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The terminologies associated with development and marginalisation for Orang Asli in Malaysia

W.A. Amir Zal , Mustaffa Omar, and Hood Salleh

ABSTRACT

Previously, any failure of Orang Asli development activity in Malaysia, was characterised by using a single term in all situations – “marginalisation”. This generalisation was unfair to everyone involved in the Orang Asli development process, made it difficult to resolve problems, and resulted in tendencies to blame certain people. Based on ethnographic research in Kuala Gandah, Pahang, Malaysia, this article allocates three terms in the Orang Asli development marginalisation discourse: “secluded”, “isolated”, and “marginalised”. “Secluded” refers to development activity that accidentally marginalises. “Isolated” refers to development activity that directly and deliberately marginalises. “Marginalised” refers to the Che Wong that were eliminating or avoiding development. These terms were exposed by weaknesses in the implementation of development, namely the role of a single dominant approach in development activities – the top-down approach – and a tendency to generalise the marginalisation of the Orang Asli. This article recommends that more care be taken to apply a development approach that deals with situations on a case-by-case basis and that utilises the partnership approach to development, involving all parties in all phases.

Dans le passé, tout échec d'activités de développement parmi les Orang Asli de Malaisie était caractérisé au moyen d'un seul terme pour toutes les situations — « marginalisation ». Cette généralisation était injuste pour toutes les personnes impliquées dans le processus de développement des Orang Asli, rendait difficile la résolution des problèmes et aboutissait à une tendance à rendre responsables certaines personnes. Sur la base de recherches ethnographiques menées à Kuala Gandah, à Pahang, en Malaisie, cet article assigne trois termes au discours sur la marginalisation du développement des Orang Asli : « retiré », « isolé » et « marginalisé ». Le terme « retiré » concerne les activités de développement qui marginalisent accidentellement. « Isolé » fait référence aux activités de développement qui marginalisent directement et délibérément. « Marginalisé » concerne les Che Wong qui éliminaient ou évitaient le développement. Ces termes ont été exposés par des faiblesses sur le plan de la mise en œuvre du développement, notamment le rôle d'une approche dominante unique dans les activités de développement — l'approche directive (*top-down*) — et une tendance à généraliser la marginalisation des Orang Asli. Cet article recommande de prêter une plus grande attention à l'application d'une approche de développement qui aborde les situations au cas par cas et qui utilise l'approche du développement axée sur les partenariats et fasse intervenir toutes les parties prenantes dans toutes les phases.

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Anteriormente, cualquier fracaso de las actividades orientadas a promover el desarrollo de los pueblos orang asli de Malasia era caracterizado recurriendo a un solo término: marginalización. Semejante generalización resultaba injusta para los diversos actores involucrados en el proceso de desarrollo, a la vez que dificultaba la resolución de problemas y daba lugar a tendencias de culpar a ciertas personas. A partir de investigaciones etnográficas realizadas en Kuala Gandah, estado de Pahang, Malasia, el presente artículo aporta tres palabras referidas al discurso de marginalización vinculado con el proceso de desarrollo de los orang asli: apartado, aislado y marginalizado. El término “apartado” hace referencia a aquella actividad de desarrollo que, sin intención de hacerlo, marginaliza. “Aislado” da cuenta de la actividad de desarrollo que, directa y deliberadamente, marginaliza. Mientras que “marginalizado” alude a personas de habla che’ wong, que habían estado eliminando o evitando el desarrollo. Estos términos resultaron del análisis de las debilidades atribuibles a la implementación de actividades para el desarrollo, principalmente al rol desempeñado por un enfoque único y predominante en dichas actividades —el enfoque vertical— y a la tendencia a generalizar al referirse a la marginalización de los orang asli. En este sentido, el artículo recomienda tener mayor precaución a la hora de impulsar un enfoque de desarrollo, que los casos se atiendan en función de cada situación y que se utilice el enfoque de alianzas para el desarrollo en que todos los actores participan en todas las etapas.

Introduction

Orang Asli refers to a group of indigenous communities in Peninsular Malaysia (Ramle 2007), who are allocated many benefits in the Malaysian constitution. The term “Orang Asli” (Orang: human being, Asli: original) was first adopted by the Malaysian government in the 1960s, to refer to the aboriginal peoples of West Malaysia (Leary 1994). The term “native people” was also considered but was rejected as confusing, due to “native” also being used in Malaysia to refer to the Malays. However, based on Nik Hassan Shuhaimi (1990), the Orang Asli and the Malays have the same root. They only differ in physical, social, language, economic, and political aspects because of different historical contexts and different reactions to change.

The Orang Asli are separated into three main tribes – the Negrito, Senoi, and Proto Malay (Ratos 2006) – with each main tribe split into six subtribes. This categorisation was made during the British rule to simplify the administration. Each group’s categorisation was based on their usual life activities. For instance, according to Carey (1976), the Negrito tribe was associated with nomadic communities, hunting, and gathering of wood products in the North. Meanwhile, the Senoi group was associated with upland agricultural activities, while the Proto Malay tribe lived in the South and were engaged in fishing and farming activities, which were the main economic activities of that area. However, there is another categorisation of Orang Asli based on Amir Zal (2013), who states that there are two categories of Orang Asli, the forest people and the sea people, based on their traditional settlement; the forest people live in a jungle environment, while the traditional residence of the sea people is a coastal area or the ocean.

