

A Transdisciplinary Research on Human-Animal-Environmental Relationships in Komodo National Park, Indonesia

Cypri Jehan Paju Dale, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

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This chapter addresses the methodological challenge of researching multiple modes of human-animal-environmental relationships enacted by different actors in Komodo National Park, eastern Indonesia. Claiming to be informed by scientific evidence, conservationists and ecotourism policy-makers have long treated the Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*), the largest living lizard surviving nowhere on earth, as wildlife. The conservation practices hence aim to separate this animal from local communities, Ata Modo, who have lived there for at least 2000 years (Verheijen 1987). The government has also planned to designate the national park as a “Jurassic park,” with the purpose of attracting rich tourists and planned to relocate the indigenous communities outside the island. This policy which is founded on the separation of Komodo dragons and humans is a radical departure from the existing relationship between humans and animals in the Komodo islands. Contrast to such modernist view, the indigenous people of Komodo Island (known as Ata Modo) perceived Komodo dragon as human kin. In their cosmologies, the dragon is believed as a twin brother/sister of human, born from the same mother. Based on a long-term ethnographic research in the park, this research expose the contrast of such modernist vies to the indigenous mode of intimate human-animal relationship. It also reflects on the limits of both natural science and anthropology to account for different epistemologies of human-animal relationships. Furthermore, it raises the possibility of collaborations between local communities and conservationists in building conservation science that accounts for multiple epistemologies. The discussion will offer a new approach that can ultimately contribute to a more grounded transdisciplinary understanding and policy in Komodo National Park and beyond.



Cypri Jehan Paju Dale is currently a post-doctoral researcher at Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), Kyoto University, Japan. He earned his Ph.D. at the Institute of Social Anthropology at Bern University in Switzerland in 2018 with a dissertation entitled “Development as Self-Determination: Anti-colonial Struggles, Endogenous Transformation, and the Role of Christianity in West Papua.” At CSEAS, he is working on a book manuscript from his dissertation while embarking on a new research project that examines social, cultural, and ecological transformations brought by the introduction of large-scale tourism development and conservation projects in Komodo National Park, Flores, Indonesia.