



# Traditional Knowledge Management and Usage of Medicinal Plants as Daily Medication in Healing Rituals Among the Batek of Kuala Koh, Gua Musang, Kelantan :an Exploratory Evidence

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## Abstract

Traditional knowledge related to medicinal plants of the indigenous people are indeed a useful asset for the community. The knowledge that had been traditionally inherited from their ancestors is an integral part of their survival as they live symbiotically with the forests. While many researches and literatures are focusing on documenting and recording these knowledge, not much has been researched in understanding the holistic process of the knowledge management particularly at the indigenous community level. This paper provides an attempt to reveal empirical findings about the management and use of medicinal plants in ailment healing rituals. In order to enable a holistic view of the management of knowledge at the study site, the main question asked was what happened during the four processes of knowledge management namely knowledge generation, knowledge codification, knowledge utilization and knowledge transfer. Using the Batek community of Kuala Koh, Gua Musang, in the state of Kelantan as a case study, ethnographic methods of individual and group interviews, observations and participants observations as well as document analysis, were employed to gather the data from the study site and the grounded theory approach was used for data analysis to enable the emergence of the themes to understand the phenomena at the study site. The study, conducted from 2014-2016, involved prolonged stays with the community. The findings revealed that there was an 'undocumented means of knowledge generation with potential loss of traditional knowledge', while there was a non-codified knowledge being practiced in the community and widespread inability of basic reading and writing skills among younger generation. In addition, there was a high level of traditional knowledge utilisation in the community but some procedures such as ritual practices have been simplified while there was a complete absence of documentation of traditional knowledge by members of the community that might weaken knowledge transfer.

**Keywords:** Bateks; Indigenous People; Knowledge Management; Medicinal Plants; Traditional Knowledge

## 1 Introduction

This paper is an attempt to reveal an empirical finding about the medicinal plants that have been used by Orang Asli in Malaysia as an alternative to modern medicinal practice to heal sickness. These findings provide an explanation towards the existing state of the management of traditional knowledge related to medicinal plants of Orang Asli particularly the Bateks. In order to discuss this broad question, this paper concentrated on the four processes of knowledge management i.e. knowledge generation, knowledge codification, knowledge management and knowledge transfer. In particular, this study aims to provide empirical evidences to answer the question of what happened to the knowledge i.e. how it is being practiced during each process of knowledge management.

## 2 The Bateks

The Bateks are one of 18 sub-ethnics of indigenous people or Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia. The 18 sub-ethnics were divided into 3 groups namely the Proto-Malays, Senoi and Negritos. According to the most recent census conducted by the Department of Statistics (DOS), in 2010, there were more than 178,000 'Orang Asli' in Peninsular Malaysia, compared to only 53,000 in 1967. Table 1 and 2 below indicate the distribution of Orang Asli by ethnics groups and states in Peninsular Malaysia in 1967 and 2011 respectively:

The latest census by the DOS has indicated that there was a healthy increase in the population of 'Orang Asli' from 53,000 in 1969 to 178,197 (236%) in 2010, more than double the increase over the period. Of all three ethnic divisions, the Proto Malays recorded the biggest jump in numbers from 20,830 in 1969 to