



The Exploration of Social Capital and Its Relation with Economic Empowerment of Orang Kuala in Johor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Trust economic empowerment is an issue that is rarely debated in discussing the reality of Orang Asli's economy. Instead, other issues such as lagging behind, poverty, and marginalization of Orang Asli often become the hot topics for discussion. History, however, has shown that Orang Asli have been conducting economic activities with other communities for ages, even though the returns of the aforementioned activities are not encouraging for them. Orang Asli also have shown, through their history, their ability to fulfil other communities' needs. Such a relationship directly indicates the relation of social capitals and economic empowerment among Orang Asli. In order to examine this issue, a study was carried out. The study was conducted on seven interviewees, who are the Orang Kuala villagers, residing at Bumiputera Dalam, Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia. Data were gathered by using in-depth interview method and semi-structured interview protocol technique. Data gathered were then analysed by using QSR NVivo software. The findings of this study showed that Orang Kuala have social capitals but the relationship differs according to the types of social capital, the bonding social and the bridging social capital. In particular, Orang Kuala have weak bonding social capital but possess a strong bridging social capital. They also show the ability to empower their economy through self-reliant, participation in businesses, increase in revenues and ability to control their income. As a conclusion, this study concluded that the economic empowerment of Orang Kuala is a result of bridging social capital.

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INTRODUCTION

Economic empowerment is one of the important aspects for community development. Even so, the process or the goal of economic empowerment is not per se in nature; instead, it requires other elements to uphold it, which is the social capital. In general, social capital owned by a community could revitalise the economy of a community (Payne, 2006). This is because the principle of empowerment depends on the ability of resource-based communities to make changes (Kapitsa, 2008). Since the process of community development involves relationship with other communities (Obibuaku, 1983, cited in Ajayi & Otuya, 2006), social capitals are often defined as a social relation that is important in empowering the economy of a community.

Such a community relationship has managed to attract attention from Callaghan and Colton (2008) who state that the stability, flexibility, resiliency and sustainability of a development, especially in the economy aspect can be maintained through it. According to Emery and Flora (2006), the relationship will ultimately create a strong momentum that gives people opportunities to serve others better through capital appreciation. For example, the increasing community mental health depends on strong social networks (Coker, 2008).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Orang Asli are the indigenous groups in Peninsular Malaysia (Ramle, 2007). The communication between their communities and the 'outside' communities is low, yet they exercise good relationships with other communities of Orang Asli from other places. The various forms of social relation between Orang Asli and other communities and within their communities are what often called as social capital (Monkman, Ronald, & Théràmène, 2005). Social capital is important as it generates beneficial outcomes to the relationship. Social capital can be viewed from two angles; the bonding social capital and the bridging social capital (Payne, 2006). In this article, the bonding social capital refers to the relationship among the Orang Asli, while the bridging social capital is defined as the relationship between Orang Asli with the other communities. Researchers such as Ramle (1993), Gomes (2004), and Toshiro (2009) have found that Orang Asli have a close bond with each other. This is highlighted through their daily activities which are performed together (Wazir-Jehan, 1981). However, as the time passes and as they are being exposed to development, the bond between them has also changed. Itam Wali Nawan (1993) discovered that the exposure to development has caused the young people of Orang Asli to transfer and migrate to other places, making the social ties between Orang Asli .

At the same time, the rapport between Orang Asli and outsiders has long existed, i.e., since the 15th century (Gianno & Bayr,

2009) through economic-commercial activities (Dunn, 1975; Carey, 1977; Nicholas, Chopil & Sabak, 2003; Gianni & Bayr, 2009). The economic activities at that time involved the sale of forest products consisting of resin and other forest produce and such activities are still happening until today (Rambo, 1979; Sarjit & Amir Zal, 2009; Amir Zal & Ma'Rof, 2010). The impacts of economic activities create economic interaction and have opened up a space for Orang Asli to build networks with outsiders, either to market their products or for other purposes. Such interactions may indicate the existence of social capital in the form of bridging social capital between Orang Asli and other communities, although in certain situation, the benefits gained by Orang Asli are of minimum returns (Gomes, 2007; Toshihiro, 2009; Amir Zal & Ma'Rof, 2010). The opportunities for Orang Asli to build the bridging social capital are getting bigger if these are considered from the perspective of their placement. Data from JHEOA (2008) showed a total of 62.4 per cent and 0.7 per cent of Orang Asli villages are now located in the sub-urban or city. This indicates the opportunities for Orang Asli to interact with other people and build networks with them are getting higher. However, a question arises: Has bridging social capital between the Orang Asli and outsiders occurred holistically? This is because a study conducted by Amir Zal and Ma'Rof (2010) revealed that bridging social capital is very low because of the 'middlemen', namely, those who become negotiators in buying and selling the products of Orang Asli.

