

**DISCOURSE OF HUMAN CAPITAL FROM ORANG ASLI
(MALAYSIA INDIGENOUS PEOPLE) PERSPECTIVE – COMPARISON BETWEEN
ORANG ASLI DARAT AND ORANG ASLI LAUT**

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ABSTRACT

The discourse of human capital is one of the elements within community development. Human capital is defined by a variety of disciplines and perspectives based on the description of niche research. Nevertheless, it has significant similarities, which is described via the knowledge owned by individuals and communities. However, the knowledge varies among the individual or communities. Similarly, Orang Asli has their human capitals known as traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge is the knowledge that was passed down from the older generations, which directly related to their environment. This means that human capital is different according to Orang Asli tribe because each tribe lived in different locations. This paper categorizes the different locations into two geographic placements, the Orang Asli Darat (Jungle Orang Asli) and the Orang Asli Laut (Sea Orang Asli). With regard to Orang Asli Darat in this paper, the term focuses on Temiar tribe. While Orang Asli Laut is referred to Orang Kuala. This article lists two objectives, namely to identify human capital owned by the Orang Asli, and to describe the human capital from the perspective of the Orang Asli. This paper uses the method of in-depth interviews and nonparticipation observation to collect data on human capitals from both Orang Asli tribes. The data collected and analyzed using QSR NVivo software. The results showed the difference of human capital depending on each of Orang Asli tribes. The results also show that human capital from the Orang Asli perspective referred to traditional knowledge and were built based on their living environment.

Keywords: Orang Asli human capitals, traditional human capital, Orang Asli Darat-Temiar, Orang Asli Laut-Orang Kuala.

Introduction

There are many definitions of human capital, every definition have the different meanings. But the distinction is only in the use of the term within a different context. While the purpose and the concept are the same. For Emery and Flora (2006), Cote (2001) in Adam and Urquhart (2007), and Phillips and Pittman (2009), human capital refers to the knowledge possessed by members of the community, including adults, youth and children. For O'Leary (2006), human capital is a skill that can be marketed to enable low-income people to get jobs that provide payment in the form of wages, to overcome poverty and lead to life satisfaction. From several other human capital definition given by the scholars, his description had a remarkable resemblance, namely human capital refers to the knowledge of individuals or communities.

Traditional knowledge as a part of human capital

Traditional knowledge is a human capital based on the conclusions from the discourse and characteristics of human capital given by the scholars. Traditional knowledge can also be associated with indigenous knowledge based on the definition given by Fernando (2003), Briggs, et al. (2007), Lauderdale (2008), and Dan, Mchombu and Mosimane (2010). Nevertheless, this paper uses the term 'traditional knowledge' because it is the contemporary term which had been adopted by scholars today.

But there is little difference between general human capital and traditional knowledge, traditional knowledge is confined to the knowledge of a community and become their identity. Traditional knowledge according to Dan, Mchombu and Mosimane (2010) is referred to the knowledge possessed by certain ethnic groups contained in the culture and are associated with a particular location of the community. For Fernando (2003) and Briggs et al. (2007), traditional knowledge refers to the internal knowledge communities that created and developed within the community itself and not a result of interaction with the outside world. It shows the originality of knowledge is passed down and instead he learned from the outside community. But it can change when communities live in a different environment (Briggs et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, traditional knowledge has an element of human capital, i.e. knowledge. But the difference is traditional knowledge is the heritage of a community. In contrast, human capital is generally not a detailed knowledge possessed by the other generations. The general definition allows traditional knowledge to be clustered as human capital. To examine the truth, this article lists two objectives that to be achieved, namely to identify human capital owned by the Orang Asli, and describe the human capital from the perspective of the Orang Asli.

