

# The Meaning and Value Attachment to Natural Symbols by Farmers in a Rural Setting: An Ethno-Ecology Communication Study of Rural Farmers in Swarna Dwiipe Village of Muara Enim Regency in South Sumatera

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## Abstract:

A study on the rural farming society began as a field work study, which aimed to study meaning and values attached to symbols by the rural farming groups. History has revealed that in the beginning, farming groups were a component of society that worked using traditional mechanisms, worked at various fields (were nomads-moving from place to place), were dependent on the rhythm of nature, and did not use any technology. However, with time, technology has been introduced hence leading to meaning and value attached to the local symbols, something reflecting the use of local technology and soft symbols or technology for communication. This study intended to examine the ethno-ecological communication of the rural farmers in order to establish such rural symbols and their meaning and values to the local communities of Swarna Dwiipe village.

**Keywords:** symbols, soft technology, rural, meaning and value, and farmers

## Introduction

A study on the rural farmer society began as a field work to study meaning and values attached to symbols by the rural farming groups. History reveals that at first, farming groups were a component of society that worked using traditional mechanisms, worked at various fields (were nomads-moving from place to place), were dependent on the rhythm of nature, and did not know technology. These patterns gradually shifted and changed. They began to settle, built settlement or society, utilized technology, and created the economical motives of farming, although it was still in the traditional frameworks. The development process they conducted brought about a change in the group. The position of the farmers, as the time went, often was in a disadvantage. Various development policies issued by the government often had to change the socio-cultural structure of the local society. The researches of Liana Murray Li (2012), Lahajir (2001), Dove (2005), and Sakai (Fox, 1997), among others, revealed the changes of conditions. The socio-cultural changes had many implications for the society, both in the physical and social environments. Landslides, drought, criminal activities in the villages, degradation of the degree of social bonds, were among the phenomena emerging in the farmers' environment. In this position, local society became the group that frequently is the target of the blame. The natural disasters were deemed to be caused by their own activities. In the context of traditional society, this opinion needed to be discussed further. Human basically

had a capacity to absorb everything happened in their surrounding, then analyze and interpret those things, both as a result of observation and experience; which in turn could be used to predict the future trend or as a basis for decision making. Many studies and researches on traditional or local wisdom were, in fact, could rebut the hypothesis that local society's actions caused the natural disasters (see Iskandar, 2012; Issac, Dawoe, Sliciechochz, 2009; Toledo, 2003, Sundar, 2005; Knight, 2005; and Dove, 2005).

It could be said that knowledge was an output of the learning process, an explanation based on human thinking and perception. Behind the knowledge of a society, there were the cultural norms and duties that would affect the direction of the decision made, wither positively or negatively (Raharjo, 2011: 186). Human could interpret and assign meaning towards the condition of their environment and surrounding, and then acted based on that interpretation.

Explicitly, this study aimed to show that there were relationships between the society's social system and the surrounding natural environment. The environment in this study was the bio-physical environment, or in AT Rambo's words was called ecosystem (1984: 47). Ecosystem consisted of the elements of climate, organism, water, and soil. These elements were the ones that often influenced, and were affected, by the social system of rural farmers' society.

Society conducted their farming business by relying on the existing environmental condition. The natural environment itself provided various inputs for people; based on the action those people took on the nature (Rambo, 1984: 2). Here, the concept of ecology became clear. As noted by Iskandar (2009: 21), the aspect of interdependency of human and natural environment was evident in the process of mutual and continuous interactions among matters, energy, and information. Soemarwoto (2008: 23) also proposed the same thing, that human had an interrelationship with nature. The interrelationship created an ecology system which could be defined as mutual relationship between organisms, particularly human, and their life environment.

Until today, the tendency of study on this matter was conducted in the discipline of Environmental Science, Environmental Biology, Environmental Anthropology, and Environmental Sociology. Environmental Science commonly examined the physical aspects, such as the changes in demography, natural lay-out, flora and fauna. This was also true for Environmental Biology discipline, for example the research of Nirmala Vh, Yadav BM, Durgale P and Shinde KM (2012) entitled *Traditional Knowledge on Mud Crab; Ethnoecology of Scylla Serrata in Ratnagiri Coast*,