Furthermore, from economic empowerment of Orang Asli point of view, scholars such as Gomes (2007), Tuck-Po (2005), Gianni and Bayr (2009), Toshihiro (2009) and Amir Zal and Ma'Rof (2010) often see activities conducted by Orang Asli as ones that could not be separated from the acquisition of their economic resources. However, this is only seen from the perspective of routine activities and economic exploitation by outsiders. The discussion from the aspects of Orang Asli's economic empowerment is still an uncommon practice among researchers.

To discuss this issue, the history of Orang Asli's economic empowerment must first be viewed. During the Malay feudalism in the 18th and 19th centuries, Orang Asli were abused and enslaved (Mansor, Abdul Rahman & Mohamad Ainuddin, 2007); however, the situation changed after Malaysia gained independence. Various plans have been designed by the government to help them. The effort could be seen from the Seventh to the Tenth Malaysia Plan, involving more than RM400 million (JHEOA, 2008). However, the development has been carried out through a paternalistic, dominated and controlled approach by the government (Asnarulkhadi & Hanina, 2008). This means Orang Asli are not brought to participate in planning their own development. Thus, Orang Asli are not exposed to determine their lives independently.

Despite the fact that they are not participating in the planning of their own development, the findings by Gianni and Bayr (2009) showed the economic

empowerment seemed to have occurred among the Orang Asli of the Semelai tribe. They are less dependent on the outsiders even after the introduction of agricultural crops. Similarly, the findings by Amir Zal and Ma'Rof (2010) reported the earnest of Orang Asli in searching products from forests and their resistance towards repression and exploitation by outsiders. In regard to the relationship between social capital and economic empowerment, Verhoef (2008) stresses that the interrelation between them, especially in the context of the impacts and benefits of social capitals on economic growth, does exist. Similarly, Bridger and Alter (2006) also stated that there is a relation between social capitals and economic changes. In reality, Orang Asli have shown almost the same thing although indirectly to the economic empowerment per se. For example, the finding by Toshihiro (2009) directly relates the Orang Asli and outsiders (bridging social capital) with an impact on Orang Asli's economy. Similarly, Gomes (2007) reflects on the same aspect. His view is on the economic growth, although it has no direct impact towards Orang Asli. Amir Zal and Ma'Rof (2010) agreed with this to a certain extent, but looking at how to leverage the relationship between Orang Asli and middlemen to produce better economic benefits to them. Based on this discussion, the current study drew a number of specific issues such as:

1. What are the social capitals of Orang Kuala?
2. Is there economic empowerment among Orang Kuala?

3. Is there any relationship between social capital and economic empowerment among Orang Kuala?

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN COMMUNITIES

The term social capital was first used in 1961 by Jane Jacobs, but according to Kay (2006), the term has actually been used since the 19th century. The term 'capital' in this study does not refer to the term used by the economists in describing property, stocks, bonds and cash (Phillips & Pittman, 2009). Instead, capital in this study is seen as the talent, skills and capacities of an individual, unions and institutions (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). For Kretzmann and McKnight, capital is an asset. Therefore, one could consider that an individual, a nation, an organization and community that have capital can make decisions for their future in a better way (Diacon & Guimarães, 2003). Scholars categorise social capital into two; the bonding social capital (Agnitsch, Flora & Ryan, 2006) and the bridging social capital (Campbell *et al.*, 2010).

The bonding social capital is known as an entity that allows people to interact with others and to build trust within their own community (Payne, 2006). For Putnam (2000), this capital is referred as the social relations of a homogeneous group and represents the internal view that tends to reinforce their identity. This also runs in tandem with Larsen *et al.* (2004), Leonard (2004), and Bottrell (2009) who believe that social model (social capital) can help to strengthen the social tie in a local homogenous group.

The bonding social capital becomes an important source in establishing a viable rural community (Wilkinson, 1991, as cited in Bottrell, 2009; George, 2008). The bonding social capital creates solidarity among members of local groups (Bottrell, 2009). The establishment of solidarity creates a strong social interdependence of each other (Bridger & Alter, 2006, George, 2008). This shows that social capital is critical in creating a strong social bond within the neighbourhood (Payne, 2006), and it provides the opportunities to develop mutual trust and cooperation between the people such as on how to deal with problems in the community, social problems, poverty and crimes.