The development of the Orang Asli is largely connected to development attempts by the Malaysian government. A focused effort to set up a specific organisation for Orang Asli affairs resulted in the establishment of the Orang Asli Development Department in 1953. Initially, this department was set up to prevent communist influences from seeping into Orang Asli villages located in distant areas. This focus continued until 1990, when Chin Peng signed the declaration of reconciliation with the Malaysian Government.

From 1954 to 1990, the development of the Orang Asli focused on efforts to persuade the Orang Asli to favour the government and not be influenced by communist propaganda (Edo 2006). However, this does not imply that there was no developmental work carried out for the Orang Asli during this period. According to Edo (2006), before the World War II, Orang Asli were involved in economic growth activities such as the production of rubber, tin, and mining.

Following the war with the Japanese, the government began to focus its endeavours on removing communist influence in the Chinese and Indian communities. Hence, the Briggs Plan was prepared for the Orang Asli. In which the British used three approaches: first, Orang Asli villages in the jungle were moved to other villages; second, Orang Asli were transferred to a temporary camp in the cities; or third, Orang Asli were allowed to continue living in their small villages, guarded by security forces (Siti Nor and Juli 2003).

In the early stages of development, the government through the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1974 introduced the slogan "Development through Security" to give full attention to safety matters amongst the Orang Asli. This slogan was later substituted with "Security through the Development". This slogan symbolised the strategy of developing the Orang Asli population first in order to later achieve security through the Orang Asli siding with the government because they received help from it. The Orang Asli population in modern Malaysia rapidly transformed, beginning in the early twentieth century, when the predominantly jungle landscape of Malaysia was cleared for plantation farming (Andaya 2002).

From time to time the government has increasingly emphasised the growth process of the Orang Asli. This is evidenced by the emphasis given to the Orang Asli in the Ninth Malaysia Plan (RMK-9), an emphasis that has been observed since the Fourth Malaysia Plan (RMK-4). Apart from RMK-4, other RMKs also focused on developing the Orang Asli. Among these, RMK-7 in particular focused on integrating the Orang Asli into mainstream society, and encouraging them to be autonomous. RMK-8 was dedicated to rooting out poverty amongst the Orang Asli. Additionally, RMK-9 focused on increasing income and improving the Orang Asli's quality of life through the implementation of economic projects.

All the government efforts have reached a certain target, such as the provision of certain facilities as an indicator for development taking into account the equivalence to mainstream society. However, the values held by Orang Asli are different from those of mainstream society, meaning that they may react differently to mainstream society to any development process. This requires comprehensive observation of the reactions of Orang Asli to development. Previously, if they have different interpretations and reactions to development efforts, they were labelled as rejecting development. From a different, perhaps empathetic, angle, they have been marginalised by development. The marginalisation was created by various factors and should be explained from different dimensions. To obtain more accurate information about Orang Asli reactions to development, this article considers how marginalisation of Orang Asli can be explained by looking at the current situation based on their values.

"Marginalisation" of Orang Asli in Malaysia

Although there is concrete evidence of long-term development policies for the Orang Asli, there are still some who believe that the Orang Asli reject development. They argue that the Orang Asli want to be free from harassment and want to hold on to their traditional life, because that is their desire and identity. Thus, the government's attempts to develop the Orang Asli can be seen as disturbing their life (Hasan 1998). According to this opinion, the Orang Asli prefer to exist independently and this creates difficulty for the government in planning development for them. This viewpoint is recognised as anti-development as it considers the Orang Asli to be a "primitive" community that is minimally concerned about development.

Another viewpoint believes that efforts to develop the Orang Asli will be futile because the Orang Asli will not allow it. Asnarulkhadi (2005) states that the Orang Asli community is considered to be not integrated with mainstream development. They are presumed to not be interested in development, and reject it. This view attempts to explain development activities from an extreme standpoint

regarding the involvement of the Orang Asli in the development process. It should be noted that development brings a dilemma to Orang Asli. They are faced with the choice of either holding on to their traditional knowledge, or making do with new, modern knowledge. This dilemma is especially evident when the developer needs “modern” knowledge.

According to Hean, Lina, and Milow (2012), Orang Asli are facing a problem with regards to practicing traditional knowledge, as the younger generations among the Orang Asli (in particular the Semai) are less interested in practicing traditional knowledge. At the same time, they are challenged by the difficulty of obtaining modern knowledge. According to Mustafa et al. (2014), the Orang Asli are categorised as a vulnerable group because of their lack of modern knowledge (human capital). Their research compared two different tribes – the Che Wong and the Jahut – and found that the Che Wong were more vulnerable because their settlement had more aggressive development than the Jahut's. Therefore the Orang Asli were an internal element that caused the failure of the development process in this situation, not an external factor.

These realities are supported by the other view. Due to internal elements, development often does not happen as planned, where the Orang Asli should be able to add their own value to the development. According to Ramle (2007), a development project is seen to be sustainable if the Orang Asli can enjoy development benefits without sacrificing existing pleasures and can pass down these benefits to their future generations. Their development is grounded on their relationship with their environment (Amir Zal et al. 2014), which is part of what forms their collective identity and provides them with a way of life and reason for living.

These views clash with another view, which points out that the Orang Asli have demonstrated an ability to conform with modern development planning, as 80–90% of Orang Asli have moved to “modern” villages (Abdul Talib 2003). This demonstrates that the view of the Orang Asli as an anti-development community is not true, as they have complied with development activities. However, we should bear in mind that their involvement was not voluntary, but a result of a top-down approach that pushed them to accept the development.

