

# INTERACTING WITH THE FORESTS: THE GENERAL VALUES OF THE ORANG ASLI

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APAFRI WORKSHOP

Kuala Lumpur

2.3.2016



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ISO 9001 : 2008  
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# Old Chinese Saying

- 建国君民，教学为先

*Jian guo jian min, jiao xue wei xian*

- To develop a nation and its people,  
Start with Education





# Old Malay Saying



- *Melentur buluh biar dari rebunginya.*
- (To bend the bamboo, it has to start from the young shoot).
- Implication: Educating children should start when they are still young.
- Application: To raise awareness on conservation of ecosystem services, early education is important.

# Old Malay/Indonesian Saying

- **Tiada rotan, akar pun berguna.**
- (If there is no rattan, the root could be used).
- Implication: If the desired rattan is not available, the alternative could be used.
- Application: Use of traditional alternative approach in forest management if modern approach is not available. Example: protection of species by local communities if official enforcement is inadequate.



# OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION
2. CUSTOMARY BELIEF SYSTEM
3. THE GENERAL VALUES
4. THINKING DETERMINES BEHAVIOUR
5. CONCLUSION

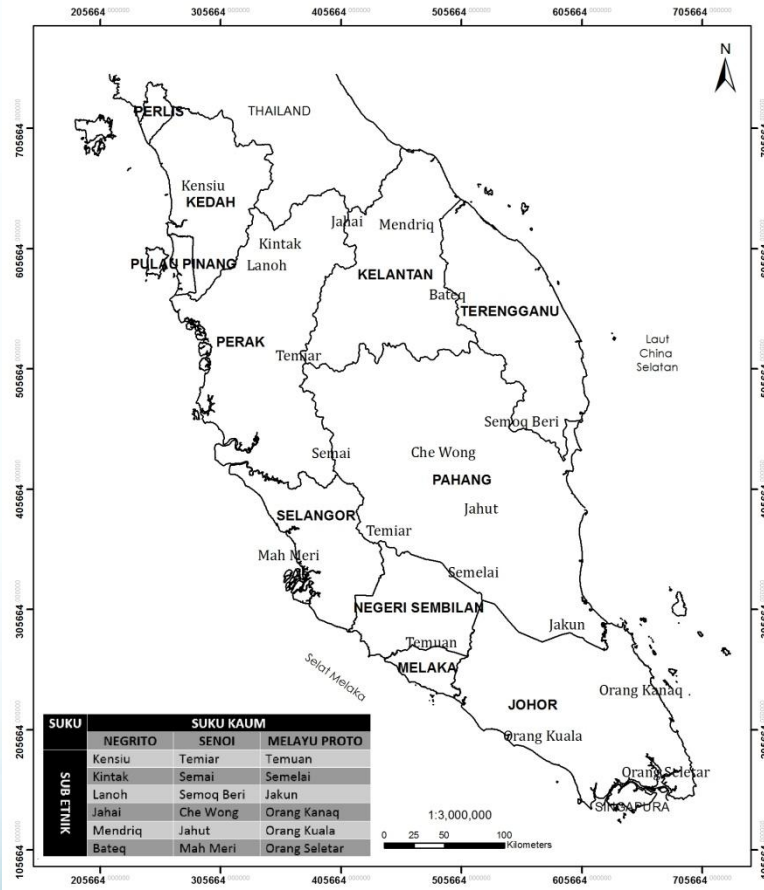


# 1. INTRODUCTION

- Orang Asli is one of the indigenous peoples residing in Peninsular Malaysi
- Total population 178,000 in 2010
- Less than 1% of 31 million Malaysian population
- Basically forest-dependent communities even though the degree of dependence has generally declined over the years.



# Distribution of 18 subetnik groups



# CUSTOMARY BELIEF SYSTEM

- Do Orang Asli believe in animism?
- Animism is the worldview that non-human entities—such as animals, plants, and inanimate objects—possess a spiritual essence. Animism is used in the anthropology of religion as a term for the belief system of some indigenous tribal peoples, especially prior to the development of organized religion.  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism>
- **Animism** definition, the belief that natural objects, natural phenomena, and the universe itself possess souls
- <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/animism>



# OA CUSTOMARY BELIEF SYSTEM

- In this customary belief system, the world view is that **certain object** (such as tree, river, water source, stone and cave) surrounding human **is resided by certain spirits or super natural beings** that **influence human livelihood.**



- These spirits or super natural beings are known as *makhluk halus* or *makhluk ghaib* (*roh, penunggu, penjaga dan bunian*).
- They are sometimes categorized into the “good” beings (i.e. the *moyang*) and “bad” beings (known as *hantu, jemalang, jin*).

- Daily interaction with the environment has to take care of these **spirits or super natural beings** that **affect the life of Orang Asli, be they at home or in the forest.**
- Even though some Orang Asli converted to Islam and Christianity, the community in general continues to hold on to this customary belief system when interacting with the forests.



# GENERAL VALUES TO BE OBSERVED

- So as **not to offend** the spirits and super natural beings which could bring negative consequences such as sickness and accident.
- To **gain the sympathy** of the spirits and super natural beings to bestow them with good health and prosperity.



# RESPECT

- **Respect for and with fear of** the spirits and super natural beings is most important prior to conducting forest activities.
- Be careful with the words used and speech to avoid offending.



# PRAYER (*DOA*)

- Perform prayer before going into the forest.
- Pray with good intention (*niat*): safety, avoid mishap or disturbances by spirits



# Prayer before clearing land



# SEEK PERMISSION

- **Seek permission** is essential before the Orang Asli commences any activity in the forest.
- Example:  
  
before and during farming activities,  
  
before taking away any fauna, flora or objects,  
  
before urining...



# SEEK PROTECTION

- **Seek protection** from the spirits and super natural beings ensure safety of Orang Asli while working or walking in the forest.

- Example of oral expression:

*“Cucu minta maaf, datok-datok, nak minta kebenaran dan perlindungan kerja di hutan...”*

(Grand children asking permission and protection to work in the forest)



# OBSERVING THE TABOO AND RULES

- **Observing the taboo and rules** while in the forest has been practised by the Orang Asli community.

- Example:

Before or when entering the forest, cannot talk about the forest produce to be harvested.

Cannot bring things with strong smell (such as curry or onion) into the forest.



# HUMBLE

- Be **humble** when entering or working in the forests help to avoid misfortune. They also believe that an Orang Asli might have accidentally offended the spirits and super natural beings which could subsequently bring mishap or sickness.
- Example: use gentle words
- do not boast



# APOLOGIZE

- Offer **apology** to the spirits and super natural beings is critical to resolve the misunderstanding or mistake made.
- Normally with assistance of traditional healers who can communicate with the spirits.



# SUSTAINABLE USE

- Practise **sustainable use** of resources is the basic value that the Orang Asli community needs to observe to be in line with the expectations of the spirits and super natural beings.
- Do not over harvest or over exploit the resources.
- Harvesting forest resources for adequate use.



# Sustainable harvesting of agarwood

An Orang Asli harvester besides a gaharu producing karas tree



# Sustainable fishing by females



# SOCIO-CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

- These values are expressed in observations, practices as well as rules and regulations which are related to forest management and climate change.



# CONCLUSION

- Customary belief system
- Have yet to find old sayings and proverbs of Orang Asli.
- Value of social expression mainly in practices, rules and regulations are merely orally passed down from generation to generation.
- Essential to record such social and cultural expressions which could be relevant for modern application in forest management and dealing with climate change.



**SEKIAN, TERIMA KASIH.  
SALAM SIHAT & SEJAHTERA.**