The bridging social capital, on the other hand, is associated with heterogeneous communities (Agnitsch *et al.*, 2006), which goes beyond than the internal community affair (Coffé, Geys & Geys, 2008). For Payne (2006) and Dale and Newman (2010), bridging social capital is the ability of a community to communicate with other communities outside their own circle. This relationship includes the purpose of expanding contacts (Agnitsch *et al.*, 2006), gaining support or information (Larsen *et al.*, 2004) that goes beyond members of the circle. This also means that the bridging social capital can be referred to as the development between communities (Campbell *et al.*, 2010). Besides, the associated organizations also come from different backgrounds (Putnam, 2000). Although the individuals or organizations are outside of the local community and do

not know each other, they share the same interest or are willing to share the same opportunities; namely, the opportunities in economy (UN-HABITAT, 2008).

The bridging social capital is important for the community. It brings them closer to the external network of communities that can give positive impacts for them (Coffé & Geys, 2007). Bridger and Alter (2006) mentioned that social capital provides community members with ample opportunity to access external resources and at the same time, promotes dissemination of information through the creation of a network. Such characteristics of bridging social capital have made it known to be the bright side of social capital (Coffé & Geys, 2008), that is, members of the community gain benefits that are difficult to be found before (Bottrell, 2009).

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Economic empowerment is an important aspect for empowerment (Basargekar, 2009). As a matter of fact, economic empowerment leads to a balance development (Laverack & Thangphet, 2009). For example, the empowerment of women is measured in terms of economic empowerment (Moyle, Dollard, & Biswas, 2006; Hollifield, Donnermeyer, Wolford, & Agunga, 2007; Vyas & Watts, 2009). More specifically, economic empowerment leads to poverty reduction (Basargekar, 2009; Vyas & Watts, 2009), which encourages a community to be self-reliance from the economic aspect. It also increases resources that can be used

and reduces problems in order to achieve a higher income (Basargekar, 2009).

According to Kantor (2005), economic empowerment includes revenues, earnings, value added and turnover, which allow women to compensate for market control and gain control over their corporate profit. The parameters used by Kantor (2005) are the control of company, profitability and numbers of individual to be contacted such as suppliers, contractors and customers. Control over income is measured by the question of who makes decision on the use of revenue gained. This also shows that participation in economic development will increase the empowerment of an individual (Wilson, 1996).

Economic empowerment is also seen from the context of revenue and its relation to the quality of life (Moyle, Dollard & Biswas, 2006); with a strong economy, a community will be able to generate employment and income (Phillips & Pittman, 2009). This is achieved by creating new jobs as the key to wealth and to improved standard of living, improving the standard of living through higher income per capita, as well as the quality of work and employment (Phillips & Pittman, 2009).

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Many research findings have proven that social capital and economic empowerment are linked with one another (Green & Dougherty, 2008). They further explained that being independent is an indicator of economic empowerment, which happens

when a community takes advantage on the existing network based on their strengths. This is to enable them to be independent from external parties that try to gain economic benefits from them. Apart from that, they can also help other people in their community. Costa (2005) found that women empowerment happens when they get new job, their income increases and their ability to meet their won needs and those of their families.

Such a fact, however, is due to the beliefs that exist within each individual; one that is related to the community network (Wilson, 1996). The beliefs shape specific behaviours among community members (Boyd *et al.*, 2008; Qingwen *et al.*, 2010). Meanwhile, participation in the network clearly shows the existence of a mutual relationship between social capital and economic empowerment. This is disclosed by Bowen (2008) as the link between economic reform and social change. Cameron and Gibson (2005) stated that social capital helps the economy and generates positive socio-economic development and the opposite will happen if a community has a weak network. As a conclusion, it was found that economic activities among rural households give the minimum impact on the empowerment of women because of the low network with outside parties (Bose, Alia Ahmad, & Mahabub Hossain, 2009).

Du Toit, Kruger and Ponte (2008) further reinforce the argument on the link between participation and empowerment. According to them, economic empowerment happens when one relates himself with

external networks. The Black Economic Empowerment, as stated by Ponte, Roberts and Sittert (2007), is a good example to explain the relation of the aforementioned issue; that economic empowerment occurs when people in the community have access to outside network.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted among the Orang Asli tribe of Kuala or Duano who are residing at Bumiputera Dalam, Rengit, located in Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia. The researchers chose this particular location/area because of its uniqueness and differences from other villages of Orang Asli. These include their success in improving their local economic activities. The reason why the economy of Orang Kuala at the village is empowered is because it centres on businesses. In fact, they have also opened economic opportunities to other communities such as to the Malays who are working with them.