Many development activities have been based on the top-down approach. Research indicates that the Orang Asli have a negative impression of this approach. Hasan et al. (2009) investigated the impact of a development process surrounding an Orang Asli village (Orang Seletar) on its inhabitants. They found that the Orang Asli of this village felt that the development was not carried out especially for them. Hence, they felt marginalised, although the development was happening close to their village.

The government has implemented development efforts for the Orang Asli, but most have failed due to various reasons (Ramle 2007). Swainson and McGregor (2008) reported on a struggling development project in an Orang Asli village, noting that its failure was caused by tangible values on the ground. According to Hasan (1998), the Orang Asli are generally not consulted in development processes, for example through an economic, societal, and political organisation. Their function is more of an observer rather than a participant. The worst part is that the Orang Asli continue to fall behind in acquiring basic facilities. This disturbing state of affairs is also likely due to the current flagship development failing to unite the Orang Asli in an organisation where they can discuss their own matters (Asnarulkhadi 2005).

There are many other unpredictable factors causing the failure of Orang Asli development. These include shortages of local human resource caused by out-migration, as well as environmental issues (Main and Fatan Hamamah 2014). Amir Zal et al. (2014) described the Orang Asli situation as a “shock threat” that has reduced the Orang Asli's potential and their economic efforts. All these factors are beyond the control of either the Orang Asli or the developers.

The issue of marginalisation among the minority group is a worldwide issue, in which the failure of inclusion of a community has been discussed alongside issues of discrimination and inequality. For UNDP (2010), the issue of marginalisation is occurring among communities globally, especially when non-indigenous people hold negative beliefs and stereotypes about indigenous people (Becerra et al. 2015). This reality is also recognised by Smylie et al. (2016), but from the inclusion and exclusion

dimensions, in which many efforts to include indigenous people in development processes do not give a true picture of inclusion. According to Smylie et al. (2016), based on various programmes with indigenous people, there is no issue of exclusion, but how the development process includes them to participate in that project has shown a positive outcome and impact.

This is similar to Masa's (2016) finding, where avoiding indigenous culture in development through tourism has not provided a positive impact for all stakeholders. Nevertheless, when indigenous people had been given the opportunity to share their opinions and to join together in the community, a more positive situation has occurred. Indigenous people have not been supporting the development process because development policy directors had not included them in the development process. For instance, *"the Australian Government's Indigenous Protected Areas programme is an initiative which offers a potential basis for developing systems for the recognition and protection of indigenous knowledge and practices relating to environmental conservation and management"* (Pert et al. 2015, 119).

From the literature review above, we can see that many situations must be considered before classifying the Orang Asli as being in a marginalised situation. It should be noted that in mainstream society, there is the one dominant meaning of the term "marginalisation" with regards to the Orang Asli. The Orang Asli are considered as marginalised when their involvement in a development process is denied. This meaning also uses "marginalisation" to describe all Orang Asli situations where involvement is repudiated. On the other hand, discourse by various scholars has concluded that three different meanings exist of the term "marginalisation" when applied to Orang Asli in Malaysia. Each meaning represents a different experience of the Orang Asli in development processes.

The generalisation of marginalisation is unfair to all people involved in the Orang Asli development process, including the Orang Asli, policymakers, and others directly or indirectly involved. Thus, the concept of marginalisation within the Orang Asli context needs more specific terms to identify this issue accurately. In order to aid in the development of a more accurate view of Orang Asli "marginalisation", this article seeks to introduce three fresh terms into the Orang Asli development marginalisation discourse. These terms were generated based on research fieldwork and represent particular experiences faced by the Orang Asli in development processes.

Research methodology

This investigation employed an ethnographic research design in order to avoid intervening in the participants' natural social environment. We realised that it would not be easy to collect research data without first building good relationships with the informants. We would have to seriously engage with them in order to obtain their trust and acceptance. Thus, the ethnographic design was the best choice of research design.

To prepare the early stage of ethnographic research design, we explored the historical context of the community. According to Carey (1976), the Che Wong is also known as Si Wong or Siwong, which means the forest man. They are a subtribe of the Senoi tribe. The Che Wong initially resided in the Titi village in Kuala Pahang, Pahang, Malaysia. However, after the Rawa War, the Che Wong began to move to Temerloh, Pahang, then to Lanchang, Bolok, Ulu Terih, and eventually settled in Kuala Gandar.

The history of the Che Wong is recorded based on two oral tales, narratives that have been handed down from generation to generation. However, these oral tales have been ignored by younger generations and are considered as mere stories by them. Both the oral tales have different plots, but are similar with regards to the origin of the Che Wong, who are reported to be descended from the "King". The first story states that the King refers to the King of Orang Asli; the second that the King refers to the King of Siam, derived from the figure of Che. The Che Wong also believe that they are the original people of Peninsular Malaysia, and they have their own government system.

The Che Wong had to deal with the Communist guerrillas who were active close to the Che Wong village. A modest number of Orang Asli were involved with the Communist guerrillas indirectly, as

mediators to buy food for them. However, this was only for a short period of time. The Che Wong soon began to shun the Communist guerrillas, after the other Orang Asli subtribe (Jah Hut) that lived around the Kroh area was slaughtered by Communist guerrillas. The incident left a deep impression on the whole of the Orang Asli, including the Che Wong.

