Finally the point with the poison on it is carefully incised as to make the point break off after it has penetrated an animal.

Other uses of rattan in connection to hunting and fishing are the manufacture of various traps. Various small noose traps (*kam*) are made of *awei lebin* and *awei kenbuh*. Some of these traps are put on the ground near the hole of a small animal, for example a rat or they are placed on the branches of a tree to catch squirrels. No bait is used. It is placed on the walking route of the animal which enters the trap, thereby hitting the trigger, by which the string which holds the noose is released, pulling it round the animal.

Fish traps are also made of rattan. I have seen only one type of fish trap in use among the Jahai. This fish trap is called *bubuk* by them. It is only in use when the seeds of the *perah* nuts (*peroh*, *Elateriospermum* *tepos*) are in season. Those nuts are first peeled, slightly cooked and then tied on a string to be used as bait in the trap (these fruits are consumed by the Jahai as well). The length of this trap can vary from 60 centimeters to about 1 meter. It has an oval, egg-formed shape, with an opening in the centre through which fish can swim through a concave tunnel into the trap.

#### *Other Uses of Ratttan*

For the rasping of certain wild tubers, like *ubi long* and nuts like the *perah* (*peroh*, *Elathriospermum* *tepos*) a rasp is made from *awei kenbuh* in Jahai. When rasping the thorny stick is kept upright in one hand, while the other hand move the hard fruit along the sharp thorns.

A sheath for the bush knife is made from rattan. It is called *raga* in Jahai and woven in an open pattern. Axes are tied to their wooden handle with rattan (*awei lebin*). The so formed axe is called *baliong* in Jahai. Around the waist most of the women wear a rattan waist-band, probably made from *calamus javonensis*. This band is used to tuck in the loin-cloth (*cherwal*.) Ridges to strengthen the shoulder bags of both men and women (*hapuh*) are made of *awei kenbuh*. The traditional shoulder

bags are woven from palm leaf, but nowadays sugar bags from the shops are mainly used to make shoulder bags. These are strengthened and decorated with the traditional rattan trims.

Fruits from *awei manau* (*calamus manau*) and *awei bateng* (*calamus mantang*) and fruits of other rattans are frequently eaten. In the month of December, the fruits of *awei bateng* (*boh bateng*) were regularly brought home. They grow in abundance so that they can be brought to camp in large quantities to be distributed. The taste is fresh sweet sour. They probably contain a lot of vitamin C. Moreover the water from the stem of *awei manau* and *awei bateng* can be drunk and is considered to have medicinal value. For example when Abong, the wife of penghulu Semanam was having severe cold, her husband fetched water for her in a bamboo, in this case from *awei bateng*.

A digging stick (*Aat*) for the digging up of wild tubers is sometimes made from *awei manau*. It is pointed with a bush knife and hardened over the fire. A walking stick for the disabled is made in the same way.

#### RATTAN FOR COMMERCIAL TRADE

For the excellent quantities as furniture material, rattan is in demand in other parts of the world and is an important export of Malaysia. It is mainly collected in the tropical rainforest by the original inhabitants of those forests, the Orang Asli. It is traded through Malay or Chinese middlemen of which there are about seven in Banun area.

At Sungai Bukek, where the research was conducted there are three settlements. Settlement A has 25 inhabitants. It is nearest to the lake and was split off from settlement B which is situated more uphill, or about 20 minutes walking distance from settlement A. Camp B has about 90 inhabitants. This is quite big for a group of hunter gatherers. Both these settlements have recently made swiddens (*selai*) and live in Temiar type houses. The third settlement has 19 inhabitants at the moment and live in windscreen houses. It takes no swidden yet, but are planning to make one. The settlement is about 10 minutes walking upriver from group B.

The main reason why these groups have moved to river Bukek is to exploit the rattan in this area, which grow in unlogged primary forest. Before their moving here, they were living at another river, Sungai Ceong. As another reason for their moving to Bukek, they say that it had become quite crowded at Sungai Ceong, They had obtained a motorboat from the *towkay*, to make rattan expeditions to transport this rattan to the bridge over the East-West Highway, where the *towkay* would wait for them and where the sticks would be counted. When they moved to Sungai Bukek, group C obtained a boat of its own.

All groups were always uncertain about how long they would stay in this area and so they never made a real swidden of their own, but rather obtained their tapioca from the swidden at Sungai Ceong on which they claimed right and from a camp at Sungai Tekam where some had relatives. They also lived on wild tubers and on rice from the shop in Gerik and occasionally from the anthropologist!