Data were collected through in-depth interview method based on the interview protocol. This protocol is more flexible and responsive in obtaining data. This technique is needed to explore the issues raised in this research thoroughly. The interview was conducted on seven informers or individuals who served as references and have authority in the community such as Tok Batin, JKKK chairman, and businessmen at the aforementioned village.

When the interview was being conducted, in-depth questions were asked to the informers by using probing technique

(Walliman, 2006). The use of the language and questions in the interview protocol questions were based on Walliman's (2006) and Majumdar's (2008) proposal; an interview needs to be conducted in an easy language so it can be understood by interviewees. This can be done by understanding their culture and way of life (Goulding, 2002). The formation of the in-depth interview protocol in this study was done by taking into account the procedure outlined by Gray *et al.* (2007), i.e. researchers must understand and familiarize themselves with the objectives of the study in advance. Therefore, data from the interview protocol are believed to be valid and reliable to answer the objectives of this study.

After interviewing the informers, the researchers transcribed the conversations. The completed and transcribed texts were then analysed by using a computer software known as QSR NVivo. The researchers built open codes derived from the raw data, and then the code was classified into the same category. In this process, the open codes are filtered to avoid duplication. In the next step, the researchers categorized the groups formed from the previous process into specific themes based on the objectives of the study. This process was done through the functions of Tree Nodes and Free Nodes QSR NVivo. Each developed theme guided researchers to describe the reality of the research informants.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Background of Orang Kuala

The village of Bumiputera Dalam at Rengit is occupied by the Orang Kuala, a tribe in the Orang Asli community. However, Orang Kuala do not favor the term 'Orang Kuala' as they think it is used to underrate them. Hence, they are more comfortable with the names Orang Laut (Sea people), Orang Asli, Malay Asli or Orang Duanu (or also spelled as Duano). Orang Kuala are the sub-ethnic of the Malay Proto. They are known as Orang Kuala for several reasons: 1) they reside along river or sea; and 2) they work as a fisherman or any activities related to water.

Since their work is very much related to river or ocean, they are also often referred to as Orang Laut, while other Orang Asli tribes living on lands are referred to as Orang Asli Darat (Land People) or Orang Sakai. In the bigger group of Orang Asli, apart from Orang Kuala, Orang Laut is also referred as Orang Seletar and Mah Meri. Mah Meri is also known as Ma' Betisek or Besese. From religion point of view, all Orang Kuala are Muslims. Unlike other Orang Asli tribes, who need to be converted, Orang Kuala have been practicing Islam since their ancestors' days. They also allege, based on the stories which have been passed down from one generation to another, that they are connected to Orang Asli in Riau, Indonesia. From a different view, Chou (2003) and Andaya (2008) stated that the Orang Asli tribe in Riau is not called Orang Kuala but rather Orang Laut or Suku Sampan.

Most of the villagers in this study involved in selling second-hand products from Singapore or things that are taken without any middlemen's interference. However, this does not mean that all the villagers are involved in the same business. Among them, there are a few who are still focusing on the traditional way of earning money such as by fishing. Second-hand products include furniture, electrical appliances, toys and decorative items. The history of businesses among Orang Kuala can be traced back as early as 1990s. In the beginning, their businesses were conducted in small scale and located in their home area; some even renovated their home into second-hand goods store. Now, however, they are many convenience stores to facilitate their businesses. Their stores are visited by many visitors and tourists, including middlemen from Kelantan and Terengganu.

Ownership of the Social Capitals

1. Bonding Social Capital

Based on the observation done in this study, there is a huge difference between the lives of Orang Kuala at Bumiputera Dalam and other Orang Asli tribes, specifically from the physical aspect. This village has received major development, just like those living in the urban and sub-urban areas, and they have accepted the development positively. Most of them have houses made of concrete, equipped with basic amenities such as 24-hour electricity, piped water, paved roads

and other facilities. In fact, most of the villagers have shops or stores to display their products for sale.

Despite the positive development, the relationship among Orang Kuala is tenuous even when the villagers are of the same family members or living in the same neighbourhood. The tenuous relationship is manifested through their negative perceptions and behaviours towards one another. Among the negative perceptions that they hold are the belief that others will not help them if they have problem in their business and they also think that other people will feel happy if their businesses are closed down.

“Taking care of the others? Emm, it does not happen here sir. Everyone is more into taking care of their own business. My business ruined years ago and nobody ever bothered to help me or maybe they like it better.

