Cultural and Ritual Practices in Temuan Indigenous Community

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores cultural continuity among Temuan communities in Johol, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. It examines selected practices relating to beliefs, marriage, funerary traditions, food and communal celebrations. This paper adopts qualitative research approach and descriptive design during field visits to four Temuan settlements: Kampung Tering, Kampung Charik, Kampung Senibai and Kampung Kelapi. The interviews provided insights into traditional beliefs, customs, and community practices. Information on funeral and celebration rituals was primarily obtained through conversations with villagers who had personally participated in these ceremonies. The findings suggest that Temuan cultural identity is maintained through community participation, customary leadership and shared ceremonial practices. Understanding their beliefs and traditions provides an opportunity to recognize how different communities observe important events, particularly weddings and funerals. These practices also offer insights into the meanings and values behind their customs and the reasons they continue to be observed. Through this exploratory study, greater awareness and appreciation of the unique cultural heritage of the Temuan community can be developed, encouraging respect for the diverse traditions practiced by indigenous communities. The findings show that although the Temuan community has adapted some of its traditional practices to modern ways of life, they continue to preserve customs and beliefs that remain meaningful to their cultural identity.

Keywords: Cultural Continuity, Cultural Adaptation, Orang Asli Temuan, Traditional Customs, Funeral Rituals

INTRODUCTION

The Orang Asli comprise diverse Indigenous communities in Peninsular Malaysia, each possessing distinct languages, social practices, belief systems and relationships with their ancestral territories. The Temuan are generally categorised among the Aboriginal Malay, or Proto-Malay, communities and are concentrated mainly in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and parts of Pahang. Like many Indigenous communities, the Temuan experience continuing social and cultural change arising from education, economic development, religious interaction, migration and engagement with neighbouring communities.

This study focuses on four Temuan settlements in Johol, Negeri Sembilan: Kampung Tering, Kampung Charik, Kampung Senibai and Kampung Kelapi. These communities provide an important setting for examining how customary practices are retained, modified and interpreted under changing social conditions. Particular attention is given to beliefs, marriage, funeral practices, food and communal celebrations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although previous studies have documented Orang Asli identity and cultural traditions in Peninsular Malaysia, limited research has examined how Temuan communities in Johol negotiate the continuity and adaptation of everyday cultural practices. In particular, little is known about how community members themselves interpret

changes in marriage, funeral, religious and celebratory practices. This study addresses this gap by examining these practices through interviews and field observations across Temuan settlements.

Cultural Continuity, Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage

Abdullah et al. (2020) directly investigated traditional knowledge and natural-resource use among resettled Indigenous people in Malaysia. Their findings show that knowledge concerning the environment and natural resources is connected to livelihood practices and accumulated community experience. A Temuan-specific study by Diansyah et al. (2022) provides stronger evidence concerning the relationship between culture and the natural environment. Their research in Kampung Tanjung Rambai, a Temuan settlement in Hulu Langat near the Negeri Sembilan border, found that the community's relationship with the forest extended beyond economic dependence. The relationship was reciprocal: the community obtained resources and benefits from the land while recognising responsibilities towards it. The authors use this finding to support greater Orang Asli involvement in forest management. The direct evidence from Diansyah et al. (2022) supports an interpretation of land as part of Temuan social and cultural life. Nevertheless, the practices observed in Johol should still be presented as local field observations because a finding from one Temuan settlement cannot automatically represent all Temuan communities. Wook et al. (2020) examined customary land practices among Temuan communities in Negeri Sembilan, highlighting the importance of ancestral land, customary rules, and traditional inheritance practices.

Cultural Interaction and Selective Adaptation

Recent studies show that Indigenous cultural continuity develops within changing institutional, environmental and socioeconomic conditions. Dong et al. (2022) demonstrate that Orang Asli experiences are affected by recognition, access to resources and participation in decisions concerning Indigenous spaces. Diansyah et al. (2022) similarly shows that a Temuan community's continuing relationship with the forest exists alongside engagement with contemporary forest-management systems. These findings support an interpretation of cultural identity as dynamic rather than isolated from wider society.