The formation, ownership and use of human capital - traditional knowledge

The formation of traditional knowledge, Turner et al. (2000) states that it is formed by the people who live in a specific place for a long period of time. The view was made after Turner et al. (2000) were done long-term research on the indigenous people of *the Secwepemc (Shuswap), Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw and Nuuchah-Nulth* in British Columbia and Canada. A long period provides an opportunity to build a suitable and permanent traditional knowledge (Dan et al., 2010). The formation of the traditional knowledge is based on intimate and symbiotic relationship with nature (Turner et al., 2000; Lauderdale, 2008). Thus, traditional knowledge formed is different because it depends on the community environment and resources available in their area (Briggs et al., 2007). For example, communities living in Aswan have different traditional knowledge compare to communities living in Allaqi (Briggs et al., 2007).

In addition, traditional knowledge is also affected by time and experience of the local population (Briggs et al., 2007; Dan et al., 2010). For Briggs et al. (2007), the experience provides an opportunity for the community to observe, to experiment and to get experience to develop their traditional knowledge. The process is not only in case of traditional knowledge creation, and but also change the existing traditional knowledge. The change was recorded carefully by Briggs et al. (2007) through Bedouin group behavior. Through their relationship with the environment, it

modifies the existing knowledge and replaces or reduce irrelevant traditional knowledge. The reality shows that traditional knowledge is depended on the nature, dynamic and changing.

With respect to the ownership of traditional knowledge, it was owned through the inheritance from one generation to another generation (Briggs et al., 2007). Briggs et al. (2007) made observations of the native Bedouin community in Egypt. Then, knowledge is used and disseminated to the next generation (Fernando, 2003), and with this help the community learn more new knowledge (Turner et al., 2000).

Traditional knowledge is passed on in various ways, including through the medium of culture. It starts with parents or grandparents provide tutoring to children and also through participation and observation of Orang Kuala generation (Turner et al., 2000; Dan et al., 2010). It shows the important role of the older generation in the sharing and inheritance of traditional knowledge (Dan et al., 2010). The issue of using the traditional knowledge is that there are many signs that can be observed. For example, according to Emery and Flora (2006), it is reflected in an increase of skills and knowledge. In effect, it helps to improve the existing human capital and gain more benefits from the usage of human capital.

In addition, the uses of traditional knowledge have a significant impact on the community. For example, the study by Mauro and Hardison (2000) found that traditional knowledge in form of biodiversity management knowledge is used by considering the environmental requirements. In fact, Briggs et al. (2007) found the ownership of traditional knowledge help local communities to sustainable use of natural resources. Because of that they are sensitive to any changes that been happening around them (Lauderdale, 2008). The reason is due to the traditional knowledge that is in direct contact with the environment (Mauro &Hardison, 2000; Dan et al., 2010). The study made by Cardamone and Rentschler (2006) also showed the same reality. He carried out research on indigenous Australian who involved in small culture business by using multimedia technology. The findings showed that human capital of the indigenous community donated more than 100 million to annual revenue of Australia, whereas they are only a small group in the country.

Changes in human capital

Traditional knowledge is being threatened with extinction and loss of originality. The relationship between local community and outside community cause the changes (Mauro &Hardison, 2000; Briggs et al., 2007), mainly due to economic interests (Lauderdale, 2008 &Hipwell, 2009). It is also made in the development process, a drastic change due to natural disasters and the use of inappropriate development approach (Hipwell, 2009). Hipwell (2009) concluded after conducting a study on Formosan aboriginal people in Taiwan. In effect, resulting in fewer young people own and use traditional knowledge (Turner, Ignace&Ignace, 2000; Briggs et al., 2007; Hipwell, 2009).

Nevertheless, that does not mean that the communities allow traditional knowledge to be lost. This is because the community is identified to link traditional knowledge with them, so they need to protect it (Turner et al., 2000 & Briggs et al., 2007). Therefore, they form a particular behavior to defend it. Among them is a continuing learning among the community (Lauderdale, 2008).