This research involved 15 Orang Asli from the Che Wong tribe in Lanchang, Kuala Gandah, Pahang. The Che Wong tribe was chosen because they had clear societal and physical separation in their village, was based on who was living in a new settlement location and who was still in the jungle. We assumed that the Orang Asli residing in new settlements would hold a different view of development. The sample size was decided during the fieldwork process.

We resolved that we would stop gathering informants when new informants were giving the same information as previous informants, based on Merkens' (2004) view. Informants were selected based on a purposive sampling technique. Along with Mack et al. (2005), this kind of sampling is important to obtain data based on the objectives behind each question in which participants are grouped according to preselected criteria relevant to the research purpose. There were a few qualities we used as criteria for participant selection: participants must reside in a "modern area" (the Poor People Housing Aid Programme (PPRT)) or far away in the jungle. Then they would be practising either a modern life or a traditional life.

We visited the study location five times. For each visit, we stayed with the Orang Asli for three to seven days. At the outset, informants refused to communicate with us. Only after repeatedly visiting and joining in their activities, did they begin to share information. They also invited us to spend a longer time with them, and we then resolved to stay in their homes. Two research methods were used to collect data, in-depth interviews and participant observation. For the in-depth interviews, we used an unstructured interview protocol. This allowed us to explore the research's subject matter without being tied to a specified set of questions, enabled two-way conversation, and also served as a participant-centred approach that enabled informants to narrate themes significant to them, thereby resulting in rich and elaborate information. Meanwhile, we participated with the informants in their everyday actions.

We also used triangulation in data collection, the best method in qualitative data especially in ethnographic research. As explained by Ercikan and Roth (2009), ethnographic research expects triangulation to point toward social truths on which participants' experiences converged. The triangulation method helped us to validate data and improve reliability.

Findings and discussion – the terms of Orang Asli development

The research observed three types of marginalisation in the Che Wong's development activities. Each type of marginalisation was given a specific new term, based on the setting and the specific issues that arose from the Che Wong's reaction to the development process. The new terms are: secluded, isolated, and marginalised.

Secluded – development accidentally marginalises the Che Wong

This article defines secluded as a situation where a development process accidentally makes Orang Asli feel they are not participating in a development because they are not involved in decision-making at any level. This situation evoked a negative perception of development amongst the Che Wong, prompted by the fact that they were secluded from mainstream development. The Che Wong also felt that they were not a beneficiary group for these types of developments, because they were not called upon to come together to discuss development matters affecting them. Evidence for this was observed in two different settings; the distribution of houses and land acquisition.

The distribution of houses

The inclusion of the Orang Asli in mainstream development has focused on fulfilling their basic demands, like providing houses, a 24-hour electricity supply, and clean water. In the case of

houses, housing relief is available through the government's Poor People Housing Aid Programme (PPRT). The number of homes is built according to the number of family heads (KIR) and settled in advance through a survey by a local leader – the Tok Batin and Chairman of the Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK). The number of houses to be built is based on the current number of KIR, and does not take into consideration new KIR formed after the census. Any Che Wong who marry after the census has been made will not receive a house. This is a common procedure used by development planners. We found that informants who were left out still expressed a desire to acquire a house:

"I truly wanted the house ... Who said I didn't want it? But, I will never get it, because they were taking a census according to house headman. We've been like this, barely married, (in) which (we) can't (get a house)." (informant B)

Although disappointed, these informants still agreed to the arrangement. But this was mixed with hope that they would later have the same opportunities as the other Che Wong who received a house.

"I know, if I was married during the count of the number of homes needed, I'll get a place. But at that time (when the census was made), I did not marry ... So, I'm residing here, this is my house, the bamboo made (one)" (informant D)

The informants expressed constant frustration regarding not getting a house. But they did not blame government officers. Instead, informants were suspicious of the process of listing houses, the classification of eligible people to receive a house, and how the houses were distributed. Informants guessed that there was nepotism or favouritism in the process of house selection and distribution. Their argument was that not all KIR received a house, although they had the same characteristics as the KIR who were given houses. This was represented by informant E:

"I suppose ... All of the young people here, like me, want a house. But, we haven't an equal opportunity. But, I recall only a certain person who has a relationship with the masses who have power (got the house)".

This finding revealed the reality of social relations amongst community members in this village, where they were having conflicts with the local leader and there was prejudice among village members. Their relationships had become increasingly distant and communications between them were no longer frequent. Communications were carried out just for exchanging greetings and not intended to enhance the relationship between community members. This gave rise to many misconceptions. Informants believed that every decision made by their leaders was aimed at meeting the need of individuals close to the leaders, including their family members. Hence, each decision was seen as being biased and not fulfilling the other community members' needs.

The local leader, however, stated that no such situation or nepotism was happening. He accepted that he was listed in the names of people who needed a house. However, he explained that the list he developed was handed over to the government agency, the Orang Asli Development Department (JAKOA), for further action. He explained that he held very limited power in reaching a determination. He could only list the names of those eligible to receive a house, and did not have the power to determine who would eventually receive a house. At the same time, we observed that local leaders were acutely aware of the constraints faced by the government in building houses due to the limitations of funds allocated. Therefore, they understood that the government would not be capable of building all the houses at one time. This was expressed by a leader:

"On that point is, (there is) no discrimination. It's a gift from the government. I dropped the name list to the JAKOA. And so they will take them ... The government officer told, not all (of them) will get the house. The government accepts their own guideline, they haven't a lot of money and then they cannot build many houses. Not the entire community members could make it at the same time. And then they were asked to wait (their turn). But I'm not sure when." (informant A)

On the whole, Che Wong community members were also well aware of these procedures and constraints, but they were still not satisfied, especially in relation to who has priority in receiving a house. This was because those receiving a house were usually related to the local leader. At the same time, informants could not understand or accept delays in the houses' construction, even though they understood that the government had restricted finances. Instead, informants speculated as to the causes of this delay, particularly regarding local leaders.