After I had left for the Netherlands in May 1989, group A/B made a swidden with maize and tapioca and later when group A split off, this group made a second one. At present, group C is planning to make a *ladang*. The tapioca in the first two swiddens is almost ready for harvesting and the people have started to eat the small *ubi*.

The rattan is collected from the hills upriver. The walking to where the *manau* grows is about 3 hours. The working time to obtain a bunch of 6 to 10 sticks is about one and a half hour and the walking back downhill two and a half hours. The Jahai complain that the *towkay* now only wants rattan *manau*. For them it is much more easy to collect rattan *mantang (betang)*, which grows nearer to the camps.

After the people have collected a few hundred sticks, which they pile in bunches at a certain place in the forest, they bring the load to the *towkay* at the bridge (causeway) of the East-West Highway, which is a trip of about one hour by motor-boat. The *towkay* counts the sticks and then tell the people how much money is earned and how much money is cut off from this for the supply of the petrol, previous debts and other costs. On this, the Jahai have no control at all as the *towkay* does not explain the calculation to the Jahai in detail. They do not know how to calculate themselves and have to trust the *towkay*. They say they trust him.

The rattan is transported to the factory where it is boiled in diesel oil and straightened after which it is cleaned and left to dry in bunches that are put upright in the sun. This takes about 10 days, after which the processed sticks are sold to the next merchant.

The motorboats are provided by the *towkay*. They use about 25 litres of petrol for one trip to the causeway and back, which costs about RM23. The Jahai at Bukek have to buy petrol if they want to visit Banun or other campsites along the lake. All other Jahai settlements excepts one are situated within one hour distance by boat. The whole lake takes about 5 to 6 hours boating and consume about a jerrycan of petrol, which costs RM23. Similarly to Banun. From the *towkay* they buy about 5 jerrycans in two weeks, which allow them a few extra trips.

According to the *towkay* there are various types of rattan that can be traded;

- A. *Rotan manau* (Jahai: *awei manau*) in 3 qualities:
  1. quality A about three and a half centimeters in diameter and above, fetches RM3 each.

2. quality B about 2 centimeters in diameter, fetches RM2 each.
3. quality C about less than 2 centimeters in diameters, fetches RM0.80 each.

The length of the stick has to be 9 feet, which is measured as 6 underarms of a Jahai man.

B. *Rotan mantang* (Jahai: *awei bateng*):

1. quality A with a diameter over 3 centimeters fetches RM1.50 sen each.
2. quality B with a diameter less than 3 and more than 1.5 centimeters fetches RM0.80 each.

Other less frequently traded types of rattan are:

- a. *Rotan Tasons* (Jahai: *awei lebin, calamus Diepenhorstic*). This is mainly used for binding. One stick has to be 24 feet long. The payment is done per kilogramme, which fetches RM0.65 for the Orang Asli.
- b. *Manau Tikus*  
One stick has to be 12 feet long. It pays RM0.30 per stick for the Orang Asli.
- c. *Rotan Gajah* with a diameter of about 10 centimeters.
- d. Smaller kinds of rattan:
  - i. *rotan saput*
  - ii. *rotan sini*
  - iii. *rotan kiel*
  - iv. *rotan tunei*

I have not seen these less frequently traded types of rattan, as the *towkay* traded only in the 3 kinds (A, B, and C). He was mainly interested in *rotan manau*. This is the most profitable for him. He says one stick at A quality may bring him a profit of RM1.30, while the profit for *rotan mantang* is about RM0.50. Now the difficulty for the Jahai is that *manau* is much less easily obtainable. As such they feel a heavy pressure on them, that their *towkay* only wants *rotan manau*.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE RATTAN COLLECTION GROUP

The men do the cutting of the rattan at Sungai Bukek, although it is not forbidden for women to cut rattan and on my previous visit I have seen young girls carrying rattan (in this case *rotan mantang*). But at present

the men go quite far into the jungle for the *manau* and this is considered too hard and dangerous for women. The walk to Bukit Kerol, as they call this hill, takes about 3 hours. The people are sometimes afraid that a tiger may come after them, especially the women. Sometimes, somebody will get a warning about the tiger in a dream and on that day the group will stay at home. In fact a man has been killed by a tiger a few years ago at Sungai Ceong, so it is not just a fantasy. Each of the three camps at Sungai Bukek has a leader, an organization of the rattan collection appointed by the *towkay*. Group of hunter gatherers like the Jahai are well known for their weak leadership, so this sometimes creates difficulties. Two of the leaders at Sungai Bukek are in charge of the motorboats. The *towkay* pays some extra money to these leaders as a commission. Officially this is RM0.20 per stick for A quality manau. This money is kept individually by those men and is used for buying cigarettes, clothes, fishing rods and the like. The other members of the groups will ask for cigarettes from such a leader, as it is Jahai custom to ask from somebody who has plenty.