Research methodology

This study used a qualitative approach to observe human capital owned by the Orang Asli Darat and Orang Asli Laut. Orang Asli Darat in this paper refers to Temiar tribe, while Orang Asli Laut refers to the Orang Kuala tribe. To obtain data from Temiar human capital, the research has been conducted in Kuntai Orang Asli village which located in Perak. The Kuntai is located about 45 to 50 kilometers from the nearest small town in which the journey would take about four hours to arrive to the Kuntai. However, the length of time varies according to route and weather conditions. As well, to obtain data from the Orang Kuala, the study was conducted at Bumiputera Dalam Rengit, Seri Pantai, Senggarang and Benut village in Johor.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, in which certain characteristics were listed by researchers. Concerned with methods of study, researchers used two qualitative methods, namely in-depth interviews and nonparticipation observations. Researchers have used two in-depth interview techniques, which are unstructured and structured protocol. Unstructured protocols are used in the initial study, in which researchers did not have a set of specific questions to ask to informants but only aims to achieve the research objectives. After interviewing several informants, the researchers formed a semi-structured interview protocol which convinced with the appropriate set of questions to data collection.

While non-observation participation method is implemented by examining each of the daily activities related to Orang Asli human capital. Observation data are recorded in the field notes. Data from the in-depth interview was transcribed and entered into QSR NVivo software to be coordinated and analyzed. While the observation data were recorded in the notes field are also analyzed by the same procedure. Through QSR NVivo, data were analyzed using the basic process in qualitative data analysis, namely open coding, clustering, categorizing and thematic. The result obtained through the thematic presentation of data with in-depth interview and non-observation participation data.

Finding and discussion

Orang Asli Darat Human Capital- The Temiar

The Temiar is one of the Orang Asli tribe in from the Senoi tribe. Temiar is also known as Senoi Serok, Tummeor, Timeor, Tembe and Teme (Carey, 1976). According to Carey (1976), the Senoi meaning of 'people' and 'Serok' is 'Inland'. The majority of Temiar is located in Perak and Kelantan. Temiar human capital is directly related to forest life, but this paper focuses on three human capitals, which are the bamboo, *petai* and *gaharu* (agarwood). In obtaining bamboo products, the knowledge was passed down to the younger generation during a bamboo collection, by alternating punctuated succession process between theory and practice during the collection of bamboo including cutting, collecting, cutting and transporting bamboo. The knowledge encompasses the characteristics of bamboo that can be harvested, the length and girth, maturity and suitability of bamboo to fulfill dealer demand. In addition, the children are also being taught about the length of bamboo that need to be cut before grouped and bounded to be carried out. Teaching is conducted in a manner that is inherited from the old generations as a complete

process starting from the very beginning they enter the forest until the process of selling the goods to dealers.

In addition, they are provided with knowledge about the best time to collect bamboo. But it does not involve the element of ritual or metaphysics. But, it involves the consideration of financial benefit only. The Temiar only enters the forests on a particular day, which based on concerns that includes weather considerations, the supply of bamboo, bamboo demand and distance. With respect to weather considerations, efforts to collect bamboo are influenced by the weather. The weather would makesome impact to the Temiar, in which it hinders them to bring out the bamboos that were collected. On the other side, the middlemen will have difficulties coming to their village to buy bamboo.

For this reason, the unwanted weather for them is when it rains, because it would be tricky for the Temiar to collect bamboo in such condition. This is because the collection involves the selection of bamboo reeds, cutting, classifying, binding and lead out of the jungle. If it rains, these efforts become more difficult. Temiar just pick and choose a suitable bamboo, based on maturity and size. To ensure a more mature bamboo, Temiar identified the suitable areas basedon the period of time. After the bamboos become matured, Temiar will return to the area. The other factors that encourage Temiar to enter forests to collect forest products is the distance. Bamboo is unplanted Arboricultural, thus Temiar more prudent to collect bamboo. If bamboo has been declining in places close to their settlement, Temiar will enter deeper into the forest.

Temiar human capital also related to *petai* (scientifically known as *ParkiaSpeciosa*) collection. However, these activities are carried out during ‘petai season’ only. The income earned from the sale of petai is higher than bamboo. Nevertheless, the collection of petai is not as simple as bamboo. Temiar must climb petai tree which exceed ten meters in height. Temiar Orang Asli should have the skills and experience to climb the petai tree to avoid any accident. If the petai tree is slippery, because of rain or dew, Temiar will avoid climbing the trees. Temiar aremore concerned about the safety and they accept the concept of ‘no luck on that day’.