Amongst the informants' concerns were that the local leader should recognise what the Che Wong needed. The informants reported that their local leader refused to take charge of this issue. Therefore, they believed that their leader was making inaccurate decisions, resulting in unfair construction and distribution of houses. As a result, the local population reported less confidence in their leader and questioned his ability to perform his tasks.

Their failure to acquire houses made the Che Wong feel distant from development. It immediately caused them to become secluded from the development, while in reality they were trying to participate in the development.

"The (indicator) of ripening is the house. If you got it, that means (you are) developed. I want to develop, simply by not owning a house, I cannot say I have developed." (Informant F)

This finding rejected the stereotype that the Che Wong refuse to take part in growth, because the results indicate that they actually desire development. They are only stunted because they have not received the same development facilities as other people. The informants felt secluded, as informants assumed that the development was exclusive to the specific group receiving the houses and that they were not getting an equal opportunity. It has not been problematic for the Che Wong to accept the development going on around them. In reality, they are only facing barriers in participating in the development's evolution due to limited opportunities.

The Che Wong's land acquisition for the elephant and tiger project

Dozens of development activities have taken place in the Che Wong settlements in the jungle and its border. The Che Wong also own a good road connecting remote and urban areas. In 1989, the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) built the National Elephants Conservation Centre (NECC) in the Che Wong hunter area (the roaming area of this tribe). The roaming area refers to the area utilised by Orang Asli to find jungle resources, including plants, animals, and other resources for food, buildings, and income.

The development efforts were undertaken with the mission to benefit both sides – the Che Wong and other residents. However, the NECC has been using the Che Wong roaming area without a specific aim to develop the Che Wong community economically or socially. Instead, it is more focused on developing a centre to tame and protect elephants from extinction. Although the Che Wong live in the jungle, they do not possess knowledge related to elephants. They are afraid of elephants and believe that it is a destructive animal. This was articulated by informant C:

"An elephant is not our friend. If we plant anything, it destroys (them), it removes trees, and some eat our plants ... I do not know how to tame an elephant. If we run into them, we just go away. While we live in the hobo camp, many elephants sleep in front of our house. They stir (us). (They) push (our) home, unplug the house. We keep silent. If it is life-threatening, we move away."

The Che Wong's participation in development was not a priority for the NECC. Probably, the Che Wong only became trained in knowledge of elephant care after the NECC was built. This knowledge is not the Che Wong's traditional knowledge. The Che Wong's work at the NECC was more or less as a worker to provide food, maintain hygiene, tame the elephants, and so on. Very few Che Wong worked with the NECC. During this study, only 15 Che Wong were found to be working at the NECC, while the majority of Che Wong were working as jungle products collectors. Therefore, the NECC was only benefiting a small group of the Che Wong. On the other hand, the NECC resulted in a large number of the Che Wong losing their "bank".

“(Roaming areas) Land of the antecedents. Since the olden days, our children (have been living) in the jungle. They take the land and we lost our food (source). That is our bank ... (This is) robbery.” (informant D)

The term “bank” is used by the Che Wong to represent how much they depend on the jungle. The Che Wong collect jungle resources such as bamboo, rattan, resin, wood, sandalwood, petai, fruits, and frogs. These resources are used by the Che Wong and sold to outsiders. The Che Wong have the skills to climb the petai tree and choose the suitable petai for sale. The petai is then sold to outsiders via a middleman with a low price. Although the Che Wong have realised that they are selling petai at a low price, they have to sell it to middlemen as they do not have any business skills. Therefore, any changes to the jungle environment will directly affect the Che Wong. The NECC project’s impact on the Che Wong, although the amount of land needed for the project was not too big, nevertheless intruded into the Che Wong’s roaming area and particular river spots. As informant F explained:

“They took our land ... The area we’re looking for food. They occupied our land, then we don’t have enough land to look for food. Then how can we find food for our household? Ha, the river, a long time ago, (contained) a large amount of fish there. But now it is occupied by the elephants (the NECC).”

This encroachment of their roaming area affected the Che Wong’s daily routine. The NECC development may have benefited some local residents, but did not benefit the entire Che Wong community. Nevertheless, the development project was expected to have a direct impact on the Che Wong economy. The project location is attractive to local and international tourists. Through tourists, the Che Wong was assumed to have more opportunity for local economic activity. But some informants felt that the tourists’ visits were interrupting their lives. They felt that the privacy of their lives was invaded, for example, by being photographed while they were sleeping or feeding.

“Even when we sleep, they (tourists) are taking pictures. Eating, drinking, taking a bath, they take (photos). (They) think we’re just like the elephants too. Like zoos. What people say, there is no privacy.” (informant B)

Following the NECC, the DWNP was planned (while this study was being conducted) to improve tiger custody. The project had a similar aim to the NECC project: to control certain species of tigers from extinction. The Che Wong reacted negatively to this effort, as the project was perceived as not benefiting the Che Wong, and possibly even harming them.