(Mr. F)

Such a reality happens due to the intense competition in their businesses, which leads to the poor relationship among them. The main thing that is being considered in their social relation is the profit or loss in their businesses.

“That’s right, I do not like him. He is my husband’s brother. But he never comes to my house, though our home is close to one another. Due to business reasons... He said I took his business. But he has forgotten that it was me who

open the business first. Since then our relationship remains in bad condition”.

(Mrs. A)

The tenuous relationship was detected because of their prejudice and lack of proper communication with one another. However, they did admit that they used to have good relationships, and that such a situation only started once they involved in business. This also happened because they were focusing on selling the same product(s). Thus, it raises the competition in terms of building, maintaining, expending and sustaining their businesses. Kinship is no longer a force to establish cooperation among them, and the relationship is no longer significant, especially when it is about gaining profit.

The situation will become worst if their effort in gaining profit is being deprived. For example, the efforts of the villagers and the intervention of former Senator of Orang Asli managed to get a building specifically designed for the villagers to run their businesses. However, the number of the stores is not sufficient to all the residents who are involved in the businesses. The problem has caused dissatisfactions among the Orang Kuala. They associate it with cronyism, i.e. the failure to get the shop is described as an effort to sustain and maintain family’s businesses.

“I asked for a shop, but was rejected! The shop must be for their families only. Like this person, he has three children who are doing

business ... same business and everyone in his family got the store. And me? I do not get the store. How can I make a living here (in house). People no longer go from house to house to buy goods”.

(Mr. B)

The problem has caused distrust and unhappiness among them. It has developed a negative environment and tenuous relationship between the local people. The inadequacy of the stores was because there are many new middlemen who want to take advantage of the business. Their existence is not taken into account at the planning stage. This is due to the new traders who start to do business only after realizing the advantages and benefits that they would get from it.

2. Bridging Social Capital

Orang Kuala have good relationships with outsiders (people who are not of their community). The outsiders are divided into three categories; namely the customers, the people living nearby who are not Orang Kuala and the middlemen. However, the relationships or the way the outsiders are treated differs based on the category. They would treat the customers better and try to fulfil their requests by providing better services and supplying the desired goods, quantity, quality, price, and delivery service at reasonable prices. Orang Kuala only provide products that are considered as needs by their customers only.

“I buy all sorts of goods in Singapore, but I have to choose very well. If it is good for our customers, we will take it. But, we are not taking everything. Of course, we have to consider our customers’ tastes and needs. If not, we will not get the profit too, right?”.

(Mr. C)

The quality of the goods will then be improved; this includes repainting the furniture, and repairing electrical appliances that are purchased from Singapore, etc. By doing these, they hope to satisfy their customers’ requirements/ needs even though they are well aware the goods are of second-hand items. Prices are also placed reasonably and they also allow their customers to negotiate the price, depending on the profitability that they want to make. In fact, mutual trust exists between the Orang Kuala and their customers when they allow them to buy their products through debt. However, this applies only to customers whom they trust, or their regular customers. This shows a good rapport between Orang Kuala and their customers, although the relationship only involves business activities or buy-and-sell activities.

Orang Kuala also have good relationships with the non-Orang Kuala who are living nearby. The relationship is not only in the type of middleman-or-customer relationship but also in the social relation. Social relation means a relation seeks to add contacts and gain cooperation. This is to further assist their businesses. Through

this study, it was also found that outsiders have been assisting Orang Kuala in their businesses. Assisting in their businesses such as business capitals are injected from people outside of the community to them. In fact, this support is easily obtained from the outsiders compared to Orang Kuala, their own community.

“Like I told before, I have closed down my shop four times (in business). Have I received any help from them? No! This person, (while point the finger at someone next to him), he helped me. Give me financial aid and support to build back my business. Others? No way, they just want to see me fail in my business”.

(Mr. F)

Orang Kuala made two types of network among the middlemen. First, the middlemen in Singapore and second the local middlemen. Through their middlemen in Singapore, Orang Kuala get second-hand goods. The local middlemen, on the other hand, buy goods from Orang Kuala and sell them in their shops. Orang Kuala have very good relations with both networks. Singapore middlemen are Bangladeshi who collect goods that are no longer needed by Singaporeans. They usually gather items in one place and then contact Orang Kuala to collect them.

The middlemen, however, are still new among Orang Kuala. Previously, Orang Kuala had to collect goods on their own.

They travelled to Singapore and went from house to house to collect any usable goods. One of the advantages of doing this is that they can obtain second-hand goods for free. Now, by using the services of the middlemen, Orang Kuala do not need to trouble themselves to collect second-hand goods. Instead, they just have to wait for phone calls from the middlemen to get the items that are already collected. However, Orang Kuala have to buy the items from the middlemen.