Leadership in Jahai society rests on the power of conviction, not on coercion. In Jahai society it is considered not appropriate to put pressure on somebody to do something, this is considered bad for the soul (Jahai: *rawai*) that may subsequently lose its vitality. The soul is said to reside in the heart (Jahai: *kelangis*).

The Jahai speak openly about things being bad for the heart and complain of a feeling of uneasiness or pain in the heart when they feel that pressure is put on them. In case of severe pain in the heart, a kind of spiritual treatment (Jahai: *jampi*) can be given to the patient during which the healer strengthens the heart again by means of praying and spitting the chewed stem of a certain wild ginger (Jahai: *bunglei*) on the patient. After this treatment the patient is not allowed to do any work for 5 or 6 days, sometimes even longer, but has to rest in the house (Jahai: *ngok kleng hanyek*). Of course this attitude interferes with a continuous pace of rattan collecting. So, the leader has to be careful and cannot force his people to work, although the *towkay* puts a lot of pressure on him to do so.

Once a leader of a rattan group, Kashod, when coming home to his camp, told his people that evening that the *towkay* had said that they should work harder. So, he proposed to start working the next morning. This led to two families splitting off from the group the next day. The two families went straight to Sungai Ceong. They felt that they were pushed too hard and did not like it.

In camp A (totaled 25 people), which is nearest to the lake, there is a rattan collecting group which consists of 12 men. These are all men above the age of about 15 except two men of about 45 years of age (considered

to be headmen), who normally do not take part in the rattan collection. They either stay at home or go hunting on rattan collecting days. This group has 3 men from settlement B among its members. In camp B, there are 7 men in one group of rattan collections, in this camp there are about 8 people, some of whom are elderly or disabled. The group has no official headman, but an elderly man is having more influence than others. He never goes for rattan collection. In camp C there are four rattan collectors. Group C has among its 18 members two elderly widows and a disabled young man. One elderly man about 55 years of age, who is considered to be headman (Malay: *penghulu*) does not take part in the rattan collection.

In camp B and C the goods that are given by the *towkay* in exchange for rattan are distributed quite evenly among the people. The group of camp A however, has developed a new scheme of payment during the last months. Each man is paid individually according to the amount of rattan sticks that he has collected. This has led to a very uneven amount of money that is obtained in the various families. This system has probably attracted the three young men from group B.

*Penghulu* Sennebreg from group A complained to me that he did not get any share at all from the leader of the rattan group. His only son who is about 15 years old, had just started rattan collecting. The son brought in 19 sticks and he got RM20 in cash after the *towkay* had cut off some money for the use of the motorboat. The leader of the group obtained about RM180 in cash. For Sennebreg's family of three the cash income for the month of December was RM20 from rattan and RM50 from the monthly subsidy of the JHEOA. This is of course not too much. Sennebreg thought of moving his residence to camp B or to his wife's family in Tekam.

I could not get much detail yet, about the exact amount of income from rattan as the *towkay* did not give me the information. At the moment it is not clear to me how much debts the Jahai are having due to previous purchases.

The amount of money they now get is relatively small. Nlipas, the leader of group C, who had brought in rattan, worth RM220.20, actually did not get any money at all as the *towkay* deducted everything. After complaining that he could not come home with nothing, the *towkay* gave him RM30 commission.

### The Whole Production of One Month (December 1989)

A. For Group A: 9 men from downstream and 3 men from upstream.		
1.	215 sticks [A quality] rotan manau @ RM3	= RM645.00
2.	109 sticks [B quality] rotan manau @ RM1.80	= RM196.20
3.	99 sticks [C quality] rotan manau @ RM0.40	= RM 39.60
		RM880.80

\*\* RM880.80 of which only RM384/= are in their hands (according to the *towkay*)

B. For Group B, upstream 1 (Atoen) total of 7 men		
1.	149 sticks [A quality] rotan manau @ RM3	= RM477.00
2.	13 sticks [B quality] rotan manau @ 1.80	= RM 23.40
3.	4 sticks [C quality] rotan manau @ RM0.40	= RM 1.60
		RM502.00

\*\* RM502.00 of which RM200 are in hand.