The Che Wong did not have knowledge of the intricacies of the tiger. They were afraid of tigers because there were cases of people being killed by tigers. This project would probably not attract Che Wong to joint development, and conversely would hold them back from developing. This situation has resulted in the Che Wong becoming secluded from development, despite its implementation in their settlement area. This situation has also occurred in other indigenous groups. For instance, a study by Temper and Martines-Alier (2013), reported that a Net Present Value (NPV) project implemented in Indian indigenous territories had excluded local peoples’ participation, and for this reason the project was not effective.

Isolated – development deliberately marginalises the Che Wong

The research also found events that caused the Che Wong to become isolated from development. The term “isolated” differs from “secluded”. “Secluded” referred to accidental marginalisation of the Che Wong by development, caused by not encouraging them to take part in development. Not encouraging them to participate was defined by the Che Wong as not being invited to plan, undertake, and evaluate a development. By contrast, the term “isolated” is the deliberate marginalisation of the Che Wong by development, such as denying the Che Wong a relationship with the jungle and demarcating their land as government land.

Denying the Che Wong’s relationship with the jungle

The close relationship between Orang Asli and the jungle is acknowledged by all parties, which is why Orang Asli are also known as the forest people (Amir Zal 2013). Most plans and efforts of Orang Asli

developers, including the Regrouping Plan, have attempted to maintain this jungle environment. This approach recognises that the Orang Asli depend on the jungle for their economic and social activity and identity.

However, something different has been happening in the village of the Che Wong. Despite the developers knowing about the dependency of the Che Wong on the jungle, they assumed that the Che Wong would easily adapt to modification by a developer. Hence, they drastically implemented development and expected the Che Wong to adapt quickly. This approach has marginalised the Che Wong. There is no question that the Che Wong have been adapting to development. An indicator of this can be ascertained from physical and non-physical aspects. From a physical aspect, the Che Wong have accepted houses made from concrete, whereas before they lived in houses made of natural resources. From a non-physical aspect, they have also changed their opinions regarding traditional and modern life. Informant G stated:

“Nowadays, (it is) more comfortable, as before (it was) a bit difficult ... Without electricity, (we) used water (from the) hill, (and) convertible roofs. Now it is easier, (we) even have beautiful homes. We have (now) changed, previously we endured in the jungle, now (we are) outside (the jungle). But (we) still need the jungle life. We do not know how to do it like the Malays. But (we) can learn ... Just to be able to survive like them (the Malays).”

Nonetheless, the development planners did not use this reality to induce the Che Wong to participate in the development momentum. Instead, their approach was based on the assumption that the Che Wong were objects that should blend into all development activities. The Che Wong expressed their regret that the developers did not involve them in the development process. As a consequence, the development did not benefit their life, and on the contrary was detrimental. This was because the development planners did not consider the importance of the jungle and its impact on the Che Wong’s way of life. Informants were disappointed that the development planners were not interested in asking them how best to proceed with the development and what the best approach was in using jungle resources for their benefit.

“We (are) more expert of the jungle ... (They) should come ask (us). Must call for us. We know we don’t have education certificates, but we’re living longer (in the jungle).” (informant K)

The Che Wong’s perspective exposes how little they are accommodated in development, whereas ideally every aspect of development should be implemented in a manner that does not estrange them. The research indicated that the Che Wong had difficulty in accepting development because the developers did not invite them to be directly involved. This situation results in marginalisation amongst the Orang Asli, especially when it happens close to their settlements. Hasan et al. (2009) similarly observed the impact of development on the Orang Seletar. The development was not for them, but used their traditional land without consultation. Similar to the Che Wong, they were only observers, and so interpreted their situation as being isolated from the development.

Rumours about the land as state land

Land is a sensitive issue among the Orang Asli. Land is directly connected to the Orang Asli identity and evicting them from land is tantamount to removing their identity. Even the traditional knowledge of Orang Asli is directly connected to the jungle, such as finding and using herbs, hunting, use of sustainable jungle resources, value creation, and cosmology. Orang Asli also believe that the whole of Malaysia’s land is their right, which they can use either for settlement, roaming, cemeteries, and so on.

Likewise, the Che Wong are dependent on the land. According to informants, the Che Wong feel isolated in terms of land issues. The Che Wong were disclosed the status of their village lands by government officials. They were told that their village land was presently possessed by the government and that their current land status was the Orang Asli reserve status, with tenants at will status. The Che Wong were not clear on the status of their lands, especially regarding the different classes of

land possession. This included land reserve status, leasing, and permanent possession. An example was stated by informant L:

“Rumours said this land is owned by the government, not Orang Asli ... This is (an) ancestral land, Orang Asli land ... If (it is) the government’s land, they can occupy as they want.”

Their confusion became obvious when the researchers asked the Che Wong to explain their land status in detail. What stood out clearly was that the Che Wong wanted communal land form, which would be freely accessible by any Che Wong. The rule was enforced by the Che Wong as performed for their ancestors. At the same time, informants also expected individual possession of land, which included the home and plant fields. This is because others would then not interrupt their individual positions.