The transaction however only involves certain middlemen. This often depends on the prices offered by the middlemen and the quality of the products. If the goods are not of their liking, they will make deals with other middlemen. The middlemen will also do likewise; the transaction will only happen if the prices offered by Orang Kuala are appropriate. The middlemen will only contact that particular Orang Kuala and not other individuals of the tribe. Such a reality reflects good relationships between Orang Kuala and their middlemen. This is to ensure that their businesses are sustained and developed at the same time.

“Emm, they are very important. If we do not keep these people, we will face a lot of problems in business”.

(Mr. A)

Their relationships with the local middlemen who buy goods from them are similar with the one mentioned above. Local middlemen are not only of the local residents but also from Kelantan, Terengganu and

Perak. If the middlemen need furniture or toys for children, they will contact Orang Kuala to ensure whether the items can be provided. Typically, Orang Kuala require one to two weeks in advance to book the items with Singapore middlemen. A good relationship with local middlemen brings handsome profits to Orang Kuala. That is why they appreciate such a relationship and always maintain it.

The differences of ownerships in the social capital among Orang Kuala can be concluded as in Table 1.

The Orang Kuala's Economic Empowerment

i. Initiative and self-reliant

The involvement of Orang Kuala from Bumiputera-Dalam village in second-hand-item business has taken place since the early 1990. Previously, most people in the village worked as fishermen. The business only started after Orang Kuala had realised the business potentials when they were selling their products (products made in their village) in Singapore. They saw a lot of unnecessary items removed by Singaporeans even though they were still usable. Such a situation made Orang Kuala

decided to collect the discarded usable goods and sell them in their village. After seeing the profits earned through the sales, the other villagers also participated in that economic activity. By the end of the 1990s, the business grew and they started to get huge responses from the outsiders.

Even though they were still new and probably knew nothing much about Singapore, they had travelled and collected items to make their living. They visited residential apartments or condominiums where the residents typically removed their items to the lowest level of their housing area. However, they faced several problems especially the one relating to transportation, i.e. to move the second-hand items from Singapore to their hometown. Such a situation forced them to opt for others' services, i.e. from the middlemen. They rented a van to unload the goods at RM500 for a trip from Singapore to Malaysia. The payment did not include the money for petrol and consolation to the driver. In addition, they also had to use an interpreter if they face difficulty in communicating with middlemen. However, most of the time, they interact by writing on the white boards provided by the middlemen. The method was used when bargaining was done

TABLE 1
A comparison of the context of ownership of the social capital among Orang Kuala

		Social capital contexts		
		Trust	Mutual connection	Involve in business
Bonding social capital	Local residents (Orang Kuala)	x	x	x
	Singapore Middlemen	√	√	√
Bridging social capital	Local Middlemen	√	√	√

between Orang Kuala and the Singaporean middlemen.

Despite of the huge cost involved and problems in communication, they are willing to do so because the profits gained will be much greater than the costs they need to pay. These show they have the initiatives to improve their life.

The efforts made by the Orang Kuala reflect the characteristics of their economic empowerment which is self-reliant. More importantly, they realize the opportunity to improve their economy and subsequently use own capabilities even though they do not have basic business skills such as reading and writing skills, which are crucial for the aforementioned activity.

“I was the first person to start the business. At that time I knew nothing about business what more how to read and write. But I know how to calculate money. Hehehe. Yes, I also do not know how to begin my business. I only observed others, so I tried too. Everything was on my own.

(Mr. B)

ii. Decision Making and Economic Consideration Skills

Orang Kuala also have the skills to estimate the prices of goods to be purchased from the middlemen without depending on others. They do this by estimating the prices that will probably be offered by the customers and the profits that they will make. Such a logical thought helps them to gain profits.

“That’s easy, first I will estimate the number of customers that would buy the item, then I will add the basic price with the profit that I want and other costs; transportation and others. That is how my business is being conducted”.

(Mrs. A)

Their involvement in businesses also requires them to learn about foreign exchange currency rates. Purchasing goods from Singapore requires them to use Singapore dollar. Therefore, they need to know the amount of money to use since the goods are sold in Singapore dollar. The skill enables them to reap greater benefits if they know about currency exchange.

From another aspect, the ability to empower their economy is also due to the freedom in making decisions; they have the power to decide on what to do with their income. This power also includes determining the goods to be bought with their money. Their decisions are not influenced by other people but rather based on their own considerations. Similarly, they have freedom to inject capital into their businesses and to purchase new assets for their businesses.