C. For Group C, upstream 2 (Lipos) total of 4 men		
1.	56 sticks [A quality] rotan manau @ RM3	= RM168.00
2.	19 sticks [B quality] rotan manau @ 1.80	= RM 34.20
3.	45 sticks [C quality] rotan manau @ RM0.40	= RM 18.00
		RM220.20

\*\*RM220.20 of which RM30 are in hand.

Normally the Jahai receive part of their income from rattan in the form of goods from a certain shop in Gerik. They are transported to the shop by the *towkay* using a small van. According to the *towkay* if there is money left, then he pays some money in cash as well. The *towkay* writes the wishes of the people on a piece of paper which is handed over to the shop owner, who packs the items for transport. The items bought are mostly: sugar, sweetened condensed milk, tea, biscuits, rice, batteries, torchlights and other items like bush knives, baby bottles, T-shirts, jerrycans to be used as water containers, mee, onions and occasionally toothbrushes and toothpaste. The last ones are actually a necessity as the Jahai are quite addicted to sugar milk tea which they like to drink at least 3 times a day. Only the men go to the shop. Most of the women of Sungai Bukek have never been to Gerik.

#### OTHER SOURCES OF INCOME

Besides money from the rattan trade, the Jahai also receive a monthly subsidy from JHEOA. This comes to RM50 a family and RM25 for an adult bachelor. This money is spent on the family. It is handed to the men and



not to the women of a family. It happens sometimes that the men finishes the money without consulting his wife. This can lead to grumbling on the wife's side. The subsidy is mainly spent in the JHEOA cooperative shop in Banun, where about the same items are bought as in the shop in Gerik.

Occasionally the Jahai of Sungai Bukek trade in forest products. I have seen *gaharu* wood (English: *eaglewood*, *aloes*, *lat. Aguilarie spp*) being traded with their own *towkay*. The trees that contain the valuable parts are felled and left for a time to be eaten by termites. The termites eat the wood except for the hard resinous parts, that are cut out to be sold to the *towkay*. There are different qualities. It is done on a very small scale. The Jahai complain that many of their *gaharu* trees are felled and cut by 'invaders' from Thailand. On a small scale also they trade with a Malay man in so-called pak Ma flowers, that are used as a medicine. This medicine is said to help contract the womb of a woman after childbirth and is used by the Malays. For each flower they get RM3 to RM5.

On the 19th of January 1989, an amount of RM800 was paid to each of the 1980 registered families and RM1,000 to a bachelor or their beneficiaries as *ganti rugi* or compensation payment for the building of the dam, which flooded a large part of Jahai territory, as a consequence of which many of their fruit trees that were planted in previous swiddens were destroyed. They still complain over the loss of their durian and other trees and that the compensation do not last nor can it be obtained every year like the harvest of the fruit trees. The RM800 were finished rather quickly. Many families bought a new radio and durable household items.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

From what had been said, it is clear that at present it would be very difficult for the Jahai to live without the rattan trade. As a result of the rattan trade they have access to the motorboats, which they need since the establishment of the lake. Without motorboats and petrol, their chances to visit other villages or to collect the monthly subsidy at Banun and to hunt occasionally at good hunting places would be severely restricted.

They however feel, that they are tied to the *towkay* and on many occasions express their wish to be free from the burden of collecting rattan and to live more freely as they had done before. Before the lake was formed, they were occasionally trading in rattan, which they brought downriver on bamboo raft (Malay: *rakit*).

Rattan trade has become a partly unwelcomed necessity to them since on the one hand it interferes with activities like hunting, fishing or

the making of swidden. On the other hand, it provides them with the possibility to compensate for the loss of easy access to hunting and gathering areas due to the flooding of part of their territory. This compensation however, has brought about a dependency relation towards the *towkay*. Thus they are trapped in a rather neotensifying pattern. If they could get enough money their mobility for hunting and lake fishing activities and for visiting family members in other camps could be increased. But to obtain this money they have to invest even more of their time and energy that they so badly need to obtain proteins and other goods for the expeditions.

It is also a problems, that the *rattan manau* near their camp is getting scarcer, while if they move to places with more rattan, they will lose their labour in the swiddens. Furthermore, the trade of rattan and its collection and transport interferes with their settlement and fission-fusion patterns. Their mutual loyalties are strengthened by their interest in the boat but weakened by the pressure on production on which they traditionally tend to react by splitting apart.

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