“The customary lands, it cannot be for the remote people. That’s Orang Asli land ... If you want to divide a land, please do not take away our current land ... Give another land (to us). Do not stir up our customary lands and our roaming areas ... But to a larger extent and more, (it is the birthland of) Orang Asli.” (informant K)

Initially, not much attention was given by the Che Wong to the matter of land possession, especially private ownership. This issue only arose when the Orang Asli began to live in settled areas. Previously, the Che Wong lived a nomadic life, depending on the surroundings and jungle resources. As discussed in the chronicles of the Che Wong, they journeyed several times until finally settling down. Before that, they lived scattered in small groups of nomads. Therefore, the subject of individual ownership of land did not arise. Each of the Che Wong were able to freely explore the jungle, collect jungle resources, clear lands, and construct a village. Unsurprisingly, rumours of the government possessing land created negative repercussions among the Che Wong. They considered it a threat to their lives.

“(If they are) Using up our land, (so) where are we going to live? ... We remain undeveloped. The areas to look for food have disappeared (It is), even hard to find rattan. Therefore, I said (the acquisition of land for development) is not for the Orang Asli.” (informant L)

The informants’ interpretation indicated that the Che Wong find themselves not the primary objective of development, despite the fact that it encroached upon their domain. On the other hand, they did not waive their priority in development efforts. The informants felt secluded from the development occurring close to them. The Che Wong is not an exclusive case. Peluso and Vandergeest (2001) agree that the land or forest is very important to all citizenry. Thus, the lack of rights to land, through various ways including the imposition of a special regulation, would make anyone feel marginalised.

Marginalised – the Che Wong marginalises development

The issue of Orang Asli failure to participate in development is associated with issues of seclusion and isolation. Both terms indicate a state of passivity and defencelessness in the development process, reflecting the Orang Asli as only objects in development. This section of our research demonstrates otherwise. Our results indicate that the Orang Asli have been actively dealing with development. The Che Wong had a direct reaction to the development happening around them; they turned down some development, which we termed as “marginalisation”. Some of these reactions are clues that they wish to leave developed areas and carry on life with traditional activities.

Leaving the developed areas

Although many of the Che Wong have received PPRT, this does not mean they have agreed to remain permanently in their houses. Among the informants, a major complaint was that the house was not suitable as it was hot and uncomfortable to stay in. The materials utilised to construct the houses were different to those utilised by the Che Wong to build their traditional houses. A PPPRT house

is made from steel, concrete, and zinc or asbestos, whereas an Orang Asli traditional house is built entirely from natural materials, where wood poles, floors, and walls are made from bamboo and leather, while roofs are made from wood and thatched Nipa fruticans.

This use of different materials from their traditional houses made the Che Wong feel uncomfortable inside these houses. As a result, the Che Wong do not live permanently in these houses. Instead, the houses have become just a transit place for a certain period. The Che Wong's discomfort has caused them to build traditional houses next to their PPRT house. There are also some members of the Che Wong community who refuse to dwell in the PPRT houses.

"It is hot ... Our kids have difficulties to sleep. The roofs (are) constructed from a material (that) is not suitable (They) don't (build the house) by asking us, we experience discomfort. Besides the PPRT house, we got a (traditional) house ... We (are) comfortable living in (the traditional house) because of the calmness." (informant N)

Although the PPRT houses were built according to common procedure specifications, the Che Wong were unable to adapt to these houses. They preferred to not fully use the house and some of them were not interested in it at all. The Che Wong reaction shows that the development that has been taking place has marginalised them. This finding is supported by Swainson and McGregor (2008), who argue that it is not easy to implement effective development among the Orang Asli, as the Orang Asli have intrinsic place-based cultural and spiritual values.

Persisting in traditional activities

There are lots of development indicators in the Che Wong village, such as a tarred road, modern houses, and a basic infrastructure. However, there is a pattern of the Che Wong avoiding development by not utilising the facility and not taking part in development processes. Instead, they have preferred to continue a traditional life, including their traditional economic activity. They affirm their life by the traditional way of life, which depends on the jungle. They do not utilise modern conveniences installed in the village, such as electricity and public water provision. Instead, they are choosing to live according to traditional routines, such as using wood to make bonfires and build houses, and using hill or river water.

The Che Wong use bonfires for cooking, to warm the body, to repel mosquitoes and wild animals, and as a source of illumination at night. To make a bonfire, the Che Wong get wood from the jungle. Usually the Che Wong do not cut live trees for firewood. Instead, when they find a fallen tree trunk, they pick off a broken tree branch and take it home. By using the wood to make fire, the Che Wong does not require an electricity source.

Another factor contributing to this demeanour is the location of the houses, which are built deep in the hobo camp. The Che Wong houses are not connected by a paved road, just by a small trail that is easily accessible by motorcycles or pedestrians. Going around the area by motorcycle would take between 30 minutes to 50 minutes, or two to three hours by foot. Despite this being a life far away from modern convenience, the Che Wong do not see it as hard.

"It's not hard ... Since the children (have living in the jungle) ... Previously in that location are no lamps, just like this (without a lamp). It's Orang Asli life, if (we do) not live like this, (then) how can we? (We) Can live well, (it's) not hard. The hard (part) is paying (the) electricity bill." (informant M)

The study found that the Che Wong felt that the modern lifestyle is working against them, because it involves certain costs that they have to endure, for example, electricity and water bills. Paying these bills causes them to be in debt. From the perspective of the Che Wong, the cost of these bills could be used for other purposes. Hence, they prefer to live without utility costs.