“No, no one has forced me on how to utilize my money. My money is my money; I know what I can do with my money. I use it to buy new stuff. Ha, this house, my husband and I used our savings to build it”.

(Mrs. A)

iii. Worthwhile Returns

Finally, they stated that the income they earn from their businesses is worthwhile. They even claimed that their lives are different now compared to the previous days, where their main economic activities only focused on works related to the sea. To date, they have been able to build their own houses with the aforementioned income. Moreover, they can afford to buy other things such as cars and motorcycles. When asked about being independent in businesses, they agreed that they would be able to maintain their businesses without having to depend on other people, particularly on outsiders. However, they do not deny the fact that certain roles still need to be played by outsiders, and these are important to help their businesses to grow.

"I have never been helped by other people. People of Department (officers of Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli) never ask us about our business. Nope, do these people (the JAKOA) know how to do their work? But for me, I still want help from the outsiders. Like bankers. We need funds to do this business".

(Mr. A)

These findings show that the economy of Orang Kuala in the village of Bumiputera Dalam is very much empowered. It can be seen through the ownership of the attitudes of independent and initiative, ownership of fixed income and assets, and changes in life, especially in the economy.

The Relationship between Social Capitals and Economy Empowerment

This study also found that the bonding social capital of Orang Kuala is negative. This is because the relationship between Orang Kuala is depressing and tenuous. The situation does not contribute to the economic empowerment of Orang Kuala. In particular, it is a rare practice among Orang Kuala to help each other in advancing or expanding their businesses. Instead, they compete negatively and this leads to conflicts with each other. Being suspicious with others creates negative reactions among them and this does not help their economy empowerment in the long run.

"I do not know. But so far I have never asked help from other people. I must be flexible in order to live. If it is difficult to get even a customer, I will do something to attract them to my shop. But to date, for whatever reason, these people never help me".

(Mr. C)

In contrast, the bridging social capital among the Orang Kuala helps to empower their economy. The increase in revenues, and the ability to enhance and grow businesses stand out among them. This Orang Asli group even think that by having good relations with the outsiders will bring their businesses to another higher level. Success is measured through acquisition and increases in their income.

“Em, if you want to compare between the folks and outsiders, from my point of view, the outsiders are better. The reason ... I think, the villagers will never buy our goods, because these people have their own shop as well (selling the same item). But with outsiders, our profits are multiplied. I remember, the first time I started doing this business outsiders rushed to my shop to buy things from me. I definitely earn more money from the outsiders”.

(Mr. A)

A good relation between Orang Kuala and Singapore middlemen is meaningful. If they have good quality items, the Singapore middlemen will contact Orang Kuala. The middlemen will not sell the items to other Orang Kuala except to the one who has good relation with them. Thus, for the Orang Kuala, relationship with Singapore middlemen should be treated with care.

The relationship between Orang Kuala and local middlemen is also good. Apart from collecting items that have been booked in advance, they also buy goods which are available at Orang Kuala’s shops. Such an action allows Orang Kuala to clear their stocks immediately and purchase other

goods for sale. In this way, Orang Kuala can earn benefits faster. The relationship between Orang Kuala and outsiders also helps their economic empowerment. Financial supports, received from banks or loans, have enabled Orang Kuala to start their businesses. It also allows Orang Kuala to continue their businesses even though they have failed before. The relationship between social capital and economic empowerment has been concluded in Table 2.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we found that Orang Kuala have both types of social capital, known as the bonding social capital and the bridging social capital. The bonding social capital is represented by the relationship that exists between Orang Kuala or the relationship within the people in their community. The bonding social capital, from this study however, was found to be rather weak and it is manifested through negative behaviours such as ignorance and prejudice; they believe that everyone in their community is trying to destroy each other’s business.

This finding indicates a different reality from the studies done by some previous researchers. For example, Larsen *et al.* (2004) elucidated the bonding social capital could generate collective actions, especially

TABLE 2
The Correlation between Social Capitals and Economic Empowerment

	Type of economic empowerment		
	Mutual in business	Income increase	Self-reliance
Bonding social capital	X	X	X
Bridging social capital	√	√	√

in poor communities. Similarly, views made by George (2008) and De Silva *et al.* (2007) stress on the importance of bonding social capital for the community in dealing with a variety of problems. In contrast, this study also found that bonding social capital does not generate collective actions among the people of Orang Kuala, especially in increasing their business revenues. Instead, Orang Kuala consider others in their community as a threat to the continuity of their businesses.

