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THE INDIGENOUS FOREST NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEM AMONG THE PENAN COMMUNITY OF SARAWAK, MALAYSIA

Abstract:

The Penans, one of the indigenous communities in the Malaysian state of Sarawak (Borneo) used to live the nomadic lives. Today, many have settled down in villages along riverbanks, and resorted to do small farming. Despite this, they still venture into the jungle to gather jungle produces and hunting. They have developed a close and personal relationship with the jungle. Their lifestyle also requires them to equip themselves with deep knowledge of the jungle. Their journey into the jungle can be between few days to few months. The group usually consists of two or more people. The deep rainforests may form various challenges to Penans, thus they have developed a unique sign system, called 'oro' to help them navigating the dense forest. This indigenous system also leaves signs to fellow trekkers to locate them if any untoward incidence occurs. This paper shares some of these unique practices and symbols used by the Penans people in navigating the forests which form part and parcel of their lives. It gives insights of the "oro" and how the knowledge being transferred from one generation to the next. The concept of tacit knowledge refers to knowledge possessed only by an individual and difficult to communicate to others via words and symbols. While much of these knowledge are taught theoretically in classrooms, the teaching and learning among the Penans of Sarawak often take place in-situ, impromptu and unconscious. The knowledge exchanges usually take place between older and younger generation onsite, experienced and eventually transferred.

Keywords:

Oro, Indigenous Knowledge, Traveling Culture, Knowledge Transfer, Malaysia, local wisdom

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