"Electricity bill has to be paid, the water too. If normal life (traditional), there is no cost. To burn firewood, drink and bathe, (we) just go back (to the river close to home)." (informant O)

They view their settlements in the jungle as better because it is easier to obtain natural resources there. The location of a house in the jungle allows the Che Wong to collect jungle resources at

any time. Accordingly, the Che Wong will only be outside the jungle if they hope to sell their products that have been accumulating. There are other reasons the Che Wong continue to be in the jungle, such as feeling more relaxed and not being affected by disturbance. The village is far from the group settlement, and being accompanied by the sounds of animals, insects, and rushing rivers makes the Che Wong feel calm. By contrast, in the PPRT area they are often distracted by the noise from other houses.

We found that the Che Wong mainly choose to live in the jungle and only occasionally will go out of the jungle. The Che Wong were also found to operate traditional economic activities, primarily sourcing food either for their own use or for sale, and practising traditional knowledge. Their traditional knowledge has been handed down from generations. However, currently most of the Che Wong products are being produced to occupy the market demand of other communities. This method allows the Che Wong to buy basic necessities.

For example, the Che Wong supply petai to Malay middlemen to earn money. The money is then used to purchase rice, bread, tea and coffee, clothing, batteries, kerosene oil, and other basic needs. Since the Che Wong do not have education certificates, they cannot obtain comfortable jobs that accommodate their interests or demands. If they do manage to get a job, the Che Wong often become depressed as they are usually required to work hard for a low wage. Hence, the Che Wong usually decide to be self-employed by gathering natural resources. This can be seen from the response by informant O: *“I want to (live) near (the) rattan sources, (there is) no need to climb down (the jungle). To get rattan, (it’s) easier to access.”*

The Che Wong are insistent in not considering other businesses, preferring the traditional work that they are well adapted for. They think that traditional work is far more stable and easy to manage. Some of their actions indicate that the Che Wong marginalises development. Considering the difficulties involved, the Che Wong choose not to take part in mainstream development. Instead, they choose their own way of life for their survival. According to Tacey and Riboli (2014), certain past experiences have greatly influenced the Orang Asli’s (Batek) present attitudes toward development. Current and past marginalised cases certainly will have an effect on their view of development activity.

Conclusion and recommendations

This research disclosed three terms in explaining the marginalisation amongst the Orang Asli, especially in the Che Wong case. Marginalisation was mentioned in the context of specific cases and settings. The marginalisation of the Orang Asli can be described more accurately using three terms: isolated, secluded, and marginalised. These terms were exposed by weaknesses in implementing developments, namely the use of a single dominant approach in a development activity – the top-down approach. This involves a single party planning and implementing a development activity. Second, there is a tendency to generalise the marginalisation of the Orang Asli in a development activity by employing a single term.

The first weakness renders the decision reached to be based on an assumption, not grounded reality. The decision will not be accurate and will be rejected by the recipient. This configuration was also reported by Ruhanen, Whitford, and McLennan (2015), who found that the dominance of the tourism sector amongst indigenous Australians was not used fully because the sector continued to be based on an assumption. This approach also was the reason for the Che Wong’s refusal to join development efforts. These conclusions are supported by Dorsner (2008), who experienced similar issues preventing participation in a Senegalese project. If the communities themselves are involved in the project, they will have more enthusiasm to invest their skills long-term in the project. One example of a successful case is the Tagal system, which was utilised for tourism activities in Sabah, Malaysia. This is a traditional system of knowledge possession of a local people. Jury (2011) found that a tourism development process that utilised local potential benefited the local people immensely, not just economically but also from environmental and societal aspects.

The weakness of the top-down approach to development also created a situation where the Orang Asli refused to become involved in development activity. While development planners do consider the Orang Asli's involvement in development, they do not ask the Orang Asli's view regarding all the developmental activities to be done to them. More effective development will happen when planning, implementation, and evaluation are discussed by both sides. This suggests that the partnership approach is suitable in this instance. This conclusion is supported by Higgins-Desbiolles, Trevorrow, and Sparrowc (2014), who realised that in order to develop an indigenous population in Australia, particularly through tourism, all parties must be involved together. This approach will help to avoid a biased perspective in the development process. Nevertheless, encouraging the Orang Asli to become involved in their own development should be carried out gradually, taking into account the changes in their values and customs. This is because change involves a great deal of new values, and cannot be altered in a short time. Nevertheless, it is important to encourage a confident and active involvement of Orang Asli in all development projects affecting them.

The tendency to use a single word to explain the whole problem of marginalisation amongst the Orang Asli should be avoided, as it is inaccurate. Three terms have been presented in this article to explain the marginalisation of Orang Asli. It is hoped that the introduction of these terms will help to solve problems such as the tendency to blame failed development on a particular person who was involved, either directly or indirectly. Each term was decided based on a specific setting and took into account the values behind the marginalisation. The authors believe that the introduction of these terms will help researchers and policymakers consider development problems specifically on a case-by-case basis. Understandably, this will require more time and effort; however, this approach will help all people involved in a development activity to not negatively labelled. Also, this will help ensure that appropriate lessons can be learnt from a development process failure.

Another benefit of these terms is that they will provide a more accurate view to policymakers, enabling them to plan more specific developments for the Orang Asli. The design of the development process must take into account the subjects' position and their values, and should not be determined solely by policymakers. Both parties should be involved in all phases of planning. Many development projects have failed due to the developer ignoring the relevant society's values. Orang Asli developers must learn from these experiences so as not to repeat the same mistake.

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