

THE AMUNG WAY:
THE SUBSISTENCE STRATEGIES, THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE DILEMMA
OF THE TSINGA VALLEY PEOPLE IN IRIAN JAYA, INDONESIA

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This dissertation is dedicated to Tamok, my faithful and fun Amung research assistant and also to her brother Tsony with much appreciation for all I learned from them.



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ABSTRACT

The people of Tsinga Valley are facing a dilemma. How will they deal with the various special interest groups coming to share in the wealth of their land: the loggers, the miners and the national park people? Their dream is that they will find a way to be respected by outsiders, to participate in the newly established market economy in Irian Jaya and to retain the elements of their traditions which they still value. The history of the problem is examined from the viewpoints of the various factions involved. If the Amung cannot convince others that they are making wise use of their land - they may lose it. One purpose of the research has been to provide solid evidence that the Amung have technological skills and strategies that will enable them to continue living in their land for many years.

There is a continuum between foraging and the various cultivation techniques used by the Tsinga Amung. I have called them "agroforagers", because they cannot be classified as either "pure" shifting cultivators or "pure" foragers. Throughout the dissertation I have stressed the continuity rather than the divisions in Amung strategies. This carries over into their shifting cultivation technology in which there is no point (even when newly cleared) when there is "bare ground." Understanding them as masters of diversity is one way of appreciating their knowledge and skills and their humanity. A possible solution to their dilemma is to integrate one or several of their farming, foraging or agroforestry systems into the economy of the neighboring Wa and Timika areas. The most likely possibility is the development of the pandanus agroforestry into an enterprise. This would need to be combined with education and other creative approaches to becoming integrated with the world outside of Tsinga Valley.

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