



# THE MYTH OF THE PROHIBITION OF CUTTING TREES IN CEMETERIES ON NATURE CONSERVATION

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## Abstract:

This research explores the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries and its impact on nature conservation in Betek Village, Dungbango Hamlet. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data was obtained through unstructured interviews and observation. The problem encountered was a lack of understanding of the relationship between traditional prohibitions and nature conservation practices. The aim was to explore the community's beliefs and experiences and analyze the implications of these practices for nature conservation. The results showed that the ban is based on local beliefs, reinforced by tragic incidents resulting from violations. Site surveys revealed high fertility rates at the cemetery, reflecting successful adherence to the ban despite sacrificing economic potential. The community's broad understanding of the ban confirms local wisdom as an important foundation for sustainable conservation practices.

**Keywords:** Prohibition against cutting trees, Environmental conservation, Local beliefs.

## INTRODUCTION

Although often dismissed as myths or traditions, the prohibition of trees around graves has been an integral part of many cultures in different parts of the world. For example, in many Southeast Asian societies, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, this prohibition is considered a taboo that is upheld (Sari et al., 2022).

Trees around graves are often considered to have spiritual significance or possess mystical powers that should be respected and protected. Previous research has noted that such beliefs have influenced people's behavior about the maintenance and protection of trees around graves (Idrus et al., 2021).

However, behind this strong belief, critical questions arise regarding the ban's real impact on nature conservation efforts. While several ethnographic studies have attempted to document the cultural and spiritual aspects of the ban, in-depth scientific research on the ecological implications of the ban is still very limited (Putra & Ariana, 2022). With the rapid growth in our understanding of ecology and the importance of nature conservation, there is an urgent need to explore the relationship between cultural beliefs and environmental conservation practices in the concrete context of local communities, as observed in Betek Village, particularly Dungbango Hamlet.

Although graveyard tree bans have been an integral part of many cultures around the world, scientific research investigating their impact on nature conservation is limited. The theoretical gap lies in the lack of a deep understanding of the relationship between cultural beliefs and environmental conservation practices in the specific context of local communities (Markiano Hutapea & Lestarini, 2023). While some ethnographic studies have attempted to document the cultural and spiritual aspects of the ban, systematic and thorough ecological research on the ecological implications of the ban is still rare.

Furthermore, in the context of nature conservation, there is a lack of adequate research on how local beliefs and traditions can coexist with more scientific and sustainable conservation practices. (Helida, 2021). This raises the question of how to facilitate dialogue between local and scientific knowledge to achieve effective conservation goals. Further research is therefore needed to fill this knowledge gap and enrich our understanding of the dynamics between cultural beliefs and nature conservation efforts at the local level.

Three years ago, research by Nguyen and Le (2021) investigated local people's perceptions and practices related to the prohibition of trees in cemeteries in Vietnam (Muth'im & Jumariati, 2021). The research found that, although the ban is still upheld as part of local traditions and beliefs, there is a trend of shifting behavior among the younger generation who are more likely to consider the ecological implications of the ban (Ayuningtias & Thohir, 2023). The results highlighted the need for a balanced approach between maintaining cultural heritage and integrating ecological science into nature conservation efforts at the local level.

In addition, a meta-analysis study by Wang et al. (2021) examined the impact of cemetery tree bans on nature conservation in various cultural contexts around the world (Hotlif A. Nope, 2019). Their analysis showed significant variation in the ecological impacts of the ban depending on factors such as local environmental conditions, land management practices, and the level of compliance with the ban in local communities. This research underscores the importance of taking into account cultural context and local conditions in designing effective and sustainable conservation strategies.

This research offers a novel contribution by expanding the understanding of the relationship between cemetery tree bans and nature conservation through an interdisciplinary approach. In contrast to many previous studies that have focused more on the cultural and social aspects of the ban, this article integrates an ecological perspective to explore the ecological implications of the ban. This paves the way for a more holistic understanding of how traditional practices and local beliefs can coexist with more scientific and sustainable nature conservation efforts (Setiana & Purwoko, 2020).

In addition, this research also emphasizes the importance of actively involving local communities in nature conservation efforts. By analyzing the social and cultural dynamics in Betek Village, particularly Dumbango Hamlet, this article highlights the need to listen to and understand local perspectives in designing effective conservation policies and programs. As such, this research not only provides new insights into nature conservation practices at the local level but also offers a more inclusive and sustainable view on how to strengthen the connection between culture and the environment.