Temiar human capital also related to *gaharu* (scientific name is *AquilaraMalaccensis Lam* or *AquilariaAgallocha*) collection. Gaharu is resinous wood from the *Aquilaria* or *Karastree*. Recently, the sale of gaharu is not marketable attributed to several factors. The sources of gaharu are not producing commercially or arboriculture, but the crop is grown naturally. The other factor is that not all Temiar know how to get gaharu especially the young generations. Gaharu collection involves specialized knowledge, the suitability of trees (matured tree) which can be timbered. Temiar have the knowledge to detect, classify and take gaharu in sustainable manner. The term sustainability refers to the actions in the present without reducing the need for future generations. Temiar were not taking all the gaharu they found, but to take part and a certain amount only.

Temiar have the knowledge to detect the matured gaharu and to grade them to A, B and C grade. Gaharu wood has a high value if it is older than ten years. Temiar will grade the gaharu by estimating the age of the tree. The older age tree is higher in price. Temiar selected gaharu with the age of eight years old and above, as if gaharu taken earlier than the period has low quality and low price as well.

The gaharu's color is also a criterion to determine gaharu grade. Gaharu colored, white or approaching white were categorized as low-grade gaharu. Instead gaharu is darker in color, thick brown or black has a higher price. Temiar also can determine the quality or grade of gaharu set through smell. The stronger smell is the higher price of gaharu. However, Temiar do not know how to extract wood to take gaharu oil as the process is done by the other communities.

Orang Asli Laut Human Capital – Orang Kuala

Orang Asli Laut known as the Sea Peoples for their daily lives depends on the marine environment (Dentan, 1968; Carey, 1976). According to Andaya (2008), the Sea Peoples are generally divided into three groups, the Sama-Bajau, Orang Laut and the Moken / Moklen. But in the context of the Orang Asli Laut in Malaysia, Orang Laut is a reference to the three tribes, the Orang Kuala, Orang Seletar and MahMeri. Placement of Orang Kuala located on the West Coast and South Coast of Johor, while placement Orang Seletar concentrated in the South of Johor (Juli Edo, 2000). MahMeri locations are in the mangrove environment and depend on agriculture and marine products (Wazir-Jahan, 1981) around the Selangor state.

Orang Kuala is a sub tribe of Proto-Malay. They are known as Orang Kuala due to their early settlements in the area of the river mouth and estuary-living as fishermen. Orang Kuala also knew as Duano (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997; Zalizan, Abdul Razaq & Ahmad Razaai, 2009), DossinDolak (Carey, 1976), JakunLaut and Orang Selat (Logan & Thomson in Skeat & Blagden, 1966). Orang Kuala did not like to be called as Orang Kuala. In their view, the term is used by rural communities to mock them. Thus, the more acceptable calling for them is Orang Laut, or Orang Asli or Melayu Asli and some people like to be known as Duano/ Duano. However, this paper uses the term Orang Kuala because the term is used by the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA). All of Orang Kuala is Muslim. Different from the other Orang Asli, Orang Kuala is not new converts to Islam, but they are Muslims from their fathers. In fact some of them regard themselves as Malays, they are not converted, but as the original Muslim Malays.

Orang Kuala have their own human capitals and it is directly related to the sea. This is because their villages are in the marine environment and enables them to access to the sea (Polunin & Sneah, 1953; Skeat & Blagden, 1966; Carey, 1976; Barnard, 1998; Andaya, 2008). Their human capitals are fishing, finding a crab (Andaya, 2008), terepang, sea plants and turtle's leather (Yuszaidy & Mohamad Nazri, 2008), sew nets, identify the weather through the wind, identify the direction of the star, making *togok*, make *jermal*, *kelong* and make a wooden boat. But, recently Orang Kuala has been using modern methods for fishing and no longer uses traditional nets. They are using nets purchased from the nearby market.

