



**Field Report**

## Some Note on Sandalwood of Timor

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Sandalwood was once an important trade commodity of the Lesser Sunda islands, East Java, Madura and the Moluccas. Nowadays, it survives only in Timor, on stony slopes which undergo severe dryness in the long dry spell. Timorese farmers interviewed stated that sandalwood was once found everywhere on the island. Now substantial standing stocks are limited to the Soe district of South Central Timor (SCT) regency. The sharp decrease in stock has been caused by over-exploitation, illegal cutting, and damage by the fires of slash-and-burn cultivation. Regeneration of the tree relies solely on emergence of root suckers and stump suckers, and their growth is slow, requiring about sixty years for the fragrant heartwood to reach exploitable size. Accelerated cutting naturally leads to the decrease of stocks. The fire damage occurs because sandalwood trees mostly stand in *ladang* fields. In the Dutch time, people were forced to take care of the natural shoots, and they were fined if they cut the shoots or young trees when preparing their *ladang*.

Presently, sandalwood is still comparatively abundant in remote areas, in areas where *adat* law is still strong, and in areas receiving the easterly rain (*hujan timur*). These areas include Mollo district, Kokoi village of South Amanatun district, SCT regency, Tanini village of Fatuleu district, and Apraen, Pakubaun, Retraen villages of Amarasasi district, Kupang regency. In regard to the *adat*, people believe that their ancestor took an oath that the sandalwood of Timor will live forever (*houmein*

*noni monin batnen, batnes nainkun, batnes nabalah*). They also believe that those who cut the tree illegally will not have a peaceful life.

While sandalwood is economically and culturally important to the province of East Nusa Tenggara (ENT), people do not customarily plant the tree. Even today they rely on natural regeneration, even though artificial plantation was started by the Dutch government in the 1920s. The natural trees were formerly owned by local rulers, who were also land lords, and because of this, sandalwood was called *kayu raja* or "king's wood." Since independence, the role of the local rulers has been taken over by the provincial government of ENT. The farmers are simply protectors and collectors who gain little share in the profits of sandalwood trade. This situation has discouraged people from planting sandalwood on their lands. They would prefer to have no sandalwood on their lands because their share of the profit from the harvest is small, and they face jail or an *adat* fine for damaging an established tree. Sandalwood is managed by the Forest Service on behalf of the provincial government.

Sandalwood has three major uses, for carvings, oil and incense. Wood of the best quality is employed for carvings, while the rest is utilized for incense and oil. The main use (70%) is for oil. The products of sandalwood are consumed domestically and exported to Singapore, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, France and USA.

In particular, sandalwood has played an important role in religious rituals for praying to God or making offerings to ancestors, as follows. a) *Kepala Cendana* (a stump of sandalwood) has been used as a substitute head of an enemy taken in a

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headhunting raid, which is poled in around the *songgo* (a sacred place for praying to God or making offering to ancestors) of the clan (*hau monef*) to gain the spirit from the dead body. This practice can also be traced in Sumba island (Widiyatmika, personal communication), b)The tree is believed to be sacred and is called *faitnai naimnuke or baha bodon* ("princess and prince"), implying that it is invaluable and must be considered like a royal descendant, that is to be protected. Because the tree is believed to be sacred, a ritual ceremony is held before felling the tree. This ritual function and belief may derive from the main belief that sandalwood is the one of

the two sacred trees (the other is *beringin, Ficus benyamina*) that emerged in the process of creation of the world by God. Due to these beliefs, sandalwood can be used as an offering to God or ancestors in religious rituals. In the more traditional regions where the role of *adat* is still strong, such as the Mollo district of SCT regency, the traditional belief associated with the tree is still acknowledged, even though the traditional significance and role of the tree will disappear as traditional society changes. (Graduate student, The Division of Tropical Agriculture, Faculty of Agriculture, Kyoto University)