The bridging social capital, on the other hand, indicates the opposite; Orang Kuala's bridging social capital is particularly strong with the middlemen, the nearby outsiders and their customers. It is manifested in the sense of trust, proper communication and participation in economy activities and such actions have increased their revenues. The findings run in tandem with Coffé and Geys (2007) who conclude that the bridging social capital is essential to any community. This is also agreed by Bridger and Alter (2006) who state bridging social capital allows community members to have access to external resources and promote the dissemination of information through the creation of network.

In reality, the economy of Orang Kuala is now empowered. They manage to use second-hand products as a means to provide them income. The initiatives and their efforts to maintain and sustain their businesses are fundamental indicators of their economic empowerment. Apart from that, the skills to determine the price of items, quantity that need to be supplied and other considerations

to ensure a good income also indicate that they are economically empowered. These findings show similar characteristics to the economic empowerment found by some previous researchers. The characteristics are independent (Wilson, 1996, Moyle *et al.*, 2006; Kapitsa, 2008), the acquisition and increasing of income (Costa, 2005; Moyle *et al.*, 2006; Kapitsa, 2008), the ability to control their income (Kantor, 2005; Basargekar, 2009) and fulfil needs (Costa, 2005), and the ability to decide on how to use the income (Kantor, 2005).

This study, therefore, differs in the fact that bonding social capital does not help the economic empowerment of Orang Kuala. On the other side of the coin, bridging social capital leads to their economic empowerment. This finding reinforces the findings made by Costa (2005) that the outside network will increase the income and the ability to meet their own needs themselves and their families. The study also supports the conclusion disclosed by Coffé and Geys (2008) and Rusch (2010) that the bridging social capital is known as the bright side of social capital, while the bonding social capital is the dark side of the community (Kay, 2006; Coffé & Geys, 2008; Bottrell, 2009).

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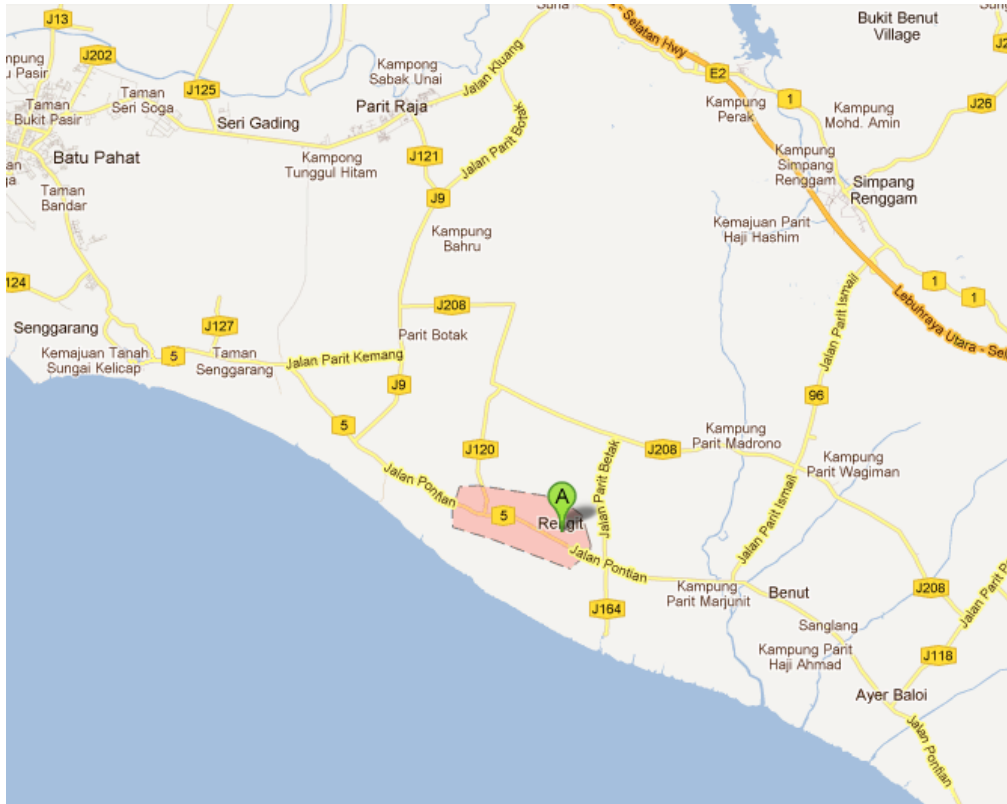
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APPENDIX

LOCATION MAP



(Source: Google map)