Ethical Representation of Indigenous Communities

Newing et al. (2024) identify fourteen principles for good participatory research involving Indigenous peoples and local communities. Their analysis stresses that participation should extend across the research process, including the formulation of questions, data collection, interpretation and dissemination. They also emphasize rights-based practice and recognition of Indigenous and local knowledge. These principles highlight the limitations of research that treats community members only as sources of information. Dunaway et al. (2023) examined ethical research collaboration with the Penan Indigenous community in Sarawak, Malaysia. Their study emphasised the importance of informed consent, respectful engagement, and recognition of Indigenous knowledge in conducting research with Indigenous communities. Toombs et al. (2026) reviewed Indigenous community-based research practices, guidelines, and ethical standards. Their findings highlighted the importance of respect, cultural diversity, reciprocal relationships, and meaningful community participation in conducting ethical research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design method in this study adopted qualitative research approach and descriptive design. With this research design it can examine the traditional beliefs, customs, and cultural practices of the Temuan community.

Types Of Data

There are two types of data gathered in Temuan tribe area, and they are primary data and secondary data. Secondary data is gathered through journal and article while primary data are gathered during the field work. Saaidin & Zulkefli (2025) mentioned that the aim of obtaining and gathering these two types of data is to help

the researcher collect the data, and to support the researcher to have a better understanding of the study. During the field work, primary data are obtained through personal face-to-face interviews with the indigenous villagers and visit to indigenous village at Johol district. Furthermore, Thartori & Ismail (2024), by using one-to-one in-depth interview, the researcher gained more information compared to focus group discussion.

Research Setting and Participant Selection

The fieldwork was conducted in the Johol area of Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The research documentation identified four Temuan settlements: Kampung Tering, Kampung Charik, Kampung Senibai, and Kampung Kelapi. Before approaching community members, the researchers met the Tok Batin (village headman) to explain the research and obtain permission to engage with the community. The Tok Batin subsequently facilitated introductions to Temuan villagers. Community members were approached directly and invited to share information voluntarily. As mentioned by Newing et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of ethical and inclusive research practices involving Indigenous peoples and local communities. The authors proposed fourteen principles for good research practice, highlighting the need to recognize Indigenous knowledge, respect community rights, and encourage meaningful participation throughout the research process. For this study, the fieldwork involved approximately 10 to 20 community members. Participants included villagers who had personally participated in traditional ceremonies and were therefore able to describe their experiences and knowledge of Temuan cultural practices.

Data Collection Procedures

The original fieldwork involved face-to-face and unstructured interviews during visits to Temuan settlements. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Melayu, with information documented through mobile-phone audio recordings and handwritten notes. During the fieldwork, permission to approach the community was obtained from the Tok Batin. Community members were invited to participate voluntarily, and participants were informed of the academic purpose of the research before the discussions began.

Data Organization and Analysis

The data were analyzed descriptively based on information collected and recorded during the fieldwork with Temuan community members. The analysis focused on identifying and describing the cultural practices shared by the participants. The findings were organized into four main themes: (1) traditional belief (2) wedding (3) funeral practices and (4) traditional celebrations.

FINDINGS

Cultural Analysis

Traditional Belief

According to the participants, the majority of the Temuan community believe in animism and their deceased ancestors. They also believe in God and supernatural powers. The participants further described several types of spells, including those intended to improve health. In addition, the Temuan community in Johol continues to observe traditional taboos, such as the belief that it is inappropriate for guests to sit facing the door when visiting a house, as this indicates that they do not intend to stay for long.

Wedding

Temuan tribe practice wedding in their life. They will invite all villagers to their son or daughter wedding using ‘bujam’. Bujam, a container to keep betel leaf and tobacco (tembakau). Bujam will be used in engagement ceremony and wedding ceremony (berolek). They will carry the ‘bujam’ and meet all the villagers and say ‘bujam jemput kahwin’ or in English is ‘bujam inviting you to a wedding’. The villagers will then understand that they are being invited to the wedding, while the bujam also serves as a means of receiving voluntary contributions donations or gifts from those invited.