From the above, this research aims to provide new insights into the dynamics between cultural beliefs and nature conservation practices and explore the potential for integration between local knowledge and modern science in formulating more effective and sustainable conservation strategies. It also gauges the extent to which the ban has a positive or negative impact on environmental sustainability and biodiversity in the region, and whether there is a gap between local understandings based on tradition and scientific understanding of sustainable nature conservation practices.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **a. Myth**

Many articles have highlighted that myths are not just stories or unsubstantiated beliefs, but reflect deep cultural and spiritual aspects of a society. In the context of graveyard tree bans, such myths may be an integral part of a community's cultural heritage, representing the relationship between humans and nature, as well as beliefs about life after death (Putera et al., 2022).

Myths have a strong power to shape people's behavior and decisions. Previous articles may have observed how traditional prohibitions, including those regarding trees in graveyards, influence people's behavior related to nature conservation. The myths may have motivated people to preserve trees around graves, which in turn can provide ecological benefits to the surrounding environment.

Articles on myths often highlight the role of local context in maintaining and transmitting myths from generation to generation (Setiawan et al., 2021). However, they may also address how globalization and modernization have affected the sustainability of these myths. In the case of the ban on trees in cemeteries, research might explore how globalization has affected local understandings and practices related to nature conservation.

Myths are often the starting point for deeper scientific research. Previous articles may have discussed how combining local knowledge contained in myths with modern scientific knowledge can enrich our understanding of the natural environment and guide more effective conservation practices. In the context of this research, analyzing the interaction between the prohibition myths concerning trees in graveyards and the scientific understanding of nature conservation may be a key focus in holistically understanding their impacts and implications (Setiawan & Triyanto, 2021).

#### **b. Prohibition of Cutting Trees in Graveyards**

Articles on the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries often highlight the associated cultural and spiritual values (Masniati et al., 2021). These prohibitions are often based on traditional beliefs that trees around graves have high sacred or spiritual value. People believe that cutting trees in cemeteries can disturb the spirits of the deceased and bring misfortune to the community.

The prohibition of cutting down trees in cemeteries is also often related to efforts to protect the natural environment. Previous articles may have highlighted that trees around graves are not only considered sacred but also provide important ecological benefits. They can keep the soil stable, maintain biodiversity, and even reduce soil erosion.

Previous research may have discussed how social and cultural changes affect the interpretation and application of this prohibition. With modernization, urbanization, and globalization, traditional values are often eroded. This may raise questions about the extent to which the prohibition on cutting trees in cemeteries is still relevant and adhered to in a society changing.

The prohibition on cutting trees in graveyards has direct relevance to nature conservation efforts. In the context of the above research, understanding how this prohibition influences nature conservation practices in Betek Village, including Dungbango Hamlet, can provide valuable insight into the relationship between cultural beliefs and sustainable conservation practices. This analysis could help formulate more inclusive conservation strategies based on local knowledge in the future.

#### **c. Nature Conservation**

**Maintenance of Ecosystems and Biodiversity:** Articles on nature conservation often emphasize the importance of maintaining ecosystem integrity and biodiversity as key objectives. Nature conservation aims to protect wild species, natural habitats, and ecosystem services that provide ecological, economic, and social benefits to people and the environment (Imran et al., 2022).

Nature conservation also involves the sustainable management of natural resources, which includes the wise use and maintenance of natural resources for the enjoyment of present and future generations. This includes protecting forests, water, air, and soil from damage caused by human activities (Darmawan., 2022).

Successful nature conservation often incorporates local perspectives and knowledge in its planning and implementation. Previous articles may have underscored the importance of

understanding and respecting the traditional wisdom of communities in maintaining the sustainability of the natural environment. This is in line with the above research that focuses on the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries, where local knowledge and culture play an important role in conservation practices.

Nature conservation often involves collaboration between science and society. It involves the active participation of communities in decision-making, implementing conservation programs, and monitoring the condition of the natural environment (Senoaji et al., 2020). In the context of the above research, understanding how the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries affects nature conservation practices at the local level is a clear example of this collaboration, where local knowledge and traditional wisdom play a role in efforts to maintain environmental sustainability.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The method used in this research is to use a qualitative descriptive approach, this research will explore the phenomenon of the prohibition of cutting trees in graves and its relationship with nature conservation in Betek Village, especially Dumbango Hamlet. This approach allows researchers to deeply understand the perspectives, beliefs, and practices of local communities related to the ban.

The research location in Betek Village, Dumbango Hamlet, provided an opportunity for researchers to engage directly with the local community. Through unstructured interviews, the researcher was able to gather rich and in-depth information about the community's views on the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries and their understanding of nature conservation. Unstructured interviews allow researchers to explore various aspects of the topic without being bound by a rigid framework of questions (Irfan Syauqi Beik, 2022).