In addition, they still have the traditional knowledge, like the knowledge to identify and determine the weather by wind and determine the direction through the position of the stars. Both this knowledge is usually known by a skilled fisherman and familiar with marine life. For Orang Kuala, the knowledge to identify the weather through the wind was a simple matter, especially if the weather is different with the wind temperature. For example, if the weather is hot, while the temperature of cold winds, then rain likely to occur. The knowledge is learned from their fathers,

who are familiar with sea life. The knowledge to determine the direction or position of the stars is very useful to Orang Kuala when fishing at night. Even Orang Kuala relies solely on the knowledge that vision is limited at night.

The other human capital which still being practiced by Orang Kuala is the skill to build togok. Togok are artificial reefs constructed using wood to facilitate Orang Kuala to get a lot of fish. Togok is easy to make, but now it began to be replaced by reefs made of concrete because it is more durable than wood. In addition, Orang Kuala previously has the knowledge to build a kelong, which is shaped housing formed on the sea. However, kelong knowledge are now rarely owns by Orang Kuala due to several factors, i.e. the cost, limited locations and knowledge to build a kelong. With those constraints, the majority of Orang Kuala does not know how to build kelong.

Finally, Orang Kuala previously has the knowledge to make a wooden boat. They have the knowledge to make the boat not only as transportation, but it is also as Orang Kuala's house. But, currently they settled on land and Orang Kuala no longer lives on the boat. Nevertheless, Orang Kuala now no longer lives on a boat, so the boat is only being used as transportation only. However, as time progressed, wooden boat is being replaced with fiber boat. Thus, only a small number of people who still know to make wooden boat.

Human capital from Orang Asli perspective

The data based on two different human capital owned by the two different Orang Asli tribes. Orang Asli human capital can be concluded as traditional knowledge which heir down from older generations to new generations. Traditional knowledge is based on established routines and relies entirely on the location of Orang Asli settlements. For example, the Orang Asli Darat - Temiar, have the knowledge to find the source of income through the collection of bamboo, petai and gaharu. All three of the knowledge acquired through inheritance made by their ancestors. In fact, the three traditional knowledge is based on the needs and routines of their life in the forest environment.

Similarly, the human capital of Orang Kuala, traditional knowledge is influenced by the location of their placement and routine of their daily lives. They have the knowledge to build Jermal, kelong, togok, set direction and forecast the weather because of their daily lives are directly related to their lives as the Sea Peoples. However, the traditional knowledge is not fully passed down to Orang Kuala new generation. Among the reasons is that they have selected jobs which no longer has any connection with the sea.

The results from these two different tribes of Orang Asli enabled this paper to explain that human capital from the Orang Asli perspectives are refers to traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge is built based on their living environment. However, traditional knowledge has started to change, especially amongst of Orang Kuala. But it does not mean that traditional knowledge will vanish altogether. This reality gives the impression that traditional knowledge may change, but it will change according to the interests and needs of the Orang Asli.

Conclusion

Human capital has a different explanation, but it should be referred to the context and relevance of the research background. In particular with the human capital in the context of Orang Asli, the human capital is associated with traditional knowledge. This is based on the equation of the keywords human capital and knowledge, in which refers to traditional knowledge. Thus, the term of human capital in Orang Asli perspective is directly referring to the traditional knowledge possessed even when they have undergone changes. The reality is compatible with the Briggs et al. (2007) findings which state that human capital has a temporary nature, dynamic and changing.

Through the findings, it can be concluded that human capital in the context of Orang Asli may be known as the traditional human capital. However, that conclusion will raise a new question, that's why it is not named as indigenous human capital? The term may be used, but this study indicates a change in human capital among the Orang Asli. Human capital shows similarities with other communities, especially with the mainstream society. Human capital is also passed on to future generations. Therefore, it is more accurately to be known as the traditional human capital as compared to indigenous human capital.

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