In the Temuan community, customary marriage arrangements involve the bridegroom and the bride's family, with the bride's father or an authorised family representative participating in the agreement. The Tok Batin (headman) also present during the ceremony, reflecting the role of customary leadership in marriage practices. Participants also described, for Temuan's wedding feast, food will be prepared by the whole villagers. In the past, they used bamboo to cook but now they use woks for cooking while continuing to practise gotong-royong, where villagers and relatives come together to prepare food for the wedding feast. Additionally, the Temuan community prepares and serves traditional kampung dishes or food provided by caterers during wedding feasts, reflecting how their practices have adapted to changing times while maintaining their traditions.

Funerary Practices and Relationships with Land and Ancestors

Pre-Burial Rituals

The findings revealed that funeral practices form an important part of the Temuan community's cultural traditions. These practices involve several stages, including pre-burial preparations, burial rituals, and post-burial observances. The practices also reflect traditional beliefs concerning the deceased, respect for ancestors, and the cultural significance of maintaining customary funeral traditions. In Temuan's tribe, there is term that always be used to tell news of death which are "dah lalu" or "dah dhuluk". The deceased will be respectfully washed in accordance with traditional customs.

During the bath, the deceased's fingers will be interlaced, and their hands will be placed across the chest and the deceased's head will be positioned facing west, towards the setting sun. After bathed, the corpse will be wrapped in a shroud with white cloth. Participants also described the practice of tying a strip of white cloth around the left wrist of close family members. Meanwhile, close family members tie a strip of leftover white cloth around their left wrists, symbolising the belief that the deceased's spirit will continue to recognise them after death.

During the preparation and care of the deceased's body, traditional oil lamps (pelita) are lit and placed on both sides of the body. The body is closely guarded to prevent cats from crossing over it, as traditional animistic beliefs hold that such an occurrence may disturb the spirit of the deceased.

Burial Rituals

When Temuan people died, all villagers will gather in house of the deceased. The men from the village will dig grave as the body will be buried underground. According to the participants, graveyard is built under the tree and located in a cool area because Temuan people believe that it will be a better life posthumously. Before the body buried, Temuan's people need to ask permission from the soil first. Tok Batin or headman of the village will lead the funeral arrangements. On another part, the body of Temuan tribe will be buried with his or her personal belonging during his daytime as a symbolic of bekalan or as an honor for the spirit when they continue their life day after. Temuan tribe will use the stone or wood as a marker to differentiate grave for men or women.

Post-Burial Rituals

On the third day after burial, family members prepare food and place it on leaves arranged on a designated platform (*para khas*) outside the house. The family members then call out the name of the deceased to inform the spirit that food has been prepared for them.

On the seventh day after burial, family members visit the grave and bring specially prepared food, which is placed on top of the grave. The grave and its surrounding area are then fumigated with smoke from burning incense (*kemenyan*) or agarwood (*kayu gaharu*). This ritual is performed seven times.

On the hundredth day after burial, known as *Hari Nauk Tanah*, the Temuan community observes the culmination of their traditional funeral rituals. A large ceremony is organised to commemorate the deceased and honour their memory. At the same time, this ceremony marks the official end of the mourning period for the bereaved family.

Celebration

The Temuan community has two unique traditional celebrations that have been passed down from generation to generation. These celebrations are known as *Hari Moyang (Aik Muyang)* and *Tahun Bahauk (Tahun Baharu)*. Both celebrations reflect the cultural heritage and traditions of the Temuan community.