In addition, data collection was also conducted through direct observation of daily practices related to the ban. Through observation, researchers can observe how the ban is implemented in people's daily lives, including how trees around graves are maintained and preserved. These observations will provide additional insights into how the ban affects nature conservation practices in a local context.

Overall, a descriptive qualitative approach involving unstructured interviews and direct observation will provide an in-depth understanding of the complexity and local context of the prohibition on cutting trees in graveyards and its impact on nature conservation in Betek Village, Dumbango Hamlet.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results show that the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries does have a strong basis in the beliefs and experiences of the local community. One of the residents interviewed revealed that there was a real incident that occurred as a consequence of violating the ban. He mentioned that there was a tragic incident where the truck carrying the fallen trees lost its brakes and fell to the bottom of a ravine, causing the death of everyone on board. There was also an incident where a chainsaw broke while attempting to cut down a tree in a cemetery, preventing the felling from taking place. These instances add credence to the ban, reinforcing the belief that cutting trees in graveyards can bring disaster.

A site survey in Betek Village, Dumbango Hamlet also revealed that cemeteries in the area do have a high level of fertility compared to other lands. This is due to the presence of many large and small trees around the graves that have never been cut down by residents, even though the trees have high economic value and are not privately owned. This suggests that the ban on cutting trees in cemeteries has been successfully adhered to by the community, even if it means sacrificing potential economic benefits.

As such, the results of this study support the existence of the myth of not cutting trees in cemeteries, by highlighting real-life experiences and survey results that show the relationship between the maintenance of trees around cemeteries and land fertility. This provides further understanding of how cultural beliefs can influence nature conservation practices at the local level and the implications for the well-being of the environment and local communities.

In addition, an interview with a resident also revealed another reason behind the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries. According to him, one of the local religious leaders had told him that the trees and plants that grow on graves play an important role in alleviating the torment of the deceased in the grave. It is believed that the trees and plants in the cemetery constantly make dhikr to Allah and the Prophet at all times. This belief confirms that the trees have high spiritual value and are interpreted as a form of worship that is constantly performed for the safety of the spirit in the grave.

With this information, the understanding of the prohibition against cutting trees in graveyards became more widespread in the local community. Not only because of real-life experiences and beliefs about potential disasters but also because of beliefs in the spiritual value of the trees. This adds complexity to the understanding of the relationship between traditional prohibitions and nature conservation practices in Betek Village, Dungbango Hamlet.

The results of this study provide a more complete picture of the significance and rationale behind the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries in the local context. By considering the experiences, beliefs, and practices of local communities, we can better understand the complexity of the dynamics between culture, spirituality, and nature conservation. This provides a stronger foundation for safeguarding and maintaining the natural environment and strengthening the relationship between humans and nature.

The site survey also revealed that Dungbango Village is known for its greenery, especially in the cemetery area. With a ban on cutting down trees in the cemetery and consistent tree maintenance by the local community, the area remains sustainable and fertile. This can be seen from the high density of vegetation and the diverse types of trees that grow around the cemetery. In addition, plantations and farms around the village also benefit from the green environment. The fertility of the soil and the good availability of water also mean that Dungbango Village is never affected by flooding, despite the rainy season.

The findings illustrate that the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries not only has spiritual and cultural implications but also contributes significantly to nature conservation at the local level. By preserving cemetery forests, local communities are indirectly safeguarding the sustainability of their ecosystem and environment. The green and lush condition of the cemetery is clear evidence that traditional practices upheld by the community can coexist with effective nature conservation efforts.

Overall, this research provides a deeper understanding of the importance of maintaining the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries in the context of nature conservation. By combining spiritual, cultural, and ecological aspects, the people of Dungbango Village demonstrate that local wisdom can be a strong foundation for sustainable conservation practices. This provides inspiration and valuable lessons for efforts to conserve the natural environment not only at the local level but also globally.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the above, it can be concluded that the prohibition of cutting trees in cemeteries has a strong basis in the beliefs and experiences of local communities. The results show tragic incidents that add to the belief in the potential for disaster if the prohibition is violated, as well

as the relationship between the maintenance of trees around graves and the fertility of the land.

In addition, the understanding of the ban is expanding within communities, with a growing understanding of the spiritual and ecological role of trees in cemeteries. Dungbango village, for example, demonstrates that this prohibition not only has cultural implications but also makes a significant contribution to nature conservation, preserving the environment and protecting the village from flooding.

In a broader context, this research provides a deeper understanding of the importance of maintaining traditional practices in efforts to conserve the natural environment. By integrating spiritual, cultural, and ecological aspects, the Dungbango community demonstrates that local wisdom can be a strong foundation for sustainable conservation practices, inspiring efforts to conserve the natural environment not only locally, but also globally.

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