



Map 1: Former and present Punan Tubu and Abai locations.

(now Respen Tubu), in the vicinity of the town of Malinau – the district capital since 2003. Numbering 2,400 (410 families in 2004), the Punan Tubu are no longer nomadic. However, those living in the upper Tubu River region (140 families) migrate periodically for hunting and collecting forest resources. By contrast, those settled downstream for the past thirty years cultivate rice and vegetables which they sell at the market; some get financial compensation from the logging and mining companies exploiting their land (see Levang, Dounias, and Sitorus 2005).

The understanding of how Punan society works requires an analysis of the history of the group

and its encounters, from the first contacts with the outside world to their subsequent integration into that wider ethnic and economic context. To be fully complete, it is also important to understand the cultural basis, integral to their economic life. Following the same pattern as other hunter-gatherer peoples (Woodburn 1980, 1982; Testart 1988), the food economy of the Punan does not traditionally produce surplus; thus wealth does not play any part in the various stages of their social existence. However, for more than a century, the trade in non-timber forest products has allowed the Punan of the Tubu River to obtain goods which are locally unavailable, objects that are still valued for