Hari Moyang (Aik Muyang)

Hari Moyang, also known as *Aik Muyang*, is considered one of the most important traditional celebrations among the Temuan community. The celebration serves as an expression of gratitude and respect towards ancestral spirits, who are believed to protect the villagers and ensure their safety, health, and prosperity throughout the year. The celebration is usually held between late December and early January. However, the exact date may vary depending on the decisions of the traditional customary council (*Lembaga Adat*) and the respective village communities. The main activities during *Hari Moyang* include ancestral grave rituals and the traditional *Sewang* dance.

During the grave rituals, villagers participate in communal activities (*gotong-royong*) to clean and maintain their ancestors' graves. The graves are then fumigated with smoke from burning incense (*kemenyan*), followed by the presentation of offerings at a designated altar. These offerings typically consist of the deceased's favourite food or personal items, such as cigarettes, betel leaves, and traditional food.

These offerings typically consist of the deceased's favourite food or personal items, such as cigarettes, betel leaves, and traditional food. In addition to these ritual offerings, the *Sewang* dance is usually performed at night or on the second day of the celebration. The performance is accompanied by traditional musical instruments, including the viola, *keratning* (bamboo guitar), and bamboo flute (*seruling buluh*). These traditional performances contribute to the festive atmosphere of *Hari Moyang* and reflect the cultural heritage of the Temuan community. Sucira (2016) highlighted that the Sewang dance among the Temuan community serves various purposes, including entertainment, cultural celebrations, and traditional healing, although its functions have evolved over time.

During *Hari Moyang*, the Temuan community also practises an open-house tradition, where villagers' welcome guests and relatives into their homes creating a festive atmosphere that reflects the community's hospitality and togetherness.

Tahun Bahauk (Tahun Baharu)

The Temuan community also celebrates its traditional New Year, known as *Tahun Bahauk*. This celebration marks the beginning of a new year for the community and represents an important occasion in their traditional cultural practices.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Temuan cultural practices observed in Johol do not represent either complete cultural preservation or straightforward assimilation. Instead, they suggest selective adaptation, through which community members retain culturally meaningful elements while incorporating practices associated with neighbouring society, and contemporary rural life. The continued involvement of the Tok Batin in marriage and funerary practices suggests that customary leadership remains central to the reproduction of Temuan cultural identity. This finding indicates that cultural adaptation does not necessarily displace Indigenous institutions; instead, new practices may be incorporated within existing structures of customary authority. Marriage, food preparation and communal celebrations further illustrate how continuity and adaptation occur simultaneously. The continued use of the bujam, the participation of the Tok Batin and collective food preparation reflect the maintenance of community-based traditions. These observations suggest that cultural influence does not necessarily result in the disappearance of Temuan identity. Instead, external cultural elements may be incorporated while traditional meanings and community relationships are retained.

Conclusion

This study explored selected cultural and ritual practices among the Temuan Indigenous communities in Johol, Negeri Sembilan, with particular attention to traditional beliefs, marriage customs, funeral rituals, and communal celebrations. The findings highlight the importance of customary leadership, community participation, and ancestral beliefs in maintaining the cultural heritage of the Temuan community. Traditional practices, including the involvement of the Tok Batin, communal wedding preparations, funeral observances, and ancestral celebrations, reflect the cultural values and social relationships associated with these customs. Ng et al. (2026) highlighted the importance of spiritual practices, ancestral knowledge, and the transmission of cultural traditions across generations within the Temuan community. Although some of the practices in Temuan tribe have some integration with other community, these developments should not be interpreted simply as cultural loss or complete assimilation. Instead, they reflect a process of selective adaptation in which community members retain practices that remain meaningful while incorporating elements that respond to contemporary circumstances. By preserving these traditional practices within the tribe, this practice helps younger generations learn about and understand the cultural traditions and customs passed down by their ancestors hence it will continue their cultural heritage and identity for decades to come. This study contributes to the documentation of Temuan cultural heritage in Negeri Sembilan by providing a descriptive account of customary practices and their cultural significance. Although limited to the communities and accounts examined, the findings emphasize the importance of documenting Indigenous traditions and supporting the transmission of cultural knowledge to